

# ‘International’ Causes and Domestic Revolutions: Liberal-Nationalist Revolutions of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century; the Case of China and Iran

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## Abstract

Mainstream schools of International Relations theory, largely, refrain from studying socio-political revolutions in earnest. Their absence has been compensated for by historians, sociologists, and political scientists who have identified the influence of 'international' causes both in the occurrence and outcome of revolutions in the modern period. Revolutions are international events in their origins, ideologies, processes and consequences and affect the logic and rhythm of international systems of their times. On the other hand, the scholarly enthusiasm toward studying revolutions with revisionist agendas in the conduct of international relations ignores a vast array of revolutions throughout modern history were looking to adapt themselves with the established conventions of the international system and its dominant hegemon. This paper will examine the 'international' causes in a wave of liberal-nationalist revolutions that happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in a number of less developed Asian countries that had been spared outright colonization and formal integration into European colonial empires.

**Keywords:** Revolutions and IR theory, the Chinese Republican Revolution and Iran's Constitutional Revolution

## 1. Introduction

A constant feature of the modern period in which the nation-states and Capitalist economics emerged has been an almost perennial revolutionary situation in the form of popular uprisings, insurgencies and resistance movements in various parts of the world. Social unrest and revolution have been a twin of counter-revolution, normalcy and order that International Relations theory, in its conventional form, usually studies. Revolutions play a central role in the dynamics and structures of international affairs. They are, as Alexander Anievas argues, international events in their origins, ideologies, processes and consequences and affect the logic and rhythm of international systems of their times (Anievas, 2015).

However, the mainstream schools of IR theory, including Realism, Liberalism and even Constructivism, have seldom shown an enthusiastic interest in studying events as abnormal and anomalous as revolutions. Felix Berenskoetter, in his "*Concepts of World Politics*", points out to one likely reason for the absence of revolutions from IR's theoretical discussions. As the dominant view treats revolutions as processes that take place essentially within the national borders, their study may not seem appealing for an academic discipline that deals with patterns of conflict and cooperation beyond national borders (Berenskoetter, 2016).

Another possible rationalization for such reluctance on the part of IR schools may be the fact that the concepts these schools deal with, in their theorization of international relations (great power rivalries, the balance of power, cooperation among states, socio-cultural norms, etc.) are all conceptual tools at the service of explaining the normal. Revolutions, in this light, have been seen as various forms of popular protests, culminated in often violent overthrow or changes in governments, with the end result of a fundamental break in the texture of international community and radical challenge to the established global order.

While it is true that each revolution seeks sweeping changes in the political organizations, social structures, economic ownership and the prevalent public order myth inside domestic society (Armstrong, 1993), And while many of the most famous revolutions of the past centuries pursued policies of radical revisions in the conduct of international relations, the values of the system and its conventions, nonetheless, not all revolutions follow the same path. Many of them, through history, were looking to adapt themselves with the established conventions of the international system and its dominant hegemon. The democratic revolutions of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in

Eastern Europe and Latin America or the colorful revolutions of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the former Soviet republics are among these. Mainstream IR analysis usually subsumes such events under the banner of democratization or transition to democracy in order to avoid associating them with the largely negative connotations of the word “revolution”.

This paper will examine the international causalities of another wave of such revolutions in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Asia. Many of the few Asian states that had been spared the outright colonization and formal integration into European empires went through democratizing revolutions in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that overthrew pre-modern political organizations and embarked on sweeping reforms in their socio-political structure in those countries. The revolutions agenda in almost all cases was to modernize the ancient societies using the latest material and intellectual accomplishments of the modern Western civilization so that these semi-colonized countries gain the strength of withstanding the aggression of the same civilization by imitating its institutions, values and material capabilities.

In the next section, I will give an account of the existing literature on revolutions in the social sciences, in general, and in the IR, in particular; I will proceed with laying out the theoretical framework that I employ in order to analyze the democratic revolutions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in semi-colonized Asian countries. The third section discusses the two case studies that I have chosen for the purpose of conducting this research: the 1912 Republican revolution in China and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 in Iran.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In its modern usage, “revolution” describes a mass mobilization of an often-violent nature with the purpose of the forceful overthrow of governments and change of their institutions and ruling classes. This meaning is a recent development as in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, revolution denoted frequent rotations of power among rival elite groups in an Italian context and the return or restoration of the past order of things in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century English one (Berenskoetter, 2016: 256). The positive idea of revolution referring to a rupture in the old order and the creation of a new, progressive, and moral one that results in an improvement in the conditions of mankind, was mainly fed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment and the subsequent democratic revolutions in both sides of the Atlantic. These revolutions founded socio-political orders based on Liberal and Nationalist ideals such as liberty, citizenship, legitimate government, and the rule of law.

