

A synopsis of the dissertation

From the 17th to 19th centuries, Iran was a key country in the Middle East for the European powers because, regarding international trade, it was on the overland route to India, the principal target of European attempts to expand their trade relations around the world. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, Iran was also a strategic ally of the West in opposing the Ottoman Empire; while in the 19th century, it was a neighbor to both the Russian Empire and British India, who were engaged in a century-long power struggle in the region.

In modern scholarship on Iran's interaction with the outside world in the 19th century leading up to its subjection to semi-colonial domination, this Russo-British power struggle, commonly referred to as the "Great Game," has received the bulk of attention. My dissertation, while not denying the central role played by these two powers in Iran's domestic affairs, draws attention to a third power with long-standing claims to influence in the country by way of politics and trade—France. The French were serious competitors in the struggle to gain influence in Iran and the Persian Gulf at the time. They failed in their objectives—other than in wielding cultural influence in Iran—but that failure does not diminish the historical importance of their place and participation in the imperialist struggle for dominance in 19th-century West and South Asia.

Through the foundation of the French East India Company in 1664, France sought to open trade with Iran in competition with the Dutch and the British, whose maritime companies were already active in the region. This objective received a boost when Louis XIV managed to conclude a trade agreement with the Iranians in 1715. Although the treaty was not implemented due to changes of government in both Iran and France, the French Government, for two centuries, sought to revive it in one way or another. Well into the 19th century, French commerce followed the same protectionist policies established by Louis XIV's minister, Colbert.

Napoleon I, in addition to his military ambition for an invasion of India through an alliance with Iran, was determined to revive the French treaty of 1715 to obtain the same privileges in the form of a new commercial treaty. The monarchical and conservative French governments that ruled France from the fall of Napoleon in 1815 until the French Revolution in 1848 paid even more attention to Iranian trade. During this entire period, the French regarded commerce not only as a source of increased wealth, but also of French national power and political influence.

This dissertation investigates the French pursuit of commercial superiority in Iran as a method by which the French sought to fulfill their political goals and to impose their influence. My intention is to use evidence to prove that French trade in Iran accompanied its imperialist ambitions from the outset. This strategy became more significant in the 19th century, when the British and Russian superpowers opposed a French active presence in Iran and prevented France from asserting direct political influence in the country. To compete with those powers, in particular to contain Russian advancement, France pursued its plan of using trade with Iran as a means of obtaining commercial concessions and privileges as well as to promote its colonial policies. This dissertation, which contributes to the literature on trade and colonization, aims to connect Iran to the large network of French colonial power and influence, developed in the Eastern Mediterranean World from the 17th to the 19th century.

This dissertation also looks at Iran's embrace of French culture, despite France's great efforts to gain colonial and commercial advantages in Iran. No matter how frequently or badly France lost to its European rivals in Iranian politics, it was still successful in shaping Iranian society's culture. Contrary to what many French scholars, diplomats, and experts on Iran assert, however, this cultural development and impact was largely the result of Iranians who assimilated French culture into their society rather than French policies towards Iran.

Competition timeline

The timeline of the dissertation process, including rough estimates of how long each step will take:

By September 2023, four of the six chapters (around 55 thousand words) had been finished and revised.

September 2023

I began work on the fifth chapter, which focuses on Iran as seen through the eyes of the French from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, primarily from a political and diplomatic perspective, highlighting the distinction between France's perception of Iran and that of other nations like Russia and Britain.

Preliminary research entails collecting all available sources, data, or literature, primarily in French, that are relevant to the French mindset towards Iran: printed or archival documents, memoirs, and travel accounts.

Create bibliography and reference list.

Speak with the supervisor to determine if I missed any significant sources.

Modify the topic's focus in response to the supervisor's comments.

October 2023

Study the French accounts and begin by making notes on the pertinent sections.

Read through the French accounts of the late Safavid period first, which total thirty accounts.

November 2023

Examine French diplomatic interactions or travelers' perceptions of Qajar Iran from a foreign policy standpoint.

Begin writing while discussing the chapter's topic, research questions, and conclusion with my supervisor.

November-December 2023

Finish writing the chapter sections as well as the concluding remarks.

Finish the bibliography and reference list.

January 2024

Begin working on the final chapter about Iran's attitude towards France, Iranian reception of French culture, and Iranian sympathy for France during the aforementioned time period.

Examine the materials gathered, highlighting relevant themes and debates.

Meeting with my supervisor about how to incorporate both the Qajars' policies toward France and Iran's adoption of French culture beginning in the early nineteenth century.

February 2024

Clarify the goals of the chapter in relation to the entire dissertation, spell out the research questions, and begin writing.

March 2024

Finalize the introduction, acknowledgement, and conclusion

Update the bibliography and write up methodologies section

Advisor's revision and final suggestions for improving the whole content

Proofreading and editing

Add in the front page, table of contents, abstract, appendices etc.

April-May 2024

Submitting the dissertation

Scheduling the defense session