

# **An investigation into cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Foundations, patterns, model)**

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## **Abstract:**

The nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on a soft power called culture, and its cultural policymaking is based on foundations of Islamic culture. Cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be analyzed in macro and micro perspectives. Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution and Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance are the main entities dealing with macro and micro perspectives, respectively.

The study was carried out by a descriptive analytical method. The results of the present study showed that cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken different forms in different circumstances. In the beginning of the Islamic revolution, there was no systematic policymaking, and policymaking would take place though an ideal approach, and the government had an executive role in so doing. After the imposed war; however, cultural policymaking became systematic and took place with a developmental and realistic perspective, and the government's role changed from being executive to supportive and regulatory. With regard to the subcultures, cultural policymaking pattern of the Islamic Republic of Iran is unity in cultural diversity, and its model is a local one which has more similarity with balanced policymaking model.

**Keywords:** culture, cultural policymaking, Islamic Republic of Iran, model

## **1. Theoretical topics**

### **1.1. Statement of the problem**

Nowadays, human life is related and tied to culture and cultural phenomena more than any other periods, and there is no doubt that

paying attention to culture, cultural policymaking, and cultural-historical identity as the most fundamental layers of the social system is necessary for a political and social system to stay maintain. Iran's recent 100-year history reveals the significance of culture and its effect on the level of policies in economy, policy, and other fields. Alienation with one's culture and identity leads to nothing other than frustration and failure.

The Iranian society took a more cultural dimension after the victory of the Islamic revolution, which makes it more necessary for Iranian researchers to study the issues of culture and cultural policymaking.

Cultural policymaking includes general and operational principles and strategies that dominate the performance type of a social entity in social issue; therefore, it includes an organized system of final, long-term, middle-term, and measurable objectives and tools to achieve them.

Given the importance of public policymaking particularly in cultural field and nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the present study was aimed at examining and discussing the cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the role of the government in this regard, and the policymaking pattern and model.

### **1.2. The role of the government in cultural policymaking (different perspectives)**

Since the concept of culture has a scope as broad as all entities and individuals of the society, the role of the government in the field of culture and cultural policymaking is different based on different approaches.

In the Marxist view, culture is considered as an entity arising from economy. In other words, Marxism regards culture as forms of superior society structure, because in this view, culture is the product of the society's ideology that is produced and developed by the ruling class, and the culture has a superstructure character (Bashiriyeh, 2000: 20). The government has a comprehensive and significant role in the fields of culture and cultural policymaking, because the dominating

class which is considered as the government decides and continues the culture (Strinati, 2003: 142).

In the Neo-Marxist view which is derived from Frankfurt School, culture is identified as one of the main factors in social controlling and preventing fundamental transformation. In this view, people and users of culture are like “a passive mass that do not have the power of distinction” (Bashiriyeh, 2000: 26).

The Neo-Marxist view considers the role of the government significant in the field of culture because this school believes that obtaining general consensus plays a vital role in making the classes obey the dominating class, and that social controlling happens by achieving this general consensus.

In the conservative view, original culture is derived from traditional community ties and caused by social realities that reflect people’s real experiences, and the government, the media, and merchants play a limited role in it. Mass culture; however, is a “manipulated culture” which is the result of business and their integration. Therefore, government, merchants, and the media as mass cultural products and values play a fundamental role. Conservative view puts much emphasis on the importance of presence of a powerful government in the fields of culture and cultural policymaking so as to prevent vulgarity and chaos in the culture (Khandan, 2012: 2).

According to Islam, government has a special place in the society, and governments are responsible for taking into account issues of the society in all aspects. This view and that the government can interfere completely in social affairs based on belief in “prophetic guidance” have been highlighted by contemporary scholars such as Imam Khomeini, ShahidMortezaMotahari, and the Supreme Leader.

In Imam Khomeini’s intellectual system, in addition to providing public goods and services, the government has a guiding role and is responsible for making cultural policies (Khan Mohammadi, 2011: 16).

