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A Methodological Critique of Fakher Jasim's Dissertation Tatawwur al-Fikr al-Siyasi lada al-Shi'a al-Ithna 'Ashariyya fi 'Asr al-Ghayba: From Political Reductionism to a Multilayered Model of Authority in Imami Shi'i Political Thought

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ABSTRACT

Fakher Jasim's dissertation, *Tatawwur al-Fikr al-Siyasi lada al-Shi'a al-Ithna 'Ashariyya fi 'Asr al-Ghayba* [The Development of Political Thought among the Twelver Shi'a in the Age of Occultation], constitutes an attempt to historically reconstruct the transformation of Imami Shi'i political thought from the beginning of the Occultation to contemporary formulations of wilayat al-faqih (guardianship of the jurist). The significance of the dissertation lies in its engagement with a fundamental question: the nature of the relationship among the Imamate, Occultation, religious authority, and political power. Nevertheless, its periodization of historical developments and its explanation of theological concepts encounter a number of methodological challenges. Using a descriptive-analytical method, intratextual critique, and intertextual analysis, the present study evaluates the dissertation's theoretical foundations, historical structure, level of analysis, and manner of representing intra-confessional diversity. The theoretical framework of the study is based on the concept of "political reductionism," operationalized through five indicators: reducing religious authority to political domination, substituting historical formation for conceptual validity, linearizing historical developments, neglecting institutions and social intermediaries, and treating wilayat al-faqih as the necessary culmination of Imami history. The findings indicate that, despite its attention to historical contexts, the dissertation does not adequately distinguish among the theological, epistemic, institutional, and political dimensions in its analysis of the Imamate, infallibility, divine designation, and religious authority. Consequently, the Imamate, which in Imami theology constitutes a divinely instituted and epistemic office, is reduced in the dissertation primarily to a political and historical institution. Moreover, positioning Imami political history along a single trajectory of "transition from revolutionary action to political quietism and subsequently to wilayat al-faqih" is inconsistent with evidence concerning the institutional networks of the Imamate, epistemic authority, Na'ini's constitutionalism, the conditional political quietism of the Khoei school, Imam Khomeini's theory of government, the divergent models of divine sovereignty advanced by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muhammad Taqi al-Modarresi, and the emergence of the Shi'i civil-state theory. As a result, the dissertation's account of the history of Imami political thought is directed toward a linear and unilinear explanation that fails to represent part of the diversity within Imami juridical and political traditions. Finally, the article proposes a five-layered model consisting of "theological legitimacy, epistemic authority, juridical



mediation, institutional organization, and political governance" for studying the transformation of Imami political thought. While acknowledging the role of history and society, this model prevents the reduction of intra-religious concepts to structures of power. By contrast, because the dissertation reduces theological concepts to the logic of political power, its analysis offers a reductionist and analytically insufficient representation of the development of Imami Shi'i political thought.

Keywords: *Shi'i political thought, Imamate, Age of Occultation, religious authority, wilayat al-faqih, political reductionism, methodological critique.*

Introduction

Imami Shi'i political thought is neither a homogeneous and static tradition nor one concerned exclusively with government; rather, it constitutes a multilayered intellectual system formed through the interrelationship among the theology of the Imamate, epistemic authority, jurisprudence, social organization, and historical experience. Within this tradition, the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad was not merely a question concerning the identity of the ruler or the mechanism for the transfer of power; rather, it expanded into questions concerning the source of legitimacy, the authoritative interpreter of religion, the continuity of divine guidance, and the relationship between religious knowledge and social leadership. Accordingly, the Imamate cannot be adequately explained solely through such concepts as political competition, the state, rebellion, conservatism, or domination (1-3). With the beginning of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the question of authority within Imami Shi'ism did not disappear; rather, its forms, bearers, and spheres became increasingly diversified. Jurists, traditionists, theologians, *nuqaba'* (community notables or representatives), agents, local scholars, sources of emulation (*maraji' al-taqlid*), educational institutions, and financial and communication networks each assumed portions of the functions that had previously been organized around the presence of the Imam. This development did not constitute a simple and complete transfer of all the Imam's prerogatives to a substitute institution, nor did it signify the suspension of political affairs until the Imam's reappearance. Rather, it was a contested historical process in which different understandings of deputyship, *al-umur al-hisbiyya* (hisba-related affairs), adjudication, the issuing of legal opinions, social supervision, limitation of political power, Islamic government, and the civil state emerged (3-5).

