Assessing the Role of Iranian Entrepreneurs in the Interwar Period via *Utaq-i Tijarat*

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Any attempt to identify and comprehend the role of Iran’s entrepreneurs and other economic actors in the country’s state-led program of economic nationalization during the 1930s would seem to be a daunting task, as evidenced by the fact that the topic itself has been elided, considerably glossed over, or subjected to the familiar stereotypes recognizable in much of Iranian historiography to date. More to the point, Iranian merchants, industrialists, and company employees, as well as their Chambers of Commerce, have been noticeably absent. Therefore, this article will approach the topic in two steps: one that will briefly highlight the leadership of Tehran’s Chamber of Commerce—and their involvement in Iran’s economic and political life—before embarking on a more comprehensive discussion of several entrepreneurs involved in trade and industry during this decade. It will be

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argued that the identities of these entrepreneurs did not correspond to those of “conventional” Iranian merchants. Moreover, it will be shown that these identities, whether of entrepreneurs or company employees, were frequently quite complex in terms of ethnicity, gender, or occupational background. Characteristically, women, young entrepreneurs and other professionals, and businesspeople with distinctive ethnic origins were conspicuous in these new developments, particularly in Iran’s industrial and foreign trade sectors. A substantial number of such individuals participated in the 1936 Exposition of Iranian Products, which was held in Tehran, and were featured in Utaq-i Tijarat (Iran’s Chambers of Commerce journal).

Based on the earlier observations of British officer Sir Arnold Wilson, Ahmad Minai asserted—about twenty-five years later—that Iran’s Foreign Trade Monopoly Law of 1931 had forced small-scale merchants in provincial cities to abandon their trade or else relocate to Tehran. According to Minai, these merchants faced bureaucratic obstacles generated by increasing government centralization and regulations, including export licenses. Echoing Wilson’s account, he concluded that “most of the cities that heretofore had been prosperous centers of business lost their commercial importance.” On the other hand, a Soviet scholar of the Stalin era reached a divergent conclusion less than a decade after Wilson. According to Gel’bras, Iran’s small- and medium-scale merchants were able to trade directly with the USSR—thereby marginalizing brokers and large buyers—thanks to the Iran-Soviet trade agreement of October 1, 1927. Akin to Minai’s scholarship, Julian Bharier’s account of the Iranian economy during the 1930s, published in 1971, relies...
on Simmons’s 1935 report for the British government’s Department of Overseas Trade. Drawing his conclusions from this report, Bharier supposes that Iranian merchants began to establish private industries after encountering problems with their import-export activities, as opposed to the enticement of “tax holidays and other incentives.” Yet there was a counter-argument to this assertion, where Minai deemed the Iranian government’s role in mobilizing nearly 2 billion rials in public and private capital towards the establishment of 1,873 corporations to be “most successful,” having been achieved “in a period of no more than a decade up to... March 21, 1941.” In effect, these statistics—obtained from Iran’s Bank-e Melli (National Bank)—were an indication that Iranian merchants and other entrepreneurs might have been induced by the lucrative potential of industry and trade, as well as state support. Concurrent with Minai’s conclusions, Gholam Reza Moghadam attributed the Iranian government’s primary role in industrialization to the “absence of a vigourous middle class.”

A more recent perspective is offered by Homa Katouzian, one which elucidates the political role of Iranian merchants and, most notably, their sizable representation in the First Majlis (Parliament), 1906–8. In particular, he points out that constitutional sanctions of extant land ownership served the interests of the relatively big merchants, whose wealth had been enhanced in many cases through international trade. Furthermore, this legal reform “potentially served the interests of the aspiring merchants who wished to do the same.” Conversely, Katouzian asserts that the same merchant class opposed Reza Shah’s rise to power, and the centralizing economic policies of the 1930s—especially the state monopoly on trade in the main agricultural products, as well as international and even some domestic trade. Meanwhile, the 1930s witnessed a changing of the guard among prominent Iranian merchants, as one was succeeded by another in Tehran’s...