With regard to the role of the government in the field of culture and art, Ayatollah Khamenei has a similar view which is a more practical approach. In his speech in a meeting with the members of the

Cultural Revolution Council on January 12, 2004, he said, “Neither can we let culture alone in the society and wait for whatever happens, nor can we make a model out of wrong regulations which are impossible and useless” (Keyhan, December 23, 2003). In another speech, he explicitly stated, “Cultural management means the existence of a thoughtful, resourceful, and skilful system that can make the culture of a country regulatory and lawful. Therefore, cultural management is opposed to cultural chaos, and Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution is the center of this management. Chaos is harmful in all vital sectors including the culture sector of the country; therefore, it is not acceptable that any corrupted good is supplied in a civilized society, and no responsibility or compensation is taken for it, because such a situation is real chaos (Keyhan, January 6, 1999).

### 1.3. Patterns of cultural policymaking

Policymaking has different forms. For example, existence of utopian, realistic, strategic, and developmental patterns leads to emergence of different types of cultural policies. Given the comprehensiveness and cohesion of cultural policies, other types of cultural policymaking can be obtained, which are divided into discrete and continuous cultural policymaking. Discrete policymaking is a special type of cultural policymaking in which the planners of each field make their policies separately and independently; therefore, there is no organic relation and tie among its different sections. In continuous policymaking; however, the planners make policies by taking into account a general pattern and an organic order, the result of which is an integrated network and set of decisions and measures (Akbari, 2002: 23).

Cultural policymaking can be implemented through different approaches. The elitist approach traditionally puts emphasis on national identity by preserving cultural heritage and reviving historical periods. The developmental approach, which is the result of culture and development integration, and the pluralist approach focus on the culture itself (Bahadori, 1997: 136-141).

On the other hand, cultural policies are mostly of two types: Controlling and incentive. Incentive policies use the encouragement and persuasion tool to achieve their goals, and they are mostly made

in order to obtain cultural development. Controlling policies also utilize restricting factors such as lack of access or threat to punishment (Kavand, 2008: 3).

#### **1.4. Patterns of cultural policymaking regarding ethnic and cultural minorities and subcultures**

##### ***1. Cultural unification:***

It follows cultural unification in the society. There are sacred principles and values in this pattern which selects focal and normative point in a geometric design of cultural values and forms an integrated society based on high values. Realization of this pattern; however, is very difficult.

##### ***2. Cultural pluralism:***

It follows the development of subcultures in a parallel way and beside one another. In this pattern, the subcultures available in a society are recognized, and a kind of cultural relativism is dominating, and the society does not pay any attention to any subculture or general principle. Implementing this pattern is highly difficult (Taghilou, 2007: 7).

##### ***3. Unity in diversity***

In addition to putting emphasis on cultural commonalities, it allows for expansion of different subcultures within a common symbolic framework. Due to common human, religious, and national traditions, and since this pattern is characterized by recognizing cultural diversity, it is suitable to societies like Iran (SalehiAmiri, 2011: 30).

#### **1.5. Models of public and cultural policymaking**

Models are abstract understanding and reconstruction of the real world. They are mainly characterized by facilitating our understanding of the reality in question. In another definition, a model is a static or dynamic conceptual framework that can help us explain, predict, prescribe, and reconstruct realities (Alvani&Hashemian, 2008: 4).

Different models have been proposed for making public and cultural policies. The most important of them are:

1. Institutional model: Policymaking is like an institutional outcome,

2. Process model: Policymaking is like a political activity,
3. Group model: Policymaking is like the result of balance and interaction among groups,
4. Intellectual model: Policymaking is like “the maximum social achievement”,
5. Systematic model: Policymaking is like the output of a system,
6. Partial-gradual model: Policymaking is like changes in past activities,
7. Integrated model: Combination of intellectual and partial-gradual models, and
8. Balanced policymaking model (Gholipour, 2010: 185).