Fakher Jasim's dissertation, *Tatawwur al-Fikr al-Siyasi lada al-Shi'a al-Ithna 'Ashariyya fi 'Asr al-Ghayba [The Development of Political Thought among Twelver Shi'a During the Age of Occultation]*, was written with the aim of explaining these transformations. The dissertation seeks to interpret the history of Imami political thought in relation to political and social conditions and to demonstrate how the concepts of the Imamate, Occultation, deputyship, and *wilayat al-faqih* changed over time (6). This attention to historical context is one of the work's strengths, since political concepts do not emerge in a vacuum and are invariably connected with crises of legitimacy, changes of government, relations between scholars and rulers, and the needs of Shi'i communities. The principal problem, however, arises when historical explanation becomes the sole valid level of analysis and theological and epistemic concepts are represented merely as reflections of political interests or as instrumental responses to historical crises. Under such circumstances, historicizing concepts ultimately results in the dehistoricization of their internal logic, because it remains unclear how adherents of the tradition themselves understood these concepts, what arguments they advanced in their support, and what distinction exists between the validity of a belief and the social conditions under which that belief emerged or expanded.

The principal question of the present study is the following: To what extent has Fakher Jasim's dissertation succeeded in distinguishing among the theological, epistemic, jurisprudential, institutional, and political levels in its representation of the development of Imami political thought? The subsidiary questions are as follows: First, does

the dissertation's interpretation of the Imamate and infallibility reflect the internal religious logic of these concepts? Second, is the historical model presented in the dissertation capable of explaining intra-jurisprudential diversity within Shi'ism during the Age of Occultation? Third, should *wilayat al-faqih* be regarded as the necessary culmination of the history of Imami political thought, or as one possible trajectory among several competing trajectories? Finally, what analytical model can simultaneously account for both the historicity and the internal logic of Imami political thought?

The hypothesis of this article is that, despite the significance of its research problem and the value of some of its historical analyses, Fakher Jasim's dissertation is affected in certain respects by "political reductionism" and a "displacement of the level of analysis." These shortcomings may be addressed through the adoption of a multilayered model that distinguishes among theological legitimacy, epistemic authority, jurisprudential mediation, institutional organization, and political governance.

Literature Review and the Position of the Present Study

The literature on Shi'i political thought may be divided into several broad categories. The first consists of historical and theological studies concerning the emergence of Shi'ism, succession to the Prophet, and the formation of the concept of the Imamate. Studies by Madelung, Amir-Moezzi, Momen, Newman, and Haider have demonstrated that, from its earliest development, the Imamate in Imami Shi'ism possessed political, epistemic, sacred, and social dimensions and therefore cannot be explained exclusively in terms of competition over the caliphate (1, 2, 5, 7, 8).

The second category consists of studies focusing on religious and political authority during the Age of Occultation. Mavani examines the transformation of authority in Imami Shi'ism from the Imamate to post-Khomeini formulations and demonstrates that religious authority and political guardianship, despite their relationship, are not identical concepts (3). Bhojani and Clarke likewise distinguish between "epistemic authority" and "practical authority," demonstrating that adherence to a religious authority cannot invariably be equated with political obedience or acceptance of domination. From their perspective, a *marja'* may constitute an "authoritative expert" for the follower without necessarily being regarded as a political ruler or holder of executive power (9).

The third category includes studies addressing the social and institutional structures of Imami Shi'ism. Hayes demonstrates that the early Imami community was not merely a "community of belief," but possessed networks of representation, financial collection and transfer, correspondence, production and circulation of hadith, and mechanisms of social boundary formation. From this perspective, the Imamate was not only a theological doctrine but also the center of a social and communicative organization (4). This finding is particularly important for criticizing approaches that reconstruct Imami history solely around political rebellion, political defeat, and withdrawal from power.

The fourth category consists of studies addressing the diversity of political thought among Imami jurists in the modern period. Farati's study of Ayatollah Khoei's school demonstrates that the political quietism of this school does not signify a denial of the social dimensions of religion; rather, it derives from particular principles of *usul al-fiqh*, limitations in the evidentiary basis for general guardianship, emphasis on *al-umur al-hisbiyya*, and considerations of necessity and exigency (10). At the other end of the spectrum, studies of Imam Khomeini's political epistemology demonstrate that the theory of *wilayat al-faqih* in his intellectual system does not rest on a single jurisprudential proof but is formed through an interrelationship among rational, transmitted, and mystical arguments (11).

Na'ini's thought represents yet another trajectory. Rather than focusing on the establishment of comprehensive political guardianship by the jurist, Na'ini identifies the central problem of the Age of Occultation as the limitation of despotism, the fiduciary character of government, the accountability of rulers, and popular participation. Within this framework, government is not the private property of the sovereign and must operate in accordance with the public interest and under popular supervision (12).

Recent studies of Shi'i Islamism likewise demonstrate its internal diversity. Scharbrodt has shown that Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, despite their shared use of the concept of divine sovereignty, do not reach identical conclusions. Al-Sadr is more concerned with defining the criteria for the Islamic legitimacy of the state and establishing a relationship between divine sovereignty and the role of the *umma*, whereas al-Mudarrisi identifies the just jurist as the principal agent through whom divine sovereignty is exercised within the state (13).