\(^8\) Minai, *Economic Development of Iran*, 212.
\(^11\) Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 297. According to this portrayal of the Iranian merchant class, their economic and political interests largely overlap with those of the landlords, who were mainly representative of political conservatism.
Chamber of Commerce. Haji Hussein Aqa Mahdavi (Amin al-Zarb) served as President of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce until his demise at the end of 1932. In addition to being an active participant in the Constitutional Revolution and a founding member of the Tehran Chamber, Mahdavi was a member of the Majlis during the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Sessions.\textsuperscript{12} His eventual successor, Mirza Abdul-Hussein Nikpour, became President of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce in April 1934 (30 Farvardin 1313).\textsuperscript{13} Although his career spanned a large (and eventful) part of the twentieth century, Nikpour was representative of the traditional Iranian bazaar and its socio-cultural values. Aside from his career in commerce, Mirza Abdul-Hussein was a regular attendee of the Majlis and maintained a very close working relationship with the Iranian government. Concurrently, another member of the Tehran Chamber’s board of directors, Mirza Ali Khan Vakili, held a position in the Ministry of Finance. Besides Iran’s capital, additional Chambers of Commerce were increasingly dispersed throughout the country, including branches in Mashhad, Gorgan, Babol, Bandar-e Pahlavi, Rasht, Astara, Ardabil, Khoy, Tabriz, Qazvin, Hamedan, Arak, Kermanshah, Kashan, Isfahan, Yazd, Ahvaz, Khorramshahr, Bushehr, Bandar Abbas, Shiraz, Kurdistan, Kerman, and Zahedan.\textsuperscript{14}

Apart from these dynamic and influential Iranian merchants, who have remained an understudied phenomenon in Western historiography, there were additional economic actors serving to propel the proliferation of domestic factories and companies during the 1930s. It is evident that many of these latter individuals could be defined by their variegated identities, whether in terms of ethnicity, gender, region, or other categories. Several of these entrepreneurs had display booths at the Exposition of Iranian Products held in Tehran on 22 Farvardin 1315 (April 11, 1936).\textsuperscript{15} Contrary

\textsuperscript{14} Torabi Farsani, \textit{Az majlis va kalay-i tujar ta utaq-i iran}, 302–428. See also “Tashkilat-i ja-did-i utaqha-yi tijarat-i iran,” \textit{Utaq-i Tijarat}, 118 (Shahrivar 1314/September 1935), 118. There was a proliferation of these Chambers during the 1930s, including an Iran-German Chamber.
\textsuperscript{15} Torabi Farsani, \textit{Az majlis va kalay-i tujar ta utaq-i iran}, 290. The 1936 Exposition had 112 booths.
to Wilson’s portrayal of provincial cities in Iran, one of the largest industrial enterprises in attendance was the Vatan factory of Isfahan, which was represented by one of its owners (the Kazeruni Brothers), Muhammad Jafar Kazeruni. According to Kazeruni, Vatan’s annual production was 650,000 meters of fabric. The total number of machines had risen from 12 to 85, and the factory was planning to expand this number to 112—amounting to a 30 percent increase. After praising Vatan’s textiles as “first-class examples,” Reza Shah inquired about army fabrics; Kazeruni replied that greatcoats would be produced by Vatan in the near future. In fact, uniforms for the police and gendarmerie were already being manufactured by a textile factory in Qazvin. It was established by Haj Rahim Aqa Qazvini, and its investment in 1315 (1936) amounted to 6 million rials. Qazvini’s factory manufactured woolen yarns up to number 24—and in the current year, number 32—as well as woolen fabrics and special blends for men’s and women’s clothing, and modern-styled blankets in a wide range of colors. Between 450 and 1800 kilos of textiles were produced per day, which amounted to an annual output of 270,000 meters of fabric. In addition to the factory’s spinning and weaving facilities, there was an iron-casting section and an electricity station. Its machinery operated with a horsepower of 400. Utaq-i Tijarat boasted that Qazvini’s enterprise only had one German machinist, who tended to its equipment, while the other workers were all Iranians. Its daily workforce was quite substantial: between 700 and 1000 workers.

A representative from the factory’s management, Gholamali Pashazadeh, who had been in the position for approximately one year, was the exhibition booth’s representative.

Along with Qazvini’s factory, two other textile enterprises received second-degree certification. The Hartunian factory of Mashhad was established in