So far, numerous models have been proposed for making, implementing, and evaluating public and especially cultural policies. However, this field still lacks a comprehensive model that is relatively able to respond to cultural policymaking requirements. The conceptual model of balanced cultural policymaking is the developed version of balanced scorecard (BSC) assessment model that was proposed by Kaplan and Norton (Alvani&Hashemian, 2008: 6). Following a comprehensive approach, this model is looking for proposing a comprehensive model for organizing all phases of organizational policymaking process. This model intends to provide the best public services, provide and actualize the public opinion and collective welfare. Among important characteristics of this model one can refer to longitudinal approach to the culture section, prospective approach, systematic thinking, observing balance, resolving theoretical and practical gap (subjective and objective), and causal and conceptual explanations (Ibid, 8).

## **2. Cultural policymaking in Iran**

### **2.1. Cultural policymaking in Iran before the Islamic revolution**

Some researchers hold that planning programs in Iran began in 1948, and believe that the period 1941-1978 should be called discrete cultural policymaking period, because cultural planners made

decisions in different cultural fields without considering any identical policy, and the behaved based on a macro pattern that determined the executive plan (SalehiAmiri, 2011: 46).

The first cultural policy text of Iran was prepared in 1968. The culture sector became independent over 1968-1977, and regularly received current and development credits from the government's public budget. Cultural policymaking was carried out in the form of continuous cultural policymaking over those years (Shakibania, 2006: 27).

According to researchers, before the Islamic revolution, culturalpolicymaking and planning in Iran used to be carried out on the basis of 4 values:

- 1) Preserving and promoting ancient culture and art,
- 2) Popularizing culture (aimed at cultural unification according to national culture),
- 3) Developing modern Western culture and art (cultural and artistic modernization), and
- 4) Introducing Iranian culture and art to the world (SalehiAmiri, 2011: 48).

## **2.2. Cultural policymaking in Iran after the Islamic revolution**

The main message, content, and form of the Islamic Republic of Iran are on the basis of a soft power called culture which has frequently been referred to in the works of theorists and interpreters of the revolution such as ShahidMotahari, Imam Khomeini, Ali Shariati, and so on (Azghandi, 1999: 92).

Cultural policymaking is applied in to fields: macro and micro fields. In fact, macro cultural policymaking is used for public development of the society and has a fundamental link with different sections of cultural activities (cultural heritage, education, artistic professional training, etc.) and policies in the fields of education, communication, science and technology, environment and so on. Micro cultural policymaking; however, is directly linked to culture in its special meaning, and is aimed at planning in a field that is related

to sections of culture and relevant subsections such as cultural heritage, culture, and art (Ejlali, 2000: 67).

### **2.2.1. Macro cultural policymaking on the Islamic Republic of Iran**

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution – formerly called Headquarters of the Cultural Revolution – is the main organization or one of the main organizations responsible for macro cultural policymaking. This organizations is responsible for developing the principles of cultural policy in Islamic Republic of Iran and determining goals and direction of educational, training, and scientific programs. In addition to Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, Public Culture Council as one of the subsidiaries of Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution is dealing with macro cultural policymaking.

In a pamphlet entitled “The principles of cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution refers to cultural policy as “the official agreement and consensus among authorities on identifying, developing, and determining the most important and irrevocable priorities in cultural movement”. In other words, it is considered as “a kind of cultural instruction which enlightens the society’s overall movement aimed at making Islamic culture the basis in all individual and social dimensions” (Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, 2013: 3).

It is necessary to pay attention to the following points regarding the cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- Cultural policy is the policy of Islamic revolution. Islamic revolution means that Islamic culture is considered as the basis in all individual and social dimensions of the country. The cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is derived from Islamic worldview and anthropology.

- Dominance of monotheistic vision over all aspects of personal and social life

- Similarity and equality of humans in creating and lack of difference among colors and races

- Imam Khomeini's thoughts, views, and fatwas as the criteria of Mohammad's pure Islam and its distinction from other forms of Islam inside and outside the country dominate over the cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ibid. 3 & 4).