Furthermore, the transformation of the concept of *maslaha* (public interest) in the Islamic Republic and the emergence of civil-state discourse among Arab Shi'i thinkers demonstrate that contemporary Shi'i political thought remains an arena of contestation and reconstruction. In the Islamic Republic, *maslaha* has developed from a relatively restricted jurisprudential principle into a mechanism for governmental decision-making, preservation of the political system, and the modification or suspension of certain legal rulings (14). By contrast, some Arab Shi'i thinkers have proposed the civil state as an alternative to *wilayat al-faqih* and as a framework for reconciling religious values, popular sovereignty, and political pluralism (15).

The innovation of the present article lies in the fact that it does not employ this diverse body of literature merely to reject or affirm the conclusions of the dissertation. Rather, it uses this literature to evaluate the dissertation's methodology and to formulate an alternative analytical model. Within this model, disagreements are not regarded as signs of confusion or the absence of a political tradition; instead, they are interpreted as consequences of the differentiability of the various dimensions of authority and the diversity of jurisprudential responses to the problem of Occultation.

Research Method and Criteria of Critique

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method, intratextual critique, and intertextual analysis. In the first stage, the argumentative structure of Fakher Jasim's dissertation, its central concepts, historical periodization, and conclusions are reconstructed. In the second stage, the dissertation's claims are compared with theological and historical sources and with contemporary scholarship on the Imamate, religious authority, *marja'iyya*, and Shi'i political thought. In the third stage, the consistency of the level of analysis, comprehensiveness of the evidence, and explanatory capacity of the dissertation's model with respect to divergent or contradictory cases are evaluated.

The present critique neither seeks to establish the theological truth of all Imami doctrines nor regards external historical analysis as invalid. The principal distinction is between "explaining the origin and social context of a belief" and "reconstructing its meaning and validity within a tradition." For example, it may be demonstrated that emphasis on infallibility expanded under conditions of conflict over religious authority; however, this historical observation does not warrant the conclusion that infallibility was merely an instrument of legitimation and possessed no independent epistemological rationale. These two propositions belong to different levels of analysis.

Accordingly, "political reductionism" is operationalized in this article through five indicators:

First, reducing authority to domination; that is, interpreting every form of religious or epistemic authority as a form of political rule or an instrument of social control.

Second, substituting historical formation for conceptual validity; that is, treating an explanation of the conditions under which a doctrine emerged or expanded as equivalent to either refuting or validating the doctrine itself.

Third, linearizing history; that is, organizing complex and simultaneous developments into successive and mutually substitutive stages.

Fourth, neglecting institutional intermediaries; that is, explaining Imami history exclusively on the basis of the political positions of the Imams or jurists while excluding scholarly, financial, educational, ritual, and communicative networks from the analysis.

Fifth, treating *wilayat al-faqih* teleologically; that is, regarding all developments during the Age of Occultation as necessary preliminaries to the emergence of the theory of *wilayat al-faqih*, or, conversely, interpreting the relatively late emergence of the theory's final form as evidence of the absence of any jurisprudential antecedents.

These criteria make it possible to move the critique of the dissertation beyond the level of doctrinal disagreement and instead focus on methodological adequacy, evidentiary proportionality, and argumentative coherence.

Reconstruction of Fakhre Jasim's Position

Fakhre Jasim's dissertation regards the Imamate as the central component of Twelver Shi'i identity and as the principal feature distinguishing it from the theory of the caliphate. In the reconstruction presented in the dissertation, the Imamate initially emerges within the context of political conflict following the death of the Prophet and, as the possibility of the Imams' acquisition of political power diminishes, its theological, spiritual, and epistemic dimensions gradually become more prominent. During the Age of Occultation, the issue of the Imam's political succession subsequently continues in the form of debates concerning the deputyship of jurists, *marja'yya*, and ultimately *wilayat al-faqih* (6).

From the dissertation's perspective, the history of Imami thought may be understood as a movement from overt political action toward theological inwardness and then back to politics in the form of the theory of *wilayat al-faqih*. Accordingly, the first period, from Saqifa to Karbala, represents direct conflict over political power; the second, extending from Imam al-Sajjad to the later Imams, represents the strengthening of the scholarly, spiritual, and theological dimensions of the Imamate; and the third represents the formation of jurisprudential and philosophical theories of authority during the Age of Occultation.

The dissertation also discusses concepts such as divine designation, the Imam's knowledge, and infallibility, but analyzes them in close connection with the Shi'i community's need to consolidate authority and differentiate itself from other Islamic groups. In its discussion of *wilayat al-faqih*, the dissertation emphasizes the relatively late emergence of the governmental form of the theory and disagreement among jurists regarding the scope of the jurist's authority. Overall, the dissertation seeks to demonstrate that Imami political thought has been the product of a continuous interaction between religious beliefs and political and social necessities.