18“Kala-yi iran: ghurfahha-yi namayishgah va tafsil-i har yak,” Utaq-i Tijarat, 134 (Urdibi hisht 1315/May 1936), 18.
19“Qanun-imliyat bar shirkatha va tijarat va ghireh: matn-i qanun-i maliyat bar shirkatha va tijarat va ghirih kih dar jalasih-yi asr-i sihshanbah 12 farvardin bih tasvib-i majlis risidih ast zila-yi daraj mikonad,” Utaq-i Tijarat, 6 (Farvardin 1309/April 1930), 17. For taxation purposes, a company with annual sales of 1,000–4,000 tomans was classified in the second-degree category.
1312 (1933) with machinery purchased from Germany. With this machinery, featuring 500 spindles and 50-horsepower engines, 140 to 300 kilos of yarn were prepared every two hours. The factory manufactured third- to eighth-grade yarns; besides its woolen yarns being used in carpet making, some of its output was exported overseas. It also produced winter, spring, and summer fabrics for various types of clothing. The Hartunian factory employed 30 adult workers on a daily basis, and its owner was Aqa-yi Qazizadeh. The exhibition booth’s representative was Hussein Taloui. The other textile enterprise with second-degree certification was a tricot company, whose headquarters were located on Firuzgar Street in Tehran, opposite the French Embassy. It was founded in 1311 (1932) with an investment of 120,000 rials, although this amount had more than doubled subsequently, reaching 250,000 rials at the time of the Exposition. Since its first year of establishment, the tricot factory’s production had increased sixfold, and the annual value of its products totalled between 400,000 and 500,000 rials. Nejatollah Maradian was the company’s manager, and 15 other workers were also employed. The tricot factory had eight different kinds of machines that could produce a multitude of various garment types, including women’s blouses styled in the latest fashion, as well as clothing for children and babies. The owner of a Yazd necktie factory, Muhammad Ali Tahzib, was a young entrepreneur attending the Exposition. Tahzib’s factory, which was established in 1307 (1928), produced neckties, neckerchiefs, and silk scarves in a wide array of colors. It had the capacity to produce 200,000 ties, and its annual output was valued at about 100,000 rials. The factory had eight different weaving machines, which were old-fashioned, wooden types. More than 25 workers, both men and women, were employed at the Yazd factory, and its representative in Tehran was the Reypour Shop on Lalehzar Street. Some of the ties were available for purchase at the exhibition, at a cost of five rials each.

20Mojtaba Khalifeh and Ali Najafzadeh, “Pazhuhishi darbarah-yi alal va avamal-i moasser bar shikl giri-yi utaq-i tijarat mash-had dar avayah-yi dowrah-yi Pahlavi,” in Hamayish-i rishihha-yi roshd-i shakhihha-yi shukufayi: tehran-25 dai mah 1389 (Tehran: Andika, 1390), 243. After the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Hartunian merchants were among those who transferred their holdings to Mashhad from Russia and Ashgabat. These merchants had a positive impact on Mashhad’s trade.
22“Kala-yi iran: ghurfahha-yi namayishgah va tafsil-i har yak,” Utaq-i Tijarat, 133 (Urdibi-hisht 1315/April 1936), 19.
Textile and leather industries located in northern Iran, specifically Azerbaijan province, were likewise represented at the Tehran Exposition. For instance, in 1305 (1926), the Wool-Spinning Jurabchi (Sockmaker) Brothers was established in Tabriz. Its wool, obtained from nearby places such as Baku, Khoy, and Khorasan, was twisted into yarns numbered from 5 to 16. This factory operated 8 hours per day, producing 60 kilos of yarn for textile weaving, in addition to another 30 kilos for carpet weaving. The Jurabchi factory’s initial investment was worth 600,000 rials. Although the entire building of the factory caught fire in 1312 (1933), it was rebuilt the following year by the owner, Haji Reza Jurabchi. As a result, new machines that could produce various kinds of wool fabrics were imported. All of the machines in this factory were 65 horsepower. The Sockmaker Brothers’ factory employed 25 workers on a daily basis. While the Omid-i Tabriz leather factory had a similar number of workers—18 were employed daily—they were all under the direction of Doctor Simanek O. F. Sheitolsen, a German leather expert. Founded by Alkasen Mosasian in 1310 (1931), Omid-i Tabriz manufactured leather in a variety of colors for saddlery, belts, gloves, hats, footwear, and furniture. This factory had 26 machines, all of which had an approximate horsepower of 190. The average value of production per year was 4 million rials. Its products were exported abroad and sold domestically, with Iran’s major cities—especially Tehran, Tabriz, Rasht, Zanjan, Qazvin, Isfahan, Mashhad, Kermanshah, Hamedan, and Shiraz—being among the largest consumers of its products. Ezram Hakak, who resided in Tehran, was the representative of this factory in Iran. Both of the aforementioned Tabriz enterprises had second-degree certification.