After the classic theoreticians of revolutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Karl Marx, Alexie de Tocqueville, Max Weber, and Emil Durkheim), the modern social sciences have studied these phenomena in the context of four major schools of scholarship. The first generation of scholars who studied revolutions were historians. They analyzed revolutions in order to identify recognizable general patterns, but their findings were clouded by a bias toward regarding such phenomena as essentially violent, often disappointing disruptions, which led them to reject revolutions as some kind of social disease (Brinton, 1938). Then came the political sociologists in the second wave who turned toward psychological, sociological and behavioral causes in order to explain the collapse of social order during revolutions. James Davies, for example, emphasized the tensions of modernization and the concomitant dissatisfaction among both individuals and groups due to dysfunctions and disequilibrium usually brought about by the rapid process of transformations, while social expectations created by such modernization processes could seldom be satisfied by fast enough results (Davies, 1971; Johnson, 1982; Gurr, 2011; Tilly, 1978).

Historical sociology represented yet another stage in the developing field of studying revolutions. Scholars who employed this approach in their research emphasized the role of macro-level structural factors that contribute to the creation of conditions under which revolutions happen. Yet, this particular group of sociologists was the first generation of scholars who realized the influence of international causes in the political, social, and economic developments in countries that had experienced revolutions.

One of the outstanding representatives of this approach, Theda Skocpol, asserted that revolutions take place in societies vulnerable to military and administrative collapse due to external pressures, on the one hand, and too weak to react as a result of the constraints derived from their existing political institutions and class structures (Skocpol; 1979). In personality-oriented and patriarchal political systems, the survival and continuous legitimacy of governments depend on their ability to mediate between various segments of society, while at the same time remaining aloof and above societal tensions. Revolution happens when such regimes lose their capacity to function as a patron for a wide range of social clients in return for political loyalty as a result of encountering a disruptive foreign factor (European modernism, for example).

Critics of this approach point out that structural causes are not, in themselves, sufficient to explain the occurrence of revolution in less developed countries that encounter the external pressures of more advanced

societies. They emphasize the important role played by agency-oriented factors such as local resistance cultures, ideologies, and popular customs and their intermingling with modern ideologies such as Nationalism, Socialism, and Liberalism.

The last generation of revolution scholars are interested in the role of inspiring ideational factors. Many great revolutions of the past have been wrapped in ideational narratives such as democratizing (checking absolute power), progress (dreams of new, better worlds), liberation (emancipation of foreign control) or a combination of them (Berenskoetter, 2016: 260-61). Some of the scholars associated with the approach, like Fred Halliday, have been focused on international aspects of ideational factors as well. Halliday's criticism of Skocpol's structuralism points out that it restricts the international causes of revolutions to the effects of hard power rivalries among the leading states of the international system or the dynamics of the Capitalist economy, while it neglects "international" as the source of providing revolutionary ideas.

Halliday's own theoretical model (which is the one that this study employs to analyze the international causes of revolutions in its two case studies), suggests that international factors affect the revolutions in four ways. First, the international system can significantly undermine states in less-developed societies through military pressures (derived from great power rivalries that usually come in the form of military defeats) or economic ones (due to the policies of more developed nations to advance their trade interests in various parts of the world). States' weakening in less-developed societies leads to the intensification of political crises in state-society relations. Foreign military defeats or humiliating economic concessions provide dissatisfied social groups with opportunities to challenge the legitimacy of governments and present their own alternatives. The embattled state might try to avert disaster by initiating reform programs intended to help it catch up with menacing foreign powers. Developing countries, at this stage, can find ample opportunities to adopt advanced technologies, institutions and practices invented in the leading countries of the international system. Inevitably, however, reforms would put more demands, either in the form of more resource extraction, more government intervention or more painful adjustments, on the already strained and fragile state-society relations. The top-bottom guided reforms would meet challenges both from those who believe they are insufficient and those who think they are too much.

Second, the political status quo in less developed countries might survive for the moment by aligning itself with great powers that turn these countries into their spheres of influence. Capitulation to foreign powers will be met with popular resistance and gives new ammunition to social groups that intend to bring down the government. As Halliday argues, any momentary loss of ability or interest on the part of the supporting great power to maintain the status quo in client states enables revolutionary windows of opportunity that seriously challenge the much-weakened governments in those societies.