This framework has two advantages. First, it does not detach Imami concepts from their social and political history. Second, it emphasizes change and intra-confessional disagreement and avoids presenting Shi'i thought as entirely static. Nevertheless, in the absence of a clear distinction among levels of analysis, these very strengths may become shortcomings, because historical transformation may be represented as the complete replacement of one dimension by another, while social explanation may substitute for epistemic analysis.

Dimensions of the Methodological Critique

The Imamate: More Than a Political Office

The first challenge in the dissertation concerns its formulation of the relationship between the Imamate and politics. It is true that the conflict over succession to the Prophet had an unmistakable political dimension; however, within the Imami tradition, the right to govern is inseparable from the right to authoritatively interpret religion, special knowledge, guidance, and religious probativity (*hujjiyya*). Therefore, the political character of the Imamate does not imply that it is exclusively political.

Qur'anic analyses within the Baghdadi theological school demonstrate that Shaykh al-Mufid and Sayyid al-Murtada explained the Imamate and *wilaya* not merely in terms of their social consequences, but through a constellation of Qur'anic, rational, and dialectical arguments. Within this theological system, discussions of explicit designation (*nass*), superior merit (*afdaliyya*), infallibility, and the probative authority of the Imam constitute components of an integrated argumentative framework and cannot simply be regarded as a cover for political claims (16).

The distinction between “epistemic authority” and “practical authority” is of fundamental significance in this context. An individual may constitute an expert and authoritative reference in a particular domain without occupying the position of ruler, commander, or holder of executive power. Bhojani and Clarke demonstrate that, within the Shi'i tradition of *marja'iyya*, adherence to a jurist's opinion may be grounded in the rational principle that a non-expert refers to a qualified expert, rather than in a relationship of command and obedience. Religious authority, therefore, is not invariably synonymous with domination, discipline, or political sovereignty (9).

This distinction is also necessary in the analysis of the Imamate. The Imam may possess political legitimacy while the exercise of his political authority remains dependent upon historical possibilities and circumstances. Conversely, his epistemic and religious authority may continue in circumstances in which he does not exercise governmental power. Accordingly, the decline of the Imams' direct political involvement should not be interpreted as the transformation of the Imamate from a political institution into a merely spiritual concept. It is more precise to argue that, in different periods, the possibility of the manifestation and realization of each dimension of the Imamate varied.

Tabatabaei similarly regards the Imamate as the continuation of divine guidance and authoritative interpretation of religious teachings and does not restrict it to the political administration of society (17). Motahhari likewise distinguishes among government, social leadership, and the Imamate understood as religious and spiritual authority, emphasizing that the Shi'i theory of the Imamate is broader than the conventional concept of government (18).

Accordingly, the principal problem with the dissertation is not that it attends to the political dimension of the Imamate, but that, in certain sections, this dimension becomes the dominant level of analysis and other dimensions are interpreted primarily through their relationship to political power.

Infallibility and Divine Designation: Distinguishing Historical Origin from Epistemic Logic

The dissertation analyzes infallibility and divine designation in relation to the process through which the authority of the Imams was consolidated and Shi'i identity differentiated from other groups. Such an explanation may illuminate part of the social history of these doctrines, but it is insufficient for a comprehensive account of them.

Within the internal logic of Imami thought, infallibility is not merely an attribute intended to enhance the Imam's social status; rather, it constitutes a condition for confidence in his interpretation, judgment, and guidance.

Babazadeh, through a reconsideration of the Imamate from the perspective of "religious authority," demonstrates that divine designation, special knowledge, and infallibility are not three separate and ceremonial attributes but are structurally related to the function of religious authority. If the Imam is the ultimate and reliable authority for receiving and interpreting religion, then, according to the internal logic of this tradition, he must possess knowledge commensurate with that responsibility, and error or sin would undermine his authority. Moreover, the designation of the ultimate religious authority cannot be entrusted entirely to the choice of persons whose own ability to fully identify the necessary qualifications is epistemically limited (19).

Mousavi likewise reconstructs the Qur'anic logic of arguments concerning the temporal scope of the Imam's infallibility through an examination of the verses concerning the truthful, the trial of Abraham, and purification. Regardless of whether one accepts the ultimate conclusion of this argument, the existence of such an argumentative structure demonstrates that the doctrine of infallibility within the Imami tradition is not merely the product of a presumed social need; rather, it has been formulated through linguistic, theological, and exegetical analyses (20).

A distinction must therefore be made between two claims. The first is that historical conditions contributed to the increasing prominence or development of discussions concerning infallibility; this claim is defensible. The second is that infallibility was nothing more than an instrumental response to political and social needs; this claim cannot be established without examining and critically evaluating the arguments internal to the tradition. Moving from the first claim to the second constitutes an instance of displacement between levels of analysis.