The Sahakian Brothers of Tabriz Company also received two second-degree certifications: one for soap production and the other for flour milling. The three Sahakian brothers—Jabrail, Asrail, and Kian Mikhail—formed a partnership. Their agent in Tehran was Mehran Petrosian of the Oriental Shop, on Istanbul Street. Founded in 1308 (1929), their vegetable oil factory was the first of its kind in Tabriz. Its products included cottonseed oil, sunflower seed oil, and olive oil. The factory produced 500 tons of

vegetable oil annually, which was sold in Iran and abroad. Its exports were shipped to foreign markets via the Hamburg route. Subsequently, the Sahakian Brothers’ flour mill was established in 1309 (1930). Its output was approximately 14,000 tons of flour per year, which supplied domestic markets. Evidently not satisfied with these two enterprises, the Sahakian Brothers established a soap-manufacturing enterprise and a wool-spinning factory in 1313 (1934). The output of the first amounted to 1,200,000 bars of soap annually. Perfumed soap, laundry soap, hand soap, bath soap, baby soap, and shaving soap were among the 25 different types produced, totalling 300 dozen bars per day. The spinning factory’s initial investment was greater than 1,500,000 rials, and its yearly output was about 180 tons of spun wool. With its new machinery, more than 100 workers were employed on a daily basis at the Sahakian Brothers’ wool-spinning enterprise, although twice this number could be accommodated.

Much like the Sahakian Brothers of Tabriz Company, Tamiz Oil Khorasan was founded by a partnership between Esmaael Aqali Kahneman—one of Khorasan’s famous and reputable merchants—and Nurallah Aqajani. The Tamiz Oil Khorasan Company manufactured soaps for washing clothes and edible vegetable oils, which were extracted from cotton, poppy, and sesame seeds, as well as turnips, almonds, and castor beans. Both its vegetable oils and perfumed laundry detergents were becoming well-known and widely used throughout Iran. It was established with an investment of 350,000 rials in 1312 (1933), and its annual production was approximately 120,000 kilos of vegetable oil. New factory equipment (presumably of domestic origin, since it was dubbed “national machinery”) had been bought for their enterprise. Tamiz Oil’s representative in Tehran was N. I. Shaban. Hailing from the same region was the Compote Producing Establishment of Khorasan, which was located in Mashhad. Its founder was Haji Abdulhussein Tehrani, who started the factory in 1308 (1929) with an investment of 300,000 rials. His factory produced between 150,000 and 200,000 cans of assorted compotes per year, which were sold domestically and exported to countries such as

India and Iraq. The value of the Khorasan Establishment’s annual sales was approximately 500,000 rials, and it employed 30 workers on a daily basis. The factory’s processing machinery, which was imported from Germany, produced compotes from peaches, nectarines, apricots, apples, pears, yellow plums, and other fruits grown in the orchards of Tehrani’s own estate. The Compote Producing Establishment of Khorasan received second-degree certification.

Unlike the enterprises mentioned thus far, the headquarters of the Brothers Arzmanian Company was established in Hamburg, with branches in Tehran, Tabriz, and Qazvin. Roman Arzmanian was the head of the Tehran branch. Its commodities included pistachio nuts, almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, prunes, and raisins. The company had been founded three years before with an investment of 1 million rials, which had increased considerably through its export business. Its goods were exported via trade routes through Julfa, Bandar-e Pahlavi, and Khorasan. In 1314 (1935), its exports amounted to more than 1,530 tons—mainly green raisins and apricots—with a value greater than 5 million rials. Presumably, Brothers Arzmanian received first-degree certification in acknowledgement of its financial success in foreign trade. Conversely, a smaller enterprise, the Arazi Huzeh Shahrud Dried Fruit and Nut Company received third-degree certification. It traded in similar commodities, such as almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, raisins, prunes, and cumin. Founded in Azar 1314 (1935) with an investment of 300,000 rials, its exports were worth about 100,000 rials. Arazi Huzeh Shahrud’s representative in Tehran was Aqa-yi Qazi Zadeh. Halfway between these two dried fruit and nut companies in terms of its rating, Mina Confectionery Factory received second-degree certification. Magardich Arakelian established his enterprise in 1310 (1931) with an investment of 150,000 rials. Having immigrated to Tehran five years before, Arakelian had worked in the confectionery sector for a total of twenty-five years. His previous company’s operations, which had been exhibited in 1912, were subsequently brought to Tehran. Located on Tehran’s Naderi Street, Mina employed 15 workers daily and produced 150 kilograms of various sweets. Besides chocolate,
his factory manufactured large and small packages of moist sweets, candy, confections with dried fruit and nuts, and varieties of unsweetened, fruit, and milk confitures. Arakelian’s most recent products were widely known and consumed throughout Iran, and his chocolate decorations attracted favorable attention at the Exposition.