Third, the international system can serve as the source of ideas, many of which could provide ideological foundations for revolutionary upheavals. These ideologies offer both revolutionary ends (general principles and inspirations such as equality, social justice, liberty, democracy, national autonomy and the rule of law) and revolutionary means (organizational methods such as the vanguard party, revolutionary committees or partisan wars).

And finally, the "international" in the form of foreign sponsors or the expatriate communities, can provide both material (purveying material equipment) and ideational (promoting revolutionary ideas) support for the revolution (Halliday, 1999).

In what follows, I will be focused on testing this theoretical model in regard to two of the earliest revolutions in Asia; the Republican Revolution of 1912 in China and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 in Iran. China and Iran were among the few non-Western countries that survived European colonial expansion and were saved from formal integration into their empires. In both cases, however, traditional political organizations, social structures and the patterns of state-society relations were severely damaged as a result of their encounters with European modernism from the mid-1800s onwards. What distinguishes early 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutions in these two countries from the later waves of revolutions in the less-developed countries (especially within the socio-political upheavals of the latter half of the century in the less-developed countries, including China and Iran themselves) is the dominant narrative of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Liberal-Nationalism of these events. Although in both cases, elements of more radical Western ideologies emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were active, the overriding considerations in the revolutionary agendas were democratizing political systems and the establishment of the rule of law, on the one hand, and protecting national sovereignty against European imperialists, on the other. In both cases, however, the influence of ideas emanating from the international system made sure that the revolutionaries' proposed solution to withstand Western aggression was to become "Western" by fully adopting

their institutions and “civilization”.

### 3. Case Studies

#### 3.1 Chinese Republican Revolution

China's first encounter with European imperialism was through the First Opium War of 1840-42 with the British which resulted in the Nanking Treaty of August 1842. The treaty-imposed indemnity, diplomatic relations on equal terms with the British, open access to European trades, and the cession of the Island of Hong Kong on China. More important than these, the Nanking Treaty shattered the traditional world order in the eyes of the Chinese by enunciating principles that were to govern its foreign relations with the outside world, thus ushering in the modern age of its history.

Many of the terms of the treaty and the rights it granted to British merchants were the same rules that were given to foreign nationals according to treaty-based legal principles of the European state system. The imposition of the logic of state-to-state relations on China, however, contradicted the traditional structures of the "tribute system" that managed the country's outside relations for more than a thousand years and ensured, among other things, that foreign trade was restricted to official monopolies and state agencies. But, besides introducing the values and practices of the modern European state and free trade, it led to the creation of the so-called unequal treaty system that went through different stages of development in almost one hundred years of life.

Unequal treaty system became a vehicle for imperialist aggression against China (Wakeman, 1995). The motivation and the might of the British aggressors derived from their possession of India. The main trade houses involved in the Opium trade in China were the branches of the English East India Company that had proliferated in the Indian sub-continent decades earlier. Even the British military might, as was demonstrated in its war with China, depending on the capacities and facilities that originated in India. The unequal treaties represented the efforts of the leading state of the international system to advance both its interests and its ideals by establishing a worldwide commercial network centered and depended on London. British diplomacy and military opened China's doors to foreign trade in order to guarantee the security of a triangular trade between China, India, and the British Isles based on the perceived universal validity and applicability of the rule of law (Greenberg, 2008).

While the unequal treaty system undermined China's national sovereignty through the imposition of the extra-territorial right of consular jurisdiction, it provided a venue for the influence of Western modernism on the internal transformations of the Chinese state and society through port treaties inside the Chinese mainland. These port treaties, especially after the second Opium war of the late 1850s, grew into urban centers of interaction between the Chinese and the Europeans and developed a hybrid cultural environment (Wakeman, 1995; Fairbank, 1995); their effects began to show themselves through the appearance of the liberal-nationalist political movements of the later decades that radically transformed the Chinese state and society in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Humiliating military defeats and diplomatic concessions, as Halliday's model suggests, could lead to reform initiatives with the purpose of compensating for backwardness and defending national independence against menacing international factors. Between the 1860s and the end of the first decade of the next century, Chinese society witnessed at least three waves of top-bottom guided reforms conducted by the *ancien regime* intended to both build up strength for future likely confrontations with the Europeans and maintain internal order in the face of growing social unrests. The government-initiated reform efforts, however, largely failed due to internal rebellion, then yet another humiliating military defeat (this time at the hands of the Japanese at the 1894-5 Sino-Japanese war), and finally regional disintegration and political crises at the central level that brought down the *ancien regime* at 1911-2.