The same consideration applies to divine designation. In Imami thought, designation is not regarded merely as a mechanism for excluding political rivals; rather, it is linked to a particular understanding of guidance, divine knowledge, and the limitations of human knowledge regarding the complete qualifications required of the Imam. Historical analysis should explain when, in what context, and in what form these arguments were formulated, but it cannot reduce them to their political function without independent evaluation.

Neglect of the Institutional Dimension of the Imamate

One of the most important weaknesses of exclusively political models is their neglect of the institutions and networks through which the Imami community was organized during the presence of the Imams and on the eve of the Occultation. Hayes demonstrates that the Imams stood at the center of a complex set of social relationships involving agents, the collection and distribution of funds, correspondence with followers, dispute resolution, transmission of hadith, appointment of representatives, and boundary formation between members of the community and competing groups (4).

This evidence challenges the binary image of "political rebellion versus spiritual withdrawal." Failure to control the state does not imply the absence of social organization, the exercise of authority, or the production of collective order. The Imami community could possess financial, communicative, educational, and identity-forming mechanisms without establishing a state. From this perspective, the period of the later Imams should not be understood merely as an era of withdrawal from politics, but also as a period during which certain institutional forms of Imami authority expanded.

Incorporating this dimension also changes our understanding of the Occultation. The Occultation did not simply create a vacancy at the apex of political leadership; rather, it generated a crisis within the network of direct communication with the Imam. The Imami community responded to this crisis through hadith-based, jurisprudential, educational, and financial institutions. The emergence of jurisprudential *marja'yya* should therefore be studied in the context of this institutional reorganization, rather than interpreted merely as a substitute for the Imam's government or as a direct precursor to the state of the jurist.

Critique of the Linear Model of Historical Stages

Historical periodization is necessary for organizing data; however, when historical stages are defined as mutually substitutive, the complexity of history is lost. In the dissertation's model, the political, theological-spiritual, and philosophical stages are to some extent organized in such a way that the beginning of each stage appears to diminish or replace the functions associated with the preceding stage.

Historical evidence, however, indicates that the various dimensions of the Imamate existed simultaneously. During periods when the Imams lacked the possibility of exercising political rule, questions concerning the legitimacy of government and relations with existing states nevertheless remained relevant. Likewise, religious, exegetical, and ethical arguments were already present in the earliest political conflicts. The increasing philosophical articulation of certain interpretations similarly did not entail the termination or replacement of *nass*-centered theology.

Consequently, rather than speaking of "mutually substitutive stages," it is more appropriate to speak of "layers characterized by different degrees of intensity and manifestation." In any given period, one layer may become more prominent because of political circumstances or the availability of particular intellectual resources, but the other layers do not necessarily disappear. Such a model is more compatible with historical diversity and doctrinal overlap.

The Relationship Between the Imamate and Political Philosophy

The dissertation identifies certain similarities between the Imamate and the model of the "ruler of the virtuous city" in al-Farabi's philosophy. This comparison is useful with respect to certain attributes, such as knowledge, virtue, guidance, and orientation toward human felicity; however, a structural identification of the two theories is problematic.

In Imami theory, the Imam's legitimacy is dependent upon explicit designation and divine appointment, while his knowledge and infallibility are understood within a theology of divine guidance. In al-Farabi's philosophy, the first ruler is explained in relation to intellect, virtue, apprehension of intelligibles, and the structure of the virtuous city. Functional similarities between the two concepts therefore do not imply identity in their epistemological or legitimating foundations.

The influence of philosophy on the language and conceptual formulations of certain Imami theologians or mystics may legitimately be studied; however, a philosophical conception of the Imamate should not be treated as a historical stage that replaced its theological conception. These formulations coexisted in many periods and were sometimes synthesized while at other times remaining in tension with one another.

Wilayat al-Faqih: Between Jurisprudential Continuity and Political Discontinuity

In its critique of *wilayat al-faqih*, the dissertation emphasizes the relatively late emergence of its governmental formulation and the absence of consensus among jurists. The basic observation is correct: the theory of general or absolute political guardianship of the jurist was not accepted in every historical period or by all Imami jurists. Nevertheless, the late emergence of the final form of a theory does not establish the absence of all conceptual and jurisprudential antecedents.

Within the Imami jurisprudential tradition, discussions concerning the issuing of legal opinions, adjudication, implementation of certain rulings, administration of *al-umur al-hisbiyya*, protection of the property of absent persons, guardianship over individuals without a legal guardian, and deputyship in certain religious functions provided conceptual grounds for debates about the authority of the jurist. These discussions are not identical with the theory of comprehensive government by the jurist, but they constitute part of the intellectual background that subsequently made possible the development of divergent political theories.