Two other companies also received second-degree certification. One of these enterprises was the Golchini Cigarette Company, established in Tehran in 1914–15. Its founder was Jafar Golchini. First-grade tobacco from Gilan, Mazandaran, Gorgan, and Rezayi was used in its products. The Golchini factory produced about 300,000 cigarettes and 500 leaf cigars per day. On a daily basis, its rate of sales was approximately 6,000 rials, and it employed from 25 to 30 workers. Its products were sold in domestic and foreign markets. Foreigners residing in Tehran were among the main consumers of its cigarettes. Another enterprise was Yahshi Aryan’s Maykadeh Company, which produced large and small bottles of beverages from its fresh and aged barrels of liquor. Maykadeh’s products included araq, wines, and assorted fruit liquors made from oranges, quinces, sour cherries, and lemons, as well as grape-flavored kvass, a fermented beverage with a negligible alcohol content. In 1310 (1931), the Aryan brothers established their factory in Qazvin, along with new orchards and vineyards that supplied fruit for beverage production. The company was organized under the name Maykadeh—with an investment of 1 million rials—in 1313 (1934). One year later, in Urdibihisht 1314 (April–May 1935), the Aryan brothers concluded an agreement with the Department of Finance to sell a portion of their beverages in Gilan, Mazandaran, and Qazvin as a five-year monopoly. At this time, Maykadeh’s payments amounted to 100,000 rials, and its total investment and annual production were valued at about 2 million rials each. At the end of the same year, final construction of the necessary buildings was completed and a new system of beverage machinery was installed. Employing 25 workers on a daily basis, the factory was able to produce 1

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33“Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 136, 18. The journal also mentions a brewery established in 1314 (1935), which annually produced a million bottles of “supremely excellent” beer. Presumably, it was located in Tehran. However, no information concerning its owners is provided. See “Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 134, 14.
million bottles of wine and 2 million bottles of liquor annually. Although much of its wine was exported abroad, Maykadeh had sold 200,000 bottles in domestic markets throughout the previous year. Besides the expansion of the company’s export markets, further specialization in wines and other beverages was planned, including a section for distilling 96-proof grain alcohol. Raisins and grapes were used in the making of Iranian araq, which had received certification from chemistry experts. The purest forms of alcohol had medicinal and cosmetic applications, for example, in perfumery. Some of the beverages that appeared in 1932–33 had purported medicinal uses and were featured at the Tehran Exposition.

The owner of a carpet and rug company, Haj Seyed Mehdi Jalili Farshji, represented the handicrafts sector at the 1936 Exposition and his company had received second-degree certification. Farshji’s carpets were woven from wool, silk, and pile fibres, and came from various locations in Iran, such as Kashan, Khorasan, Tehran, Kerman, Isfahan, and Arak. His company, which had been established two years before, exported Iranian carpets to London, Paris, Beirut, and Baghdad. Furthermore, Farshji had attended trade fairs in Brussels and Bari during the previous year. With sales amounting to 3 million rials, he had concluded an exclusive contract for the sale of his merchandize. Kerman’s carpets and rugs, embroidered cotton textiles, and “chic pork-pie hats” were also featured at the Tehran Exposition. In addition, local stone obtained from Kerman’s environs was used to craft a variety of decorative objects on display, such as ashtrays. This enterprise received second-degree certification, and its representative at the Exposition, Hassan Qazvini, was a member of the Majlis. These products were sold in Iranian markets and abroad. Meanwhile, another booth displayed pure silk, artificial silk, and silks from various parts of Iran, including Kashan, Gilan, Khorasan, and Mazandaran. Its representative was Nosratollah Ghaffari, who was an agricultural engineer and one of the technical experts working for the silk-making enterprise, Silkworms of Iran Company. It was established in Tehran with an investment of 1,500,000 rials—under the administration

34“Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 136, 18.
35“Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 134, 15.
36“Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 136, 18.
37“Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 136, 19.
of the Bank of Agriculture and Industry—and its branches were located in Gilan, Khorasan, Yazd, and Mazandaran. In 1315 (1936), 2,500,000 kilos of cocoons were obtained from 140,054 boxes of imported silkworm eggs, each containing 25. The result was a nearly 40 percent increase in yield compared with the previous year. The improvement and development of the silkworm enterprise involved four Iranian technical experts, while other work was carried out by 50 Iranian women.