However the Ch'ing regime's reforms left longer-term consequences for the Chinese traditional state and society. They, inevitably, led to a departure from earlier practices of statecraft and governance, replaced Confucian virtuous ruling by the quest for wealth and strength at the forefront of the government agenda and introduced novel ideologies and knowledge to the administration of the empire. In order to carry out its reform policies of enriching and strengthening the country, the *ancien regime* needed to recruit new kinds of technical and managerial personnel who replaced the old guard of Confucian scholar-officials. By conducting these reforms, the Ch'ing government revealed a realization on the part of at least some elements in the state bureaucracy that European political institutions and their international system of states are superior to the ancient Chinese model of government (Ting-Yee Kuo, 1995).

The 1890s marked an important turning point in the transformations of Chinese politics and society. It was mentioned above that the Western impact on Chinese developments in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had

two major aspects; the question of imperialism and the transformative effects of Chinese contacts with Western culture. Following the humiliating defeat of China in the 1894-5 war with the Japanese, powerful European nations (Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia) engaged in a frenzied competition to divide the ancient empire into their spheres of influence (Kwang-Ching Liu, 1995). The result of the intensification of imperialist encroachments was the political crisis of an unprecedented scale for the *ancien regime*. In the modern period, however, the effects of the international system on the political developments of less-developed countries have been almost always of a dual nature, shaking the old structures and institutions and introduction of yet another one.

In the 1890s, Chinese society went through a parallel process of transformations as a consequence of deeper and more serious engagement with Western ideas, norms and values. The Chinese experience with Western lives and activities did not remain restricted to port treaties. The socio-political products of interaction between the two civilization at those cities in the form of durable growth, the formation of modern economic sectors and integration into global markets, brought about tangible social changes, including the emergence of wholly new social classes of European-styled businessmen, salaried professional workers and urban proletariat (Feuerwerker, 1995). Extensive contacts with the Westerners began to go beyond the port treaties in the 1880s and 1890s and affected larger parts of inland China. The increase in communication with the outside world stimulated a process of cultural transformation and social mobilization among local populations that eroded the earlier attitudes and commitments and created newer values, expectations, and patterns of behavior.

Renewed imperialist aggressions and an acute sense of national crisis in the mid-1890s bridged the gap between the gentry-literati class and the Western culture and contributed to the widespread dispersal of Western ideas and values among members of the elite. The traditional bearers of Confucian learning went beyond a mere curiosity with Western technology in order to engage with broader aspects of its civilization and cultural heritage, including its political thought and philosophical traditions.

One of the major agents in the process of cultural and intellectual transformation was Christian missionaries. These missionaries, while largely failed in their main objective of converting the Chinese masses into their faith, succeeded, nonetheless, in their roles as cultural brokers in purveying Western secular ideas among the Chinese educated classes. The three main institutions that Christian missionaries relied upon in teaching Western viewpoints to the Chinese were modern schools, private societies, and newspapers. One of the most important private societies was the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge which embarked on a program of translating Western books into the Chinese language and published the *Globe Magazine*. The *Magazine* played a significant role in introducing European culture to the Chinese elites and intellectuals and overcoming the gap between the two cultures from 1887 onwards (Adrian A Bennett & Kwang-Ching Liu, 1974). While Christian missionaries by no means intended to challenge the Ch'ing government, the socio-political ideals that they promoted and publicized in their writings and publications influenced reform-minded Chinese readers. Their newspapers and magazines, also, grew into important vehicles for social criticism, political discussions, and expressing modern ideas and values that were, inevitably, challenging the old institutions and the political regime that upheld them.

Intellectuals like Sung Ye-Jen, Ch'en Ch'iu and T'ang Chen were other agents of cultural transformations who began to publish their political writings in the 1890s. While still in the tradition of the quest for national wealth and power of earlier decades bureaucrats, these writings contained ideas radically departing from the previous discussion in that they encouraged the acceptance of Western political values such as popular participation, parliamentary institutions, constitutional monarchy, and nationalism. For the reformist intellectuals defending the country in an age of rampant imperialism meant discovering the secrets of Western wealth and power and imitating them (Chang, 1995).