At the same time, these antecedents do not necessarily culminate in absolute *wilayat al-faqih*. Ayatollah Khomei's school provides a clear example of restricting the authority of the jurist. Within this school, textual evidence is not considered sufficient to establish general guardianship, and the jurist's intervention is largely restricted to *al-umur al-hisbiyya* and to the minimum jurisdiction established with certainty, particularly under conditions of necessity and exigency. The political quietism of the Khomei school should therefore not be interpreted merely as a psychological disposition or form of social conservatism; rather, it is related to its principles of jurisprudential reasoning, its particular assessment of the evidence, and its evaluation of the institutional capacity of the *marja'iyya* to administer the everyday affairs of the state (10).

In contrast, Imam Khomeini develops a more comprehensive theory of *wilayat al-faqih*. Epistemological analyses of his writings demonstrate that this theory is not merely the result of reliance on several transmitted reports, but is formulated through the interrelationship of rational arguments concerning the necessity of government, textual evidence concerning deputyship, and mystical and philosophical foundations concerning *wilaya* (11). The difference between Khomei and Imam Khomeini should therefore not be reduced to binaries such as "authentic jurisprudence versus political innovation" or "quietism versus politics." Rather, it should be understood as a disagreement between two jurisprudential and epistemological systems concerning the scope of the relevant evidence and the functions assigned to the jurist.

Accordingly, a more precise formulation is that *wilayat al-faqih* possesses "earlier jurisprudential roots and antecedents" while simultaneously representing a "new political and institutional formulation." This formulation avoids two extremes: first, the claim that there was a historical consensus concerning government by the jurist; and second, the claim that there is no continuity whatsoever between the modern theory and the Imami jurisprudential tradition.

Na'ini and the Constitutionalist Trajectory of the Age of Occultation

A linear model that divides Imami history between political quietism and *wilayat al-faqih* cannot adequately account for Na'ini's political thought. Na'ini understands the problem of the Age of Occultation neither as the establishment of unrestricted political guardianship by the jurist nor as the acceptance of despotic monarchy; rather, he seeks the transformation of a proprietorial and servile state into a fiduciary and constitutional form of government.

In a fiduciary state, political power is not the private property of the ruler and government must be exercised for the public interest. Whether the ruler is infallible or non-infallible, political governance cannot be independent of accountability, consultation, and public supervision. For Na'ini, in the absence of infallibility, law, parliament, and public oversight constitute mechanisms for reducing despotism and preventing arbitrary rule (12).

This theory demonstrates that Imami political jurisprudence during the Age of Occultation can defend popular participation, limitation of power, and accountable government without accepting comprehensive political guardianship of the jurist. Na'ini's constitutionalism should therefore be understood not as an incomplete stage on the path toward *wilayat al-faqih*, but as an independent and historically grounded trajectory within Imami political thought.

The Diversity of Shi'i Islamism: Al-Sadr and Al-Mudarrisi

A study of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi further confirms the non-linear character of Shi'i political thought. Both thinkers employ the concept of divine sovereignty and affirm the necessity of an Islamic state, yet the function of this concept differs significantly in their respective works.

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr links divine sovereignty with the role of the *umma*, collective responsibility, and Islamic criteria for the legitimacy of the state, and seeks to establish a relationship between religious authority and popular participation. By contrast, Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi identifies the just jurist as the principal bearer and agent of divine sovereignty within the state and proposes a more centralized structure of juristic authority (13).

This difference demonstrates that even acceptance of principles such as divine sovereignty or the Islamic state does not necessarily produce a single institutional model. Shared concepts may generate divergent arrangements of power, participation, and oversight within different intellectual systems.

Maslaha and the Reconstruction of Governmental Authority

The transformation of the concept of *maslaha* in the Islamic Republic similarly illustrates dynamism and internal contestation within the theory of religious government. Traditionally, *maslaha* was employed with greater caution in Shi'i jurisprudence than in some Sunni schools; however, following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, it gradually acquired a broader role in macro-level governmental decision-making, preservation of the political system, and resolution of tensions between legal rulings and the requirements of governance.

Khodadadi demonstrates that *maslaha* has made possible the modification, suspension, or reconfiguration of certain legal rulings in pursuit of social and political objectives. At the same time, ambiguity regarding the criteria for identifying *maslaha* and determining its scope also creates the risk of arbitrary decision-making and expansion of the power of governmental institutions (14).

This development demonstrates that the theory of *wilayat al-faqih* did not remain static after the establishment of the state, but was reconstructed in response to the practical requirements of governing society. The history of Shi'i political thought therefore neither ends with the establishment of the Islamic Republic nor treats *wilayat al-faqih* as a closed and immutable formulation.

