



CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONS XVI. IMPACT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION IN IRAN

CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONS

xvi. Impact of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran

The Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 attracted the attention of the Chinese constitutionalists and revolutionaries immediately upon breaking out. The earliest reports on the revolution were published in two famous Chinese periodicals, *Zhengyi tongbao* (Journal of politics and Art) and *Dongfang zazhi* (The Eastern miscellany), which were characterized by their promotion of constitutionalism.

As one of the earliest periodicals in China, *Zhengyi tongbao* (started in 1902) first supplied information on Persia in its 17th issue of 1905, in which it reported news from St. Petersburg that Russia would soon dispatch more soldiers to Turkestan to augment its military strength in Persia. In its subsequent issues, the journal paid special attention to the competing spheres of influence in Persia between Russia and Britain, as well as news on the progress of the Persian Constitutional Revolution. In 1907, after the



establishment of constitutionalism in Persia, *Zhengyi tongbao* published the remarkable review “On the ways of national salvation (Part 2),” in which the author states, “Nowadays, constitutionalism has been established even in the old-aged nation of Persia. With the establishment of the Persian constitutional government, the competition for spheres of influences in this country between Britain and Russia has been contained to a great extent” (Wang Deyuan, p. 1485). He concludes that constitutionalism was the only way to save a nation from downfall, and he therefore appeals for the establishment of a constitutional government in China.

Another important periodical which showed much interest in the Persian Constitutional Revolution was *Dongfang zazhi*, a comprehensive monthly magazine that had a publication history of 45 years (1904-48) and exerted a great influence on the modern history of China. Its editors and writers were well known in China as constitutionalists, and shortly before the outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution, *Dongfang zazhi* published several news reports about Persia. In its third issue of 1904, an article appeared entitled “Bosi-wang zhi dengwei” (The coronation of the Persian Shah), recounting the ceremony at which Mozaffar-al-Din Shah ascended the throne. It was probably the first report on Persia in Chinese magazines. In its fifth issue of this year, it published the review “Bosiwan zhi jinzhuang” (The current situation in the Persian Gulf), analyzing the competition between Russia and Great Britain in occupying Persian Gulf. Interestingly, in its ninth issue of 1904, inside front cover, *Dongfang zazhi* published a mini-sized portrait of Mozaffar-al-Din Shah.

After the outbreak of the Persian Constitutional Revolution, especially after 1909, *Dongfang zazhi* paid much more attention to Persia than before, and published many news reports tracking the development of the Revolution. In its sixth issue of 1907, inside front cover, it published a photo of the new Persian monarch Moḥammad-‘Ali Shah. In 1909, when the Constitutional Revolution was spreading across Persia and approaching its climax, *Dongfang zazhi* published 44 news reports about Persia in its 12 issues of that year, providing Chinese readers with a detailed and continuous account of the great event in progress in Persia. Most of these news reports were selected and translated from the Chinese-language British newspaper *Lundun taiwushi bao* (*The Times of London*), by a Chinese correspondent named Gan Yonglong. In addition to these news reports, *Dongfang zazhi* published frequent commentaries on the Persian Revolution, such as “Bu ji Bosi geming zhi lishi” (Additional remarks concerning the history of the Persian Revolution) (6/10,



1909, pp. 46-51), “Ke’ai Bosi zhi fei-huang” (How regretful the Persian dethroned king is) (6/11, 1909, p. 57), and “Kelian Bosi zhi jin-huang” (How unfortunate the Persian reigning king is) (op. cit., pp. 57-58).

Beginning in 1910, news reports about the Persian Revolution declined, but several important analytical reviews indicated the continuous concern of the magazine for the Persian Constitutional Revolution. In 1910, there were two relevant reviews, one entitled “Ying-E guafen Bosi zhi jinggao” (Warning: Britain and Russia are carving up Persia; 7/12, pp. 67-68), which expressed the author’s worry about Persia, and another entitled “Bosi ningchen zhi shou-sixing” (On the execution of a treacherous courtier following the death sentence)(7/12, pp. 59-60), in which the author gave a very detailed description of how and why the bodyguard of the shah was sent to the gallows.

In 1911, there were also two reviews in *Dongfang zazhi*: “A brief remark on the education of the Persian shah” (Gan Yonglong, pp. 1-2), and “The future of the Persian Gulf” (Kong Qinglai, pp. 16-18). The latter review analyzed the effect of the construction of the Baghdad railway on the political and economical situation in the Persian Gulf, especially its effect on the competing British and German spheres of influence; the former reported on of the appointment of the American W. Morgan Shuster to the office of Minister of Finance by the Majles, discussed many other reforms undertaken by the Persian constitutional government, and went on to report on educational reform in Persia, regarding it as the most significant proof of the ideological progress of the Persians. Three photos of Aḥmad Shah, the teenaged reigning monarch of Persia, and of the Qajar princes Alā’-al-Saltāna and his son Mo’in-al-Wozarā, were attached to this review.