The Liberal-Nationalist intellectual writings, revolutionary educational reforms in the shape of founding modern schools and their Western-style curriculum, private study associations and newspapers not only radically transformed the dominant cultural environment for the educated Chinese, but also, provided powerful vehicles of political activism for the intellectuals that turned toward revolution and forceful overthrow of the *ancien regime* in the years to come.

The revolution of 1912 is a common designation for a series of events that happened between the Fall of 1911 and the Spring of the next year and culminated in the replacement of the Ch'ing dynasty with a republic in China. The more immediate socio-political causes of the revolutions lay in yet another failed attempt at reforms by the *ancien regime*. As Chuzo Ichiko explains:

“... the reform program during the last five or six years ... of the Ch'ing dynasty may be viewed as attempts of

the Manchu rulers, [Han] Chinese provincial governors and [Han] Chinese gentry members to preserve their powers ... these elements often worked at cross-purposes ... the reforms led to the fall of the dynasty” (Chuzo, 1995).

The revolutionary movement was a fragile alliance and a temporary coalescence of various interests and agendas. Republicans and radical reformist moved aside their haphazard and uncoordinated efforts to unite under the banner of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance that represented the new social groups who had emerged as a result of decades of socio-economic and cultural modernization. These groups were comprised of Westernized urban classes in big cities, students and Chinese expatriate communities in Japan and elsewhere. The transformed old groups (traditional rural China) who have still maintained a large share of their power and legitimacy joined them out of the fear that they might lose their privileges by continuing to support a regime that was no longer able to keep its hold on power (Lewis, 1971; Jansen, 1954).

The Ch'ing government, in its last decades in power, initiated a number of political and institutional reforms. It allowed the growth of new interest groups and supported their political participation through provincial assemblies comprising of local gentries and educated classes. The ruling dynasty thought that it could keep the new political actors under strict control. In 1911, however, their demands grew to encompass the drafting of a written constitution, the convocation of a national assembly, and the establishment of a new government. The *Ancien regime* provoked public anger by appointing a “royalist cabinet” whose members were mostly of Manchu origin. In October 1911, fifteen provinces declared their independence and then came a wave of uprisings by the New Army soldiers (one of the institutional reforms of the post-1901 period) who had been influenced by the Revolutionary Alliance's propaganda and acted in concert with the local gentries and the members of provincial assemblies. From November 1911 the initial thrust of separatist sentiments gave way to a broader national cause when several of the self-declared independent provincial governments changed their position to support the convocation of a national assembly and the establishment of a national government. Finally, in March 1912, the new national government, the Republic of China came into being (Gasster, 1995; Chang, 1972-3).

The international system can contribute to domestic political transformations through ideas, institutions, and practices that originated in the more developed countries. But it cannot solve the inevitable social, economic, political, and cultural contradictions that grew out of amalgamating inorganic, anachronistic, and incompatible forms of development. The resulting tensions and instabilities in the social structures can lead to chaos, the collapse of the central authority, and civil war (Anievas, 2015: 846).

The victory of the revolution became meaningless almost immediately by the collapse of national unity and the rise of warlordism in various regions of the country. Yuan Shih-k'ai who came to occupy the central position in the years following the revolution as the president of the new republic was an authoritarian militarist with no program or potency to resolve the tensions that had either transferred from the Imperial era into the republican age or created precisely as the result of that transition. The "international", too, played its part among various causes of the failure of the revolution and its resulting chaos and warlordism that plagued China for the next almost four decades. Foreign powers took advantage of political disruptions brought about by the collapse of central authority by augmenting their privileges, including in the administration of China's customs and violating its declared impartiality during World War I in order to turn China into a battleground of great powers (Young, 1983).

### 3.2 Iranian Constitutional Revolution

In 1796, Qajars, a Turkic-speaking tribe, united Iran after decades of political instability and civil wars following the fall of the Safavid dynasty. In continuation with the traditions of earlier Iranian dynasties, the Qajar government relied upon influential social groups both in the central and local levels to exercise and preserve its power. These groups included landed gentries, religious leaders, bureaucratic officials, tribal chiefs and wealthy merchants.

Despite decades of half-hearted efforts in the early part of the Qajar rule to introduce new governing institutions, the traditional Iranian government can best be described as a skeleton of a central government, a bureaucracy without any viable bureaus or trained and salaried personnel, regional departments or even procedures for keeping an archive of files. At the same time, men who occupied the positions in the ministries and departments of this inert bureaucracy were descendants of families with decades and even centuries of history in official services. Their long history of serving the Iranian governments gave the members of this social class a sense of corporate identity that even Qajar rulers had to recognize (Ashraf & Banuazizi, 1999).