An Iranian woman, Gol Bangiz, also established an institute for glasswork techniques in 1311 (1932), specializing in opaque and colored glass, as well as the first glass factory and retail outlets. Eight workers were employed at Bangiz’s establishment, which produced mirrors, street lights, globe lights, tube lighting, and small bottles, including those for medicine. While her establishment received third-degree certification, the Tehran Glassworks factory succeeded in obtaining second-degree certification. Its owner, Muhammad Ali Gilanpour, established the factory in Shahrivar 1314 (August–September 1935) with an investment of 150,000 rials. Gilanpour’s factory was located on Khani Abad Street and produced every type of glassware, including sugar bowls; candy, nut, and fruit dishes; globe lights; medicine bottles; telephone mouthpieces; funnels; lantern globes; inkwells; droppers; and various other kinds of bottles and glassware. The Tehran factory produced more than 600,000 pieces of glassware per year, employing about 40 workers and specialists on a daily basis. Gilanpour’s products were bought by pharmacies and the General Department of Telephones, and were about to be exported in 1315 (1936). Like the aforementioned factory, Batul Khanum Mohajer-Qarahbaghi received second-degree certification in 1936. Moreover, her artificial flowers were on display at the 1313 (1934) Exposition. Originally, Mohajer-Qarahbaghi had referred to the Department of General Trade with a request to import artificial flowers, particularly orange blossoms, which were prohibited. She subsequently established her own company for the production of artificial flowers, which were said to be comparable to their imported counterparts and more suited to Iranian needs.

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39“Kala-yi iran,” *Utaq-i Tijarat*, no. 136, 20. In 1314 (1935), 121,251 boxes had resulted in 1,800,000 kilos of cocoons.

40“Kala-yi iran,” *Utaq-i Tijarat*, no. 133, 19.


42“Kala-yi iran,” *Utaq-i Tijarat*, no. 133, 17.

tastes. Her establishment was equipped with special machinery imported from abroad that was used to construct the artificial flowers from domestic fabric. Some of these flowers, such as imitation Damask roses, orange and cherry blossoms, pansies, nasturtiums, and narcissus, were used to decorate women’s dresses and hats.\textsuperscript{44}

As might be expected, a number of Tehran-based enterprises were represented at the 1936 Exposition. A steel and iron tool factory, founded on Sepah Street some years before, manufactured industrial supplies, automobile spare parts, gas and steam machine equipment, and water pipes and pumps.\textsuperscript{45} However, its name and owners were not listed in Utaq-i Tijarat. On the other hand, it mentioned that Abdallah Kamal had made one of the Saba Factory’s knitting machines.\textsuperscript{46} Saba produced socks and fabrics. Another mechanical factory was located on Ferdowsi Street. It produced cotton-cleaning apparatuses with multiple saws and a steam-operated motor. During the past two years, 30 of these cotton-cleaning machines had been sold to agricultural organizations. Some of these machines were purchased by landlords in agricultural cities, such as Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz, Qazvin, and Shahrd. Its manager was Mikhail Kasparian, and it received second-degree certification. A larger group of tile, firebrick, and glassware enterprises received first-degree certification. Owned by Hassan Ali Afsari, the first factory was established in 1311 (1932) with an initial investment of 100,000 rials.\textsuperscript{47} Its annual output was more than 100,000 large and small tiles, and it employed 12 workers on a daily basis. In 1312 (1933), it started to manufacture firebricks that were used inside steam locomotives and lump sugar factories, among other places. Consequently, Afsari was granted a 20-year concession for a patent monopoly on this product, and imports were prohibited. Prior to the establishment of Afsari’s domestic production facilities, imported firebricks had been extremely expensive. The production of these bricks, approximately 100,000 per year, employed 30 workers on a daily basis. The investment in this factory was 210,000 rials. Soon afterwards, his glassware factory was established in 1313 (1934) with an investment of 100,000 rials. It employed 25 Iranian

\textsuperscript{44}“Kala-yi iran,” \textit{Utaq-i Tijarat}, no. 134, 15.
\textsuperscript{45}“Kala-yi iran,” \textit{Utaq-i Tijarat}, no. 134, 14.
\textsuperscript{46}“Ayin-i gashayish-i namayishgah-yi kala-yi iran,” \textit{Utaq-i Tijarat}, 10.
\textsuperscript{47}“Kala-yi iran,” \textit{Utaq-i Tijarat}, no. 134, 17.
workers on a daily basis, including specialists. Technicians worked at all three of Afsari’s factories.