#### **2.2.1.1. Goals of cultural policy of Islamic Republic of Iran**

- Determining and developing guidance principles and necessary priorities in the cultural movement of the country and recognizing it,

- Establishing unity of procedures and cultural harmony among different organizations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and mobilizing the facilities in order to respond to the society's cultural needs,

- Putting emphasis on spiritual goals and values and Islamic culture as a guidance to cultural policymaking,

- Making necessary arrangements and provisions in order to align economic, social, and non-cultural programs with the country's cultural policy, and

- Facilitating and promoting the cultural planning, monitoring, and evaluating programs, along with supporting the diversity and freedom of cultural activities among people and cultural exchange among different governmental and non-governmental sectors in order to promote knowledge, research, and innovation (Ibid. 5).

#### **2.2.1.2. Principles of cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

The principles of cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran that are assessed as the irrevocable legal document monitoring the long-, middle-, and short-term programs include numerous potential capacities regarding internal and international cultural and social necessities in order to achieve the strategic cultural goals of the country (Samadi Randi, 2007: 239).

Among the most important principles are:

- Recognizing and assessing historical and national heritages and traditions,

- Comprehensive understanding of the culture and civilization of Islam and Iran,

- Active relationship with countries and nations and enforcing the link between Muslims and other nations of the world,
- Consolidation of national and religious unity with regard to ethnic and religious characteristics and attempt to remove barriers,
- Expanding participation of the people in cultural affairs with the government's supervision, and
- Promoting, reviving, and introducing original and constructive art (Ibid. 7).

### **2.2.2. Micro cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

The main micro cultural policymaking organization in Iran is Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Article 29, the goals and responsibilities of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, considers this ministry responsible for setting up general cultural, artistic, and cinema policies of the country and proposing them to the Islamic Consultative Assembly.

Iran's Islamic policymaking after the Islamic revolution can be divided into two periods:

- The first period from 1979 to 1989
- The second period from 1990 to the present time (Ejlali, 2000: 69)

#### **2.2.2.1. The first period of cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-1989)**

In the first period, there was no systematic cultural policy, and cultural activities are legitimized based on Imam Khomeini's thoughts, views, and fatwas and principles of Islamic Republic of Iran and the top managers' temporary emphasis.

In this period, particularly from 1979 to 1981, Iran's cultural identity was established on dynamic, constructive, revolutionary religious values, and due to the religious-charismatic leadership of Imam Khomeini, there was an attempt to extend political-cultural vision and awareness to other Islamic countries, and cultural policy was based on expansion-oriented discourse and community-oriented approach. Over 1982 to 2001, war was paid close attention as one of

the main element of Iranians' collective memory. Martyrs and veterans of the sacred defense were known as the cultural myths of the Iranian community and symbols of piety, truth, honesty, faith, endurance, and so forth, and Basiji culture formed based on religion as the factor of public order, national determination, and public participation (Dehshiri, 2007: 174).

Records of activities in fields such as cinema, theatre, and music and boom of some cultural activities such as books and press were the result of unique conditions of that period.

#### **2.2.2.2. The second period of cultural policymaking of Islamic Republic of Iran with an emphasis on the role of culture in five-year development plans**

The second period began in 1989 with the first 5-year plan of economic, social, and cultural development, and the law of the first plan of economic, social, and cultural development can be regarded as the first document which systematically puts emphasis on the importance of culture and cultural policymaking (Ejlali, 2000: 70). Afterwards, it continued in the second plan of development. In fact, in that period, cultural policymaking was carried out systematically and based on planning in the framework of economic-social and cultural development plan and providence.

The first 5-year plan of economic, social, and cultural development was passed in 1989, and it was affected by social circumstances at the time of passing the law and avoidance from governmentalizing cultural affairs. It had different goals such as attempts to publicizing cultural activities, absorbing public participation, changing the government from the agent of cultural affairs to the supervisor and guide of cultural activities.