Since the Qajar government lacked any coercive or administrative tool to rule over Iran, it had to guarantee its survival by systematically taking advantage of the country's social divisions emanating from economic, religious,

ethnic and tribal differences between various social groups. As Yervand Abrahamian explains:

“... Qajars governed Iran less through bureaucratic institutions, coercion, or grand appeals to divinity and history ... than through the systematic manipulation of social divisions ... Their state – if it can be called that – hovered above rather than controlled and penetrated into society ... its real jurisdiction, however, was sharply restricted to the vicinity of the capital” (Abrahamian, 2008).

As in China, the Iranian 1906 revolution had its long-term roots in the gradual Western penetration of the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first encounter between these two worlds came, again, through military defeats in the hands of both Czarist Russia in the north and the British in the south. The former occupied large parts of Iranian territory or its traditional spheres of influence in Central Asia and Caucasia and imposed on Iran two humiliating treaties of Golestan and Turkmanchai in 1813 and 1828; while the latter who had taken southern shores of the Persian Gulf and had begun their advance toward northwestern parts of the Indian sub-continent, forced Qajars through 1857 Treaty of Paris, to renounce their territorial claims over Western parts of modern-day Afghanistan, especially the city of Herat.

These developments had two immediate consequences for Iran. They established Iranian borders that have survived until today, and they turned the country into a buffer, at times contested, zone between two great European powers that had been engaged in the great game of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Central Asia. The Russian and British representatives became the most influential political actors in Iran and began their constant interventions in the daily political affairs of the nation.

The longer-term effects of Western penetration were undermining the already tenuous relations between the state and society in, at least, two major ways. It constituted a common threat for the traditional socio-economic classes (urban merchants and religious leaders) who developed a shared antipathy toward both the Qajar government and European imperialists during this period. On the other hand, growing contacts with Westerners through the modern education system that became prevalent in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century injected modern ideas and values and introduced new economic activities in the Iranian society and culminated in the formation of a modern middle class.

Unequal treaties with Western powers opened the path for their economic penetration and obtaining diplomatic and trade concessions from the Qajar government. As in the case of China, European powers gained extra-territorial rights of consular jurisdiction, and their merchants were exempted from import duties, internal tariffs and travel restrictions and the jurisdiction of Iranian courts. These privileges became the main form of Iranians' encounter with imperialist aggressions (Atabaki, 2003). Then came the commercial concessions. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Iran's foreign trade, largely monopolized by the Russians and the British, increased about eight times. Iran imported weaponry, tools and textile while exported foodstuffs, agricultural goods and opium (which supplied parts of the ludicrous British Opium trade in China). Until 1900, Iran had been largely integrated into the Europe-centric global economy, with the northern parts of the country supplying agricultural goods and unskilled labour for the Russian market and the southern parts providing rug and opium for the British merchants. In 1888, the London-based Lynch Brothers Company began running steamships in Iran's southwestern rivers; a year later, the British founded Imperial Bank of Persia, while the Russians followed suit by creating Banque d'Escompte de Perse (Abrahamian, 2008: 37).

The *ancien regime*, in its efforts to curb European penetration, launched a number of reform programs that largely failed due to structural weaknesses such as its inability to increase tax revenues, staggering inflation of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and budget deficit. The government's policy of raising revenue through selling concessions to European entrepreneurs or asking for loans from foreign powers, too, were met with severe social reactions.

At any event, Qajar's self-strengthening reforms did little to contain the advancement of foreign powers' economic interests. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the next, the British stepped up their efforts to penetrate local economy by obtaining concessions of dredging and navigating in southwestern rivers, construction of roads and telegraph lines, complete control over banknotes printing through their Imperial Bank and drilling oil (that culminated in the foundation of Anglo-Persian Oil Company); the Russian did the same with their fishing and oil drilling concessions in the north. The more lasting achievements of their reforms, however, came in the form of the establishment of modern institutions such as a new police force, central mint (that replaced the provincial ones), telegraph office, and most important of all, the new education system.

The first modern school was founded in 1852. *Dar-al-Fonun's* (Institute of Technologies) main task was to train the sons of the noble or officials' families for the public service. By the end of the century, however, it became a center for educating almost 350 students and preparing the top graduates for continuing studies in Europe. The

Qajar government sponsored the establishment of four other middle schools and five *Dar-al-Fonun*-affiliated colleges (two military colleges and the school of agriculture, political science and foreign languages) that started projects of translating and publishing European books in areas of modern medicine, military affairs and the classics of European literature. At the same time, the European works on the ancient history of Iran began to be translated. These works contributed significantly to the dissemination of nationalist and liberalist ideas and political concepts such as citizenship, nationality, sovereignty and the rights of men among Iranians (Kasravi, 1984).