Another factory located in Tehran, Vatan Bed Manufacturing, also received first-degree certification. It produced a variety of beds, including deluxe models and those with goose-feather mattresses and coil springs. Amir Sharafi established his bed factory in 1310 (1931). While in the Ministry of Public Works, Sharafi apparently got the idea of establishing this factory with an assistant, Monsieur Engineer Charneski. Thereupon, he resigned from his job, and the opportunity to establish his factory with Russian émigré specialists gradually developed. Darvazeh Dowlat was chosen as the location for the factory’s establishment, from which its products were delivered to the local bazaars. The blast furnace of this factory produced cast iron, copper, brass, zinc, aluminum, and all types of metalwares. In addition, Sharafi’s factory accepted purchase orders from government factories for the utilization of its blast furnace. This furnace was the invention of Engineer Qobad Naqizadeh, and it was installed in the factory in 1313 (1934). According to Utaq-i Tijarat, it was something of a technical innovation—capable of burning with three mans of coal for more than 18 hours without stoking. For five years the factory provided—free of charge—all manner of repairs to its beds. Vatan employed 60 workers, producing 25 beds and three heating devices per day. These products were sold to government institutions and provincial and state guest houses. The factory’s mechanical equipment included 10 machines, 35 manual machines, and three motors with 18 horsepower each. The combined investment of the Vatan factory and firm was 600,000 rials, and according to the official balance, its transactions amounted to a value of 10,060,000 rials in 1314 (1935).

In a consideration of the 1936 Exposition’s significance, there are several points worth mentioning. First, it is evident that Tehran was the primary center of industry and commerce. However, there was significant economic expansion in other major cities, such as Isfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Qazvin. Second, family enterprises involving brothers, such as the Kazerunis, Sahakians, Arzmanians,

48“Kala-yi iran,” Utaq-i Tijarat, no. 136, 15.
49The man was a unit of measurement for weight in Iran. However, its weight was variable according to the region and time period. One unit might have been as much as 53 kilograms.
and Aryans were obviously a common feature of the Iranian economic landscape. Yet there were also partnerships between unrelated individuals in the case of Tamiz Oil Khorasan and Vatan Bed Manufacturing. Furthermore, at least one technical specialist was found at most of these factories. While Qazvini’s factory and Omid-i Tabriz employed foreign experts, who both happened to be Germans, Silkworms of Iran Company and Afsari’s factories had Iranian engineers and technicians. In fact, other Iranians were designing and inventing industrial equipment, for example, Abdallah Kamal’s knitting machine for Saba Factory and Engineer Qobad Naqizadeh’s blast furnace for Sharafi’s factory. Likewise, Bangiz was not only a pioneering entrepreneur in her own right by founding the first glass factory and retail outlets, but she also promoted technical specialization with her institute for glasswork techniques. Another common feature among many of these enterprises was their success at obtaining government monopolies and other contracts, as with Qazvini’s police and gendarmerie uniforms, the Aryan Brothers’ beverages, Gilanpour’s glasswares, Afsari’s firebricks, and Sharafi’s beds and heating devices—as well as the procurement of his factory’s blast furnace. In effect, products as dissimilar as firebricks and artificial flowers were indicative of the Iranian government’s efforts to create a comprehensive national industry based on the domestic manufacture of both essential and superfluous goods, with the aim of reducing the country’s dependency on imports.

Besides industry, Iranian entrepreneurs were engaged in foreign trade in full force during this period. Their multifarious means and ways of exporting products merit certain comparisons. As previously noted, Mosasian’s leather goods, Aryan’s wines, Kerman’s handicrafts, and, very likely, some of Gilanpour’s glasswares were available in foreign markets. In particular, Tehrani’s compotes found buyers in neighboring countries: directly westward across the border, in Iraq, and eastwards—along the Persian Gulf trade route—to India. Conversely, the Hamburg route was used to convey

50Minai, *Economic Development of Iran*, 212. From Minai’s perspective, the opposite was true: “In a country so much wedded to individualism, and in spite of strong cultural barriers to associations and team work . . . it was not by any means an easy task to form corporations.”