The Civil State: An Alternative Within Shi'i Discourse

The emergence of the theory of the civil state among Arab Shi'i thinkers provides further evidence of the multiple trajectories of contemporary development. In this literature, the civil state is neither necessarily an anti-religious

state nor a government of clerics. Rather, it is a model that derives executive legitimacy from citizens, elections, law, and public accountability while simultaneously preserving the possibility of religious values participating in the public sphere.

Lavie and Bar demonstrate that this theory has emerged in Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia as a critique of sectarianism, concentration of clerical authority, and the model of *wilayat al-faqih*. Thinkers associated with this current seek to establish a relationship among the Shi'i heritage, the will of the *umma*, citizenship, and a non-theocratic state (15).

The significance of this current for the critique of the dissertation lies in the fact that *wilayat al-faqih* cannot be regarded as the definitive endpoint or necessary culmination of Imami political thought. Contemporary Shi'i thought continues to possess the capacity to produce new models and reinterpret the relationship between religion and the state.

Decentralized and Delegated Forms of Authority

The diversity of authority in the Shi'i world is not confined to formal jurisprudence and the state. Studies of contemporary Shi'i Sufism demonstrate that certain Sufi orders distinguish between authority pertaining to the *shari'a* and authority pertaining to the *tariqa*, referring their followers in jurisprudential matters to a *mujtahid* outside the Sufi order. Others restrict the scope of the *qutb's* authority or reject the concentration of authority in a single individual (21).

These examples are significant for the present article because they demonstrate that delegation or restriction of authority does not necessarily signify its disappearance; rather, it may constitute a means of differentiating domains and regulating different forms of competence. In the history of Imami Shi'ism, a distinction must likewise be drawn among epistemic, jurisprudential, spiritual, institutional, and political authority, and these different forms should not be collapsed into a single concept of power.

A Proposed Model for Analyzing the Transformation of Authority in Imami Shi'ism

To address the shortcomings of the linear model, the transformation of Imami political thought may be analyzed through five interconnected but distinct layers.

The Layer of Theological Legitimacy

This layer concerns the source of right and legitimacy. Concepts such as explicit designation (*nass*), divine appointment, the Imamate, divine sovereignty, and deputyship belong to this level. This layer identifies the ultimate source to which a political theory attributes the authority to determine and impose binding norms.

Within Islamic political theology, ultimate sovereignty is commonly attributed to God; however, the question of who, after the Prophet, possesses the authority to exercise or interpret this sovereignty, and through what mechanism, has generated divergent theories of the caliphate, the Imamate, the *umma*, and *wilaya* (22).

The Layer of Epistemic Authority

At this level, the principal question is: "Who constitutes the authoritative interpreter of religion?" The Imam's knowledge, infallibility, the probative authority of the infallible Imam's statements, *ijtihad*, *marja'iyya*, and *taqlid*

belong to this layer. Epistemic authority may become connected to political power, but it is not intrinsically identical with it.

Distinguishing this level makes it possible to study religious *marja'iyya* or the Imam's scholarly authority without reducing either to political domination. It also clarifies why disagreement concerning the authoritative interpreter of religion can remain of fundamental importance even in the absence of a religious state.

The Layer of Jurisprudential Mediation

This layer concerns the mechanisms through which religious sources and principles are transformed into practical rulings and decisions. *Ijtihad*, *ifta'*, adjudication, *al-umur al-hisbiyya*, secondary rulings, governmental rulings, and *maslaha* belong to this level.

Disagreements among jurists concerning general guardianship, *al-umur al-hisbiyya*, or the scope of *maslaha* are, more than direct disagreements concerning the foundations of religion, disagreements regarding methods of legal inference, the probative force of evidence, and the scope of the jurist's authority. Analysis at this level prevents the conflation of the theology of the Imamate with the jurisprudence of government.

The Layer of Institutional Organization

This layer includes the network of agents, seminaries, *marja'iyya*, financial institutions, mosques, religious propagation organizations, religious parties, and administrative structures of the state. Similar doctrines may produce different political consequences when embedded in different institutional contexts.

For example, *wilayat al-faqih* as a jurisprudential discussion is not identical with *wilayat al-faqih* as a constitutional principle and institutional structure of the state. The transformation of a theory into an institution requires distinct historical, legal, and organizational processes.

The Layer of Political Governance

This layer concerns the form of the state, distribution of power, popular participation, law, accountability, citizenship rights, and the relationship between religious institutions and government. Na'ini's constitutional monarchy, a state based on *wilayat al-faqih*, al-Sadr's model of the *umma* and *marja'iyya*, the restricted political model of the Khoei school, and the Shi'i civil state constitute different formulations at this level.

The advantage of this five-layered model lies in its capacity both to preserve the connections among the different levels and to prevent their conflation. Two thinkers may share similar views at the level of theological legitimacy while reaching different conclusions at the level of political governance. Likewise, a jurist may recognize extensive epistemic authority for jurists while restricting their political guardianship.