The representatives of the nascent modern middle class (entrepreneurs of modern sectors of the economy who had extensive ties with European economic interests) began to fund cultural programs and finance modern schools and reformist newspapers. Semi-official cultural groups such as the National Society, The Society for Humanity, The Revolutionary Committee and various secret societies were holding meetings among their members to promote the idea of governmental reforms. They created a distinct intelligentsia (the cultural component of the modern middle class) whose members came from the ranks of the old elites. But the enlightened, as they first called themselves, had no intellectual association with the old literati class of religious leaders and bureaucratic officials. They understood the world through French enlightenment and its ideals rather than the traditional Islamic learnings; instead of the authority of the faith and the Shah (kings), they believed in popular sovereignty, liberty and the rights of men; and they had no respect for old notions of social equilibrium and political harmony as modern ideas of humanity's inevitable progress and the ideals of European Liberalism, Nationalism, even Socialism, fascinated them (Mozaffari, 2001: 112; Abrahamian, 2008: 40-1).

The 1906 revolution had its short-term roots in the economic crisis caused by government expenditures. At a time of rampant inflation, the *ancien regime* struggling to receive loans from the Russians and the British decided to hand over Iran's customs to Belgian administrators, so that foreign powers could rest assured that the priority in handling Iran's customs revenues would be to pay them back. While the public was angry with this recent development, Tehran's Royal Governor flagged a number of merchants in the Tehran Bazar (the traditional middle class) in reaction to rising prices in basic commodities. The whole market shut down in protest, while the Shi'a clerics joined them in demanding the ousting of Tehran's governor and the Belgian administrators, limiting the operations of foreign banks and the establishment of *Adalat-Khaneh* [House of Justice] (Malekzade, 2008).

The merchants, guilders, students at the modern schools and colleges and members of the secret societies took sanctuary in the British embassy at Tehran to demand drafting a constitution, the establishment of a parliament and a constitutional monarchy. Faced with unbearable pressure of strikes, telegrams from concerned religious leaders, the threat of armed intervention from the Iranian expatriate communities in the Caucasia and ultimately, a real prospect of mass defection among the soldiers of the New Cossack Army, the court backed down. A royal proclamation on August 5, 1906, decreed holding elections for a national assembly (Brown, 1995).

The national assembly started in October 1906 to draft the new constitution and to devise a constitutional system based on the separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. The coalescence of both traditional and modern social groups, the old and the new elites, during the final stages of the revolution, meant that the new power structure had to give concessions to both. The new Iranian constitution, while guaranteed the rights such as protection of life, property, honor, freedom of speech and assembly, equality before law and safeguards against arbitrary arrest, had to placate the old elites by stipulating that the national assembly cannot pass laws contrary to Islam and divide the judiciary between civil and religious courts (Dezfuli, 2016).

The "international" causes played a prominent role in the outcome of the revolution as well. A year after the convocation of the national assembly, the British, growing increasingly fearful of the rising German power, decided to wrap up their rivalries with the Czarist Russia in Asia. By dividing Iran into two zones of influence between the two European powers in the north and south, the British betrayed the constitutionalists who regarded them as their allies. The revolutionaries lost their credibility at a time that a new monarch (Mohammad Ali Shah) was planning to get rid of the vows his late father had made in the royal proclamation of August 1906. In June 1908, his Cossack army headed by the Russian Colonel Liakhoff declared martial law and bombarded the building of the National Assembly (Abrahamian, 2008: 51).

The coup led to a civil war between the royalists and the constitutionalists. The latter were composed of three forces: the volunteers who took arms in the northern cities like Tabriz in defense of the constitutional cause (supported by Iranian expatriate communities of industrial workers in Caucasia), local magnates and landlords in some regions of the country who rose against the court, and southern tribes who chose to sever their historical



ties with the Qajar monarchs in order to band with constitutionalists. In July 1910, these forces converged to advance toward Tehran. Mohammad Ali Shah took refuge in the Russian embassy and later accepted an abdication in favor of his 12-year-old son.

