The Combination of Traditional and Modern Models for Higher Education in the Humanities in a Country in Transition: An Innovative Model in Iran

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Abstract

In the contemporary era in countries in transition, especially those countries which have a long history in founding and maintaining traditional institutions for higher education in the humanities, we have witnessed the simultaneous presence of traditional and modern institutions for higher education in the humanities. This simultaneous presence has often revealed itself in the form of conflicting coexistence and has caused a kind of non-productive action in the space of production and consumption of the humanities in these societies. Iran, as a country in transition, with the aforesaid history in founding traditional institutions for higher education in the humanities, which has also tried in the last one hundred years to establish modern institutions for higher education in the humanities, has experienced the same trend. After the 1979 Revolution in Iran, attempt was made to combine the traditional and modern models of higher education in the humanities. Although this combination did not produce the desired results at first, it seems that today, on the basis of this combination, some institutions have come into existence, which are able to perform their research and educational duties properly. The present article uses the historical method, to study the origin of the aforesaid idea of combination, and then introduce an example of the successful implementation of this combination, which has established itself in the form of a university institution.

1. Introduction: The Combination of Modern and Traditional Educational Institutions

Among the distinguishing characteristics of a society in transition is the combination of traditional and modern institutions in all domains of social life. This combination is due to the inability of such a society to replace the traditional institutions, which form the social order, with modern institutions. One example of this combination is in domain of education, as one of the most important domains of social life. In Iran, as a country in transition, this combination occurred around 150 years ago. Because of the technological needs of the armed forces, some modern educational institutions were established with the aid of western specialists, at a time when higher education in the humanities was still dominated by traditional institutions. At that time the humanities were taught at religious institutions such as *hawzah* (Islamic religious center). In other words, higher education in the humanities was confined to training clergymen and specialists in religion. Some modern institutions for the humanities were active in the capital between 1880 and 1920, but their activities were recurrently opposed by advocates of traditional institutions. These oppositions and conflicts which resulted in violence at times were the pathological manifestations of the coexistence of traditional and modern institution in the field of education in Iran. The intermittent support of the political power for the modern or traditional education changed the form of these conflicts in different eras. After the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the political system supported traditional education in the humanities, and the modern institutions were obliged to adhere to values of traditional education. Although universities, as modern educational institutions, were closed between 1980 and 1982, their existence was never endangered. After the reopening of universities, to resolve the historical conflict between traditional and modern institutions for the humanities, the government developed some hybrid models, in which attempt was made, first and foremost, to combine the traditional and modern educational curricula. The idea of Islamic university evolved at this time in Iran.

2. Islamic University and the Combination of Educational Curricula in Iran

In most Muslim countries in transition, Islamic university is a structure intended to resolve the conflict between traditional and modern educational institutions, especially, in the domain of the humanities [2]. It seems that because of lack of any essential contradiction between science and religion in Islam, such an institution can be established only in Muslim countries, and it has never existed in the West [8]. Muslim countries developed the idea of Islamic university in order to resolve the contradiction between some modern and Islamic values [1]. Before the 1979 Revolution, some clergymen, who later founded the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, had already come up with this idea. After the Revolution, the hybrid model for university curriculum was developed based on this idea. In this model, the university curriculum for the humanities was a combination of western and Islamic courses [4]. In other words, the idea of Islamic university was initially based on the idea of combining academic curricula. The hybrid model was implemented in many Muslim countries and encountered many theoretical challenges. The first challenges were posed by thinkers who did not believe in the possibility of any combination of sciences and religious tendencies or thoughts. The pioneers of this theory were secular thinkers who considered such an idea essentially impossible [5]. Because of secular criticisms, the former challenges and contradictions remained even after the implementation of hybrid programs at universities. While these challenges had almost resulted in the inefficacy of the hybrid model in the academic curriculum in Iran, the Iranian policy-makers of sciences decided to create spaces, besides the hybrid model of academic curriculum, which could embody the idea of Islamic university [6]. It seemed that the development of hybrid models for the humanities could not fulfill the ideal plan alone, and new spaces were needed for its realization.