In 1912, there was an unusually long review entitled “The current situation of Persia” (Qian Zhixiu, pp. 12-19). It gave a description of the outrages committed by the Russian troops and Šojā’-al-Dawla, and of the miserable condition in Persia, particularly in Tabriz, after the coup of December 1911. It analyzed the reasons for the failure of the Persian Revolution and pointed out that it was foreign interference, especially Russian armed intervention, that put an end to the Persian Constitutional Revolution, and that Great Britain played an accomplice role in helping Russia to intervene. Nine photos appended to this review are of special historic importance, for they showed the real conditions of the Persian society, mainly the Persian army, around 1911.



The most interesting article on the Persian Constitutional Revolution was published by *Minbao* (The magazine of the people), the official periodical of the Chinese revolutionary party known as Zhongguo Tongmenghui “United League of China,” the predecessor of Guomindang (Kuomintang “National Party of China”), of which Sun Zhongshan (i.e., Dr. Sun Yat-sen, 1866-1925), the forerunner of Chinese democracy, was the founder and leader. Created in November 1905 in Tokyo, *Minbao* was in great demand in China and among Chinese living abroad, and had a circulation of more than 50,000.

Minbao did not publish any news concerning the Persian Constitutional Revolution before 1907, but in the spring of 1910, after the convening of the Second Majles in Tehran opened a new phase in the Constitutional Revolution, *Minbao* published a special review on the momentous event. This article was entitled “Bosi geming” (Persian revolution), written by Minyi (“the opinion of the people”), which was the pen name of Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) and Hu Hanmin (1879-1936), the two core members of the United League of China and the former editors in chief of *Minbao*.

The article “Persian revolution” reflects the reverberations of the Persian Constitutional Revolution in the hearts of Chinese contemporaries. The author of the article praises the cause for which Persian constitutionalists were fighting, saying: “It was the zeal for freedom, equality, and fraternity that aroused the fighting will of the Persian constitutionalists and made them fearless in the struggle of resistance against power and force” (Minyi, p. 8). The author then analyzes the success of the Persian constitutionalists in establishing the Second National Assembly in November 1909, and he proposes three reasons for this success: (1) the great bravery and the unyielding determination of the Persian constitutionalists, who were fighting a bloody battle against oppression and foreign intervention; (2) the evenly matched trial of strength between Russia and Britain in Persia, which restrained unbridled Russian armed intervention to a certain extent; (3) Russia’s domestic trouble caused by the Russian Revolution in 1905-07, which weakened the power of Tsarist Russia. He finally drew a conclusion from the Persian Constitutional Revolution: “Enthusiasm for revolution is found today everywhere in the world. It is the trend of the world. Now it is time for us to make determination and to rouse ourselves for vigorous efforts to make our country prosperous. We will succeed only when we do all we can. This is what the Persian Revolution has taught us” (Minyi, p. 12).

One year later, in 1911, the armed uprising known as the Xinhai Revolution



(1911-12), led by Sun Zhongshan, broke out in China and led to the downfall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and the establishment of Zhonghua Minguo “the Republic of China” (1912), the first democratic republic in the history of China.

By the end of the nineteenth century, both China and Persia were ancient civilizations suffering from economic plunder and political subjugation at the hands of foreign powers, particularly Russia and Britain. At the same time, theories of democracy, freedom, independence and equality were spreading from Europe, thus awakening national consciousness and patriotic enthusiasm among intellectuals who were then inspired to seek out methods of enacting change. Although the revolutions’ immediate goals differed (the Xinhai Revolution established a republic, whereas the Persian Revolution founded a constitutional monarchy), China and Persia’s similar historical and social backgrounds lead to the great interest shown by Chinese revolutionary democrats towards the Persian constitutional revolution. As the first event of its kind in the east, the Persian Constitutional Revolution has been regarded by Chinese scholars as the beginning of the Awakening of Asia, and the Chinese “Xinhai Revolution” as the high tide of this awakening. Together the revolutions mark the beginning of the modern history for Persia and China.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gan Yonglong, “Bosi huangdi dianxue jilüe” (Brief Remarks on the education of the Persian Shah), *Dongfang zazhi* 8/6, 1911, pp. 1-2.

Kong Qinglai, “Bosiwan zhi weilai” (The Future of the Persian Gulf), *Dongfang zazhi* 8/8, 1911, pp. 16-18.

Minyi, “Bosi geming” (Persian revolution), *Minbao* 25, 1910, pp. 8-12.

Qian Zhixiu, “Bosi zhi jinzhuang” (The current situation of Persia), *Dongfang zazhi* 9/9, 1912, pp. 12-20.

Wang Deyuan, “Jiuwang jue lun er” (On the ways of national salvation, Part 2), *Zheng-yi congshu*, “Dingwei zheng-xue-wen bian 6,” Taipei, 1976, pp. 1484-85.