Discussion

The examination of Fakher Jasim's dissertation demonstrates that any historical analysis of Shi'i political thought that neglects social and political contexts will remain incomplete; however, the same is true of approaches that disregard the tradition's internal religious logic. An approach focused solely on theological arguments loses the ability to explain change, disagreement, and the institutionalization of concepts. Conversely, an approach that regards all concepts as reflections of interests or political crises cannot adequately explain why those concepts were accepted, persisted over time, or acquired normative force.

The Imamate provides a clear example of the necessity of integrating these two levels. On the one hand, it developed within the context of conflict over succession to the Prophet and the political transformations of the early Islamic centuries; on the other hand, within the Imami tradition it developed into a theory of guidance, knowledge, probative authority, and continuation of the Prophet's religious authority. Neither level can be reduced to the other.

The same principle applies to *wilayat al-faqih*. The theory of government by the jurist is connected to the jurisprudential heritage of deputyship, adjudication, and *al-umur al-hisbiyya*, while its contemporary political and institutional form is also a product of the modern state, revolution, constitutional law, and political organization. Accordingly, it can neither be regarded as a doctrine entirely without precedent nor can its contemporary form be identified with the views of all earlier jurists.

The diversity represented by Khoei, Na'ini, Imam Khomeini, al-Sadr, and al-Mudarrisi demonstrates that a single religious tradition can produce different political models on the basis of shared sources. Such diversity does not necessarily signify contradiction or complete instability; rather, it results from differences in determining the scope of evidence, conceptualizing the relationship between legitimacy and popular acceptance, understanding the role of the people, evaluating the capacities of jurists, and interpreting historical conditions.

Accordingly, the most important methodological revision required in Fakher Jasim's dissertation is the replacement of a linear narrative with a multilayered and multi-trajectorial analysis. Within such a framework, the history of Imami political thought is neither an inevitable movement from the Imamate to *wilayat al-faqih* nor a simple transition from revolutionary activism to conservatism. Rather, it constitutes a field of interaction and competition among different forms of authority and governance, some of which became prominent in particular periods while others remained relatively marginal.

Conclusion

Fakher Jasim's dissertation, *Tatawwur al-Fikr al-Siyasi lada al-Shi'a al-Ithna 'Ashariyya fi 'Asr al-Ghayba*, is an important and noteworthy work in terms of its formulation of the problem of the transformation of Imami political thought, its attention to historical context, and its examination of the relationship between the Occultation and the authority of jurists. Nevertheless, its methodology is affected in certain sections by three principal shortcomings: displacement of the level of analysis, linearization of history, and inadequate representation of intra-confessional diversity.

First, the Imamate in Imami Shi'ism is not merely an institution of government or a claim to political power; rather, it simultaneously possesses theological, epistemic, social, and political dimensions. Reducing it to competition over power marginalizes the roles of probative authority, knowledge, infallibility, religious authority, and the social organization of the Imami community.

Second, infallibility and divine designation may be studied from the perspective of social history, but explanation of their historical context cannot substitute for analysis of their internal logic and theological arguments. The historical origin of a belief is not identical with either its validity or its meaning.

Third, Imami history cannot be divided into mutually substitutive political, spiritual, and philosophical stages. These layers coexisted throughout different periods, while only their degree of prominence and institutional manifestation changed.

Fourth, *wilayat al-faqih* is neither a theory entirely disconnected from the jurisprudential tradition nor an inevitable outcome of that tradition. There are continuities between earlier discussions of deputyship, adjudication, and *al-*

umur al-hisbiyya and the state based on *wilayat al-faqih*, but such continuities do not imply either historical consensus or conceptual identity.

Fifth, the views of Khoei, Na'ini, Imam Khomeini, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, and proponents of the civil state demonstrate the existence of multiple competing trajectories within Imami political thought. Restricted political authority based on *al-umur al-hisbiyya*, constitutional and fiduciary government, political guardianship of the jurist, the integration of the *umma* and *marja'iyya*, centralized juristic sovereignty, and the civil state all constitute different responses to the problem of authority during the Age of Occultation.

On this basis, the article has proposed a five-layered model comprising “theological legitimacy, epistemic authority, jurisprudential mediation, institutional organization, and political governance.” This model allows the relationship between religion and politics to be retained without reducing every form of religious authority to political domination. It also acknowledges the historicity of Imami thought without confining its explanation to external determinants.

The ultimate conclusion is that studying the development of Shi'i political thought requires the conjunction of two perspectives: an external perspective that examines historical, social, and institutional contexts, and an internal perspective that reconstructs the language, arguments, concepts, and criteria of validity operating within the Imami tradition. Only by preserving both levels is it possible to provide a methodologically rigorous, balanced, and non-reductionist account of Imami political thought.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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