3. Imam Sadeq University as an Innovative Model for the Combination of Traditional and Modern Institutions for Higher Education in the Humanities

While after the Revolution all universities in Iran designed their curricula based on the hybrid model, the policy-makers decided to establish new institutions, besides universities, to embody the idea of Islamic university; Imam Sadeq University was established in Tehran in 1980 for the same purpose [9]. This university was an effort to place the Islamic worldview (which thought of itself as having a substantial body of knowledge in the humanities) in the context of modern society (i.e. university) [2]. This newly-established institution tried, based on the aforementioned hybrid model, to organize university courses in a way that students could study both the Islamic and the modern theoretical sciences [3]. In all departments (political science, law, economics, culture and communication, management, and theology), students had to earn some 120 course credits in the Islamic sciences. Despite the large number of these credits, the university curriculum was still based on the hybrid model which could not fully fulfill the idea of Islamic university at other universities. The systematic program for student enrollment, the extra-curricular programs, the cultural centers at the university and the support for the active participation of students in educational and ethical activities, made Imam Sadeq University move beyond the hybrid model, and turn into a new model, referred to in this article as the model for the combination of traditional and modern institutions. At first, Imam Sadeq University tried to accept students with lived experience of traditional world, who were primarily from religious families. These students, as active actors, reproduced values at universities which were rooted in the tradition and Shi'a faith. One of the main challenges of the inefficacy of the hybrid model of other universities was that students, who should have internalized the values of the hybrid model, could not easily do that, because of their social status. This challenge, because of the purposeful selection of students at Imam Sadeq University, was largely solved.

Table.1. A Sample of Hybrid Curriculum at Imam Sadeq University for Students of Culture and Communications

Courses	Credits	Field of Study
Islamic Thought, Philosophy, Logic, Islamic History, Islamic Civilization, Islamic Interpretation, The Qur'an, *Fiqh*, The Principles of *Fiqh*	70 credits	Islamic Knowledge
1. Culture and Communications Policy-making in Iran, 2. The Media Law, International Law, Communications, Comparative Education, Traditional Communications in Iran and Islam, Social Studies in Islam, An Introduction to Religious Studies, International and Inter-cultural Communications	150 credits	Culture and Communications
45 credits		Foreign Languages (English and Arabic)

At Imam Sadeq University, effort was made to develop the ethics of education and research on the basis of Islamic ethics. Therefore, the mosque and religious centers of the university serve as centers for discussion and debate. Discussion and debate in an organized form are special to religious institutions and *hawzah* [7]. While at most universities public spaces are used by students for passing their free time, at Imam Sadeq University these spaces serve as centers for scientific debates and political and cultural discussions. It should be noted that the activities of cultural and political student organizations are supported by Imam Sadeq University. While these activities have been generally controversial at other universities, at this University, because of students' internalized values, no conflict between the interests of the university and the demands of these groups has occurred. Another sign of the aforementioned combination is the interaction between the university president and the students. The university president, as in religious scientific institutions, is a religious figure who, as a professor, teaches Islamic ethics to all students when they enter the university. Also the students receive a kind of non-bureaucratic support from the university president and, as a result, the relationship between the university president and the students is different from the common modern bureaucratic relationships at other universities. At this university, attempt is always made to give a traditional meaning to organizations and institutions which are influenced by the values of the modern world. However, the administrative and organizational system is influenced by the bureaucracy of modern institutions.

4. Conclusion
The present article aims to introduce and describe an innovative model of the combination of tradition and modernity in the higher education in the humanities in Iran, as country in transition. The idea of such a

combination in the Muslim countries in transition can be traced back to the introduction of university as a modern institution to these countries. This introduction was largely accompanied by challenges and contradictions between traditional and modern educational institutions, and the idea of combination was developed to resolves these challenges and contradictions. In this study, two hybrid models are examined. The first model is based on the curriculum which is a combination of tradition and modern curricula and has faced many problems and challenges in practice. However, the same challenges and problems paved the way for the development of another model which, because of the experience of Imam Sadeq University, encountered fewer problems. We called this model the model for the combination of traditional and modern institutions for the humanities. In this model, in addition to the combination of different courses, the education of students as the main actors of the university cultural milieu, the extra-curricular political and cultural programs and the development of traditional and religious spaces to internalize the traditional values, are of enormous importance.

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