The third plan of development seems richer than the other two plans with regard to its deep scientific vision to the issue of cultural development, civil management participation in management and supervision of cultural activities, and paying attention to other culture in the national culture and necessity of adopting suitable solutions in order to protect the national culture and identity. This plan considers

distribution of cultural facilities in different regions of the country based on their cultural specifications and people's participation in cultural activities especially civil management participation (municipality and city council) as two important principles. Distribution of cultural facilities is a very important strategic policy given the cultural specifications of the regions, which strengthens national unity and creates cultural interaction among local cultures (Samadi Randi, 2007: 275).

The law of the third 5-year development plan deals with modifying the rights of authors and writers, and includes reports, theses, and software in the title of "work". Moreover, this law pays serious attention to supporting and protecting manifestations of the historical culture and the current culture, and in both cases, it modifies the previous laws and regards paying attention to cultural, social, and geographical specifications of the regions as an important principle in distribution and creation of a balance in providing the regions with cultural and artistic facilities and spaces.

Along with paying attention to the strategic policies of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> plans of development, the fourth plan presented the following goals in the section of cultural development of strategic policies (Ibid, 277).

### **2.2.3. Pattern and model of cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

The analytical study shows that the cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran have had a different form in different conditions. In the early Islamic revolution, there was no systematic cultural policy, and cultural activities and policymaking were regarded in an ideal perspective, and a macro interpretation was made about culture. Compared to other organizations, universities were paid more attention as important cultural and education centers, and Cultural Revolution placed more emphasis on education. Also, enhancing religious and cultural teachings took place through education in universities and schools, and cultural activities were mostly based on Imam Khomeini's thoughts, guidelines, and fatwas and principles of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the managers' temporary emphasis was legitimize in the agendas of the government.

In this regard, the government had a merely executive role, and it was the only entity that was responsible for cultural policymaking (Vahid, 2003: 162).

The second period of cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran was systematic and based on planning in the form of economic-social and cultural plan and a futuristic view. In this period, cultural planning and policymaking in the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution targeted not only universities but also cultural development and reform at all levels. Among the most important resolutions of this order are cultural policy principles, cultural council regulations, confronting cultural invasion, fundamental values, cultural indicators, and cultural council regulations, in which the culture field was paid more attention than before. The role of the government in this period onward changed from mere executive to supervision and support in cultural policymaking.

In 2004, the supreme leader referred to cultural engineering as the most important responsibilities of Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, and cultural policymaking and planning were paid attention in the form of perspective document (Eshrafi, 2014: 6).

The pattern of cultural policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially with regard to subcultures, is unity in cultural diversity, which along with highlighting cultural commonalities allows for diversity of subcultures in a symbolic framework. At the same time, cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran is mainly characterized by recognizing cultural diversity.

#### **2.2.4. The local model of cultural policymaking of Islamic Republic of Iran**

The cultural policymaking model of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a local model which is based on Islamic-Iranian norms, values, and principles. It neither believes in minimum definition like the realistic-positivist approach nor supports the extreme subjectivism of the interpretive-hermeneutical approach, i.e. its maximum definition. It pays a special attention to cultural policymaking based on its belief in a moderation policy and the principle of Islamic-Iranian values. However, it is faced with numerous problems.

Islamic Republic of Iran was established on the basis of Islamic-Iranian culture and values, and its cultural policymaking uses a longitudinal approach to accept a contextual role for culture compared to other economic, political, and juridical sectors.

In the providence issue of cultural policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it should be noted that culture and its identifying components dominate this document the perspective document and its 20-year period from 2005 to 2025, and cultural specifications of Iranian community are explicitly referred to in Clauses 1, 3, 4, and 5 (Islami, Bayat, 2011: 32).

Keeping balance in cultural policies and plans is another specification of cultural policymaking on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Various dimensions, fields, and requirements are taken into account in Iran's policymaking agenda, and there has been an attempt to make a balance between the governmental and private sector and other fields.