The constitutional government soon found itself beset by the same problems that had plagued the *ancien regime* for decades: the lack of institutional means to govern the country and carry out reforms, the absence of centralized state machinery and financial difficulties due to insufficient revenues. The new revolutionary system was as weak as the absolute monarchy in raising tax revenues in a way that does not jeopardize the fragile socio-political balance in the state-society relations.

The crises that the nascent constitutional government faced with contributed in three ways to its ultimate failure and replacement by the militarist Pahlavi regime in the years to come. First, when the financial situation of the central government became known to the public, the local magnates began to enhance their autonomous powers and showed increasing signs of indifference, even disobedience toward central authority that seriously undermined national unity. Tribes organized private armies and became virtually independent in many parts of the country. Many local notables even started to conduct their independent foreign policies and asked for foreign powers' protection. In the southwest, local tribes even entered into deals with the British to exploit the economic resources of their territories (Dezfuli, 2024 & Abrahamian, 2008: 56-7). Second, the financial and institutional crises were compounded by the struggle among the moderates and radicals in the national assembly that effectively paralyzed the central government. Their conflicts began by debates over the extent of secularism and continued with disagreements on the question of the rights of ethnic minorities, the role of women in the society, and the function of religious laws in the judiciary system.

Finally, the 'international' factors were important in shaping the outcome of the revolution. The Czarist Russia occupied large parts of its sphere of influence in the northeast and northwest in 1909 with the excuse of quelling unrest and establishing law and order. The British helped the process of political disintegration in Iran by supporting the autonomous, sometimes rebellious tribes and local powerholders in their southern spheres of influence. In both cases, the foreign powers' real intentions were to gain practical control over the regions that had been divided between them according to the 1907 agreement. Despite Iran's official policy of neutrality, foreign occupation intensified following the start of World War I as large parts of western, northwestern and southern Iran became a battleground for the Ottoman, Russian and British military forces or German covert agents.

Britain augmented its efforts to weaken Iranian national sovereignty after the 1917 revolution in Russia and the end of the Great War the next year. Anxious to protect its colonial possessions in India and the Middle East, the British turned the post-war situation into a perfect opportunity for their take over in Iran and its integration into their colonial empire (Curzon, 2016). The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 gave the British the sole right to provide loans, arms, military instructors, civil advisors, custom administrators and even college teachers to the Iranian government. The agreement struck Iran's domestic politics like thunder, and the British soon realized that no politician would dare to ask parliament to ratify the content of the agreement or to implement them.

While saved from being a British colony or official protectorate, 14 years after the Constitutional Revolution, Iran had become a 'failed state' in which the central government had no authority beyond its capital. While the national assembly had lost its function due to the conflicts among political parties, provinces had been taken over by the warlords or confronted with local armed rebellions, and foreign armies (both the British Indian army and the Soviets' Red Army) had stationed in parts of north and south Iran, the stage was set for the final defeat of the constitutional revolution and the government it founded which came through in the form of a military coup in February 1921 and the subsequent rise to power of the militarist first Pahlavi Shah in 1925.

#### **4. Conclusion**

New approaches that trace casual international mechanisms in the study of revolutions emphasize the simultaneous impacts of military-economic pressures from the international system (as a result of great powers rivalries or their attempts to advance their trade interests in less developed countries) and the opportunities provided by the system in the shape of new technologies, ideas and practices that developing states can take advantage of in the process of catching up. The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal-nationalist revolutions in China and Iran, among other less developed countries of that period, were made possible, somewhat, by the realization among large segments of local societies that it is necessary to adapt to the conventional international structures and practices if they ever wish to become respectable members of the international state system, take advantage of the benefits of international trade and finance systems and achieve security.

According to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century notions, full statehood meant not only the ability to exercise effective control on a

domestic level but also the willingness to act according to a set of privileges and duties determined by the long-established rules of the Westphalian state over time that governed the international behaviors of states. It was expected of a less developed Asian state to achieve standards of civilization, the rule of law, internal governance and rationality, and it was thought that the community of Westphalian states would, in return, treat such a state as a full, equal member.

In practice, however, neither of those conditions materialized. Political, social, cultural and economic contradictions as a result of an amalgamation between inorganic and incompatible structures and forms of development led to tension, instability and finally, political chaos and civil war in Asian revolutionary states of early 20<sup>th</sup> century. European states, on the other hand, largely ignored these liberal-nationalist revolutions. The chain of events in the less developed Asian countries constituted sequences that the Europeans simply lacked a proper frame of reference to understand. Revolutions in the name of democratic values among backward Asian nations were regarded as an unimaginable fact and met with their skepticism and unrecognition.

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