Another similarity of the local model of cultural policymaking and the balanced cultural model is attempt to fix the gap between theory and practice. One of the major problem in the cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the second decade of the revolution was generalizing and escaping from details in cultural policies. However, developing 5-year plans and perspective document led to a decrease in generalizing and reaching tangible and practical concepts and resolving the gap between theory and practice.

### 3. Conclusion

Analytical examinations showed that cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran has had different forms in different circumstances. In the early Islamic revolution, there was no systematic cultural policy, and it was based on an ideal view about culture. After the sacred defense and in the second period; however, cultural policymaking was carried out systematically and based on a plan in the form of economic-social development and a realistic and developmental perspective. Cultural policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran is retrieved from Islamic and Iranian culture, and it can be examined in macro and micro fields. The main organization for macro cultural policymaking is the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution. In a pamphlet entitled "the Principles of Cultural Policy

of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, this council announced that Iran’s cultural policy is a revolutionary Islamic policy. It means that Islamic culture has taken as a basis in all individual and social aspects, and monotheistic vision dominates over all aspects and fields. Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is the main organization responsible for cultural policymaking in the field of self-discipline. The role of the government in the cultural field was “executive” from the victory of the Islamic revolution to the end of the imposed war in 1989. After that years, the government’s role changed from being “executive” to “monitoring and supportive” referred to in the third law of development, and it was continued in the fourth law of development. The principles of cultural policymaking passed by the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution has a value and preferential tendency.

The cultural policymaking pattern of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding subcultures is the pattern of cultural diversity, which while putting emphasis on cultural commonalities allows for expansion of subcultures in an allowed symbolic common framework, and the cultural policymaking model is a local model which is more in agreement with the balanced cultural policymaking model.

Among the most important problems of cultural policymaking of Islamic Republic of Iran, one can refer to generalizing and escaping from details and the gap between theory and practice. In the second period of cultural policymaking, a decrease in generalizing and resolving existing problems was considered in the agenda.

### دراسة السياسة الثقافية لجمهورية إيران الإسلامية

الدكتور

عليرضا شيخ محمدي

دكتوراه في العلوم السياسية (السياسة العامة)

دراسة السياسة الثقافية لجمهورية إيران

الإسلامية (الأسس- الأنماط- النموذج)

المدرس المساعد

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ماجستير في العلوم السياسية

جمهورية إيران الإسلامية

جامعة پیام نور- طهران

### المخلص:

بُني أساس جمهورية إيران الإسلامية على أساس قوة ناعمة تحت عنوان الثقافة، وأُسست سياستها الثقافية وفقا للثقافة الإسلامية. تمكننا دراسة السياسة الثقافية لجمهورية

إيران الإسلامية في مجالين: المجال الواسع الأفق والضيق الأفق. يقوم المجلس الأعلى للثورة الثقافية، بتحديد السياسات في المجال الأول في حال تقوم وزارة الثقافة والإرشاد الإسلامي بالمهمة الثانية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة السياسة الثقافية في إيران وفقا للمنهج الوصفي التحليلي. أظهرت نتائج البحث أنه لإيران في ظروف مختلفة إستراتيجيات سياسية ثقافية مختلفة ولم يكن لإيران في بداية الثورة سياسة ثقافية مبرمجة ومحددة حيث كانت تنظر إليها بنظرة مثالية. أما بعد الحرب المفروضة فقد أدرجت السياسة الثقافية في جدول الأعمال ونظر إليها بنظرة أكثر واقعية فتغير دور الحكومة من كونها تنفيذية إلى داعمة وتنظيمية. نمط السياسة الثقافية لجمهورية إيران الإسلامية فيما يتعلق بالثقافات الفرعية نمط الوحدة في التنوع الثقافي ويعتبر نمودجا داخليا يشبه نمودج السياسية المتوازنة من بين نماذج السياسة الثقافية الأخرى.

**الكلمات الرئيسية: الثقافة، السياسات الثقافية، جمهورية إيران الإسلامية، النمودج.**

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