51Torabi Farsani, *Az majlis va kalay-i tujar ta utaq-i iran*, 24. Although a trade route to India is not mentioned, a land route between Mashhad and Karachi and another from the Persian Gulf via Baghdad to Iran are listed.
the Sahakian Brothers’ vegetable oil, presumably to purchasers throughout Europe. Both of the dried fruit and nut companies already mentioned derived sizable profits, proportionally, from the export of their commodities. While not much more is known about the status of Arazi Huzeh Shahrud’s trade abroad, foreign markets were undoubtedly of such significance to Brothers Arzmanian that its headquarters were located in Hamburg. Moreover, the utilization of trade routes by way of Julfa, Bandar-e Pahlavi, and Khorasan was a clear indication that these goods passed through Soviet territory. Of all of these enterprises, Farshji’s business was the most geographically dispersed, covering a total of four major Middle Eastern and northern European capitals. The carpet dealer would also seem to have been aiming to expand his markets by displaying his wares elsewhere within Europe, in Belgium and Italy. Although there is no mention of whether Golchini shipped his cigarettes abroad, it appears that enough foreign consumers could easily be found in Tehran.

Taking into account a number of factors, such as the amount and type of machinery and other equipment, number of employees, and annual output and profit, it is reasonable to assert that the scale of production among the factories under discussion varied to an appreciable extent. In view of the Vatan Factory’s ability to produce 650,000 meters of fabric per year, the considerable size of Qazvini’s daily workforce (700–1000 people) as well as its iron-casting and electricity facilities, the average value of Omid-i Tabriz’s production per year (4 million rials), Maykadeh’s total investment and annual production (approximately 2 million rials each), and the annual transactions of Vatan Bed Manufacturing in 1314 (worth 10,060,000 rials), it is obvious that these firms were among the foremost enterprises in terms of size. That said, many of the others were fairly large, especially by the standards of their counterparts throughout the Middle East at the time. For example, the combined production facilities of the Sahakian Brothers, and likewise those of Afsari, were major enterprises in their own

52“Kala-yi iran,” *Utaq-i Tijarat*, no. 133, 18.
right. On the other hand, some of the other establishments could best be termed “artisanal” enterprises. This was the case with Tahzib’s factory, which had old-fashioned, wooden weaving machines. Given the type of products and smaller number of workers (i.e., 15 or less), the production facilities for Arakelian’s confectionery goods, Bangiz’s opaque and colored glassware, and Mohajer-Qarahbaghi’s fabric flowers would also appear to fit within this category. Another distinction between these enterprises may be made according to the types of goods being produced. Typically, Iranian commodities, including nonperishable foodstuffs (e.g., nuts, dried and canned fruits, vegetable oils, and wines) and handicrafts—principally carpets—were destined for export. Conversely, tricot clothing, ties, porkpie hats, soap for personal use and laundry, decorative glass dishes, confections, infrastructural and automotive supplies, lighting, and beds were finding an increasing number of domestic consumers within Iran. Further along this line, it would seem logical to conclude that Mohajer-Qarahbaghi’s stated design aesthetic (i.e., “suited to Iranian tastes”) was true for other consumer goods being produced, such as clothing and glassware.

As outlined at the beginning of this article, the identities of these individuals invite consideration. Fortunately, Utaq-i Tijarat contains many of their portraits, despite their biographical information remaining incomplete at this time. A good number appeared to be within the age range of 30–50 years. Judging by the appearance and personal details of Jabrail Sahakian, Jurabchi, Arakelian, Farshji, and Afsari, they were all seasoned businessmen with a fair amount of entrepreneurial experience in their respective sectors. However, several of the participants in the 1936 Exposition did not resemble these more conventional types of entrepreneurs, being much younger or women—most notably, Bangiz, Mohajer-Qarahbaghi, Tahzib, Gilanpour, Sharafi, and the agricultural engineer, Ghaffari. This said, Iranian merchants could also begin their careers very early in life, as in Nikpour’s particular case, out of family necessity.54 At least two of these individuals—Ghaffari

54Abbas Milani, Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), vol. 2, 657-58. Upon his father’s death, Nikpour was obliged to begin his career in order to support his family. Despite being the eldest son, he was only 14 years old.
and, presumably, Bangiz—possessed a formal technical education. As for Sharafi, it is unclear whether he had been an employee of the Ministry of Public Works (or there for some other purpose) before establishing his bed factory. While it is apparent that at least a few women entrepreneurs as well as a greater number of female workers were participating directly in Iran’s public economy at this time, the question of ethnic identities is rather more complex. At least a few guesses may be made. Names such as Arakelian, Mosasian, Kasparian, and Arzmanian were indicative of Armenian origins. Arakelian had immigrated to Tehran from elsewhere, and quite possibly, from the Caucuses. In the case of Mohajer-Qarahbaghi, part of her name literally meant “one who has come from another place.” Given the diversity of participants at the 1936 Exposition in Tehran, any assumption that a “quintessential” Iranian entrepreneur dominated national economic life at this time is untenable.

Having presented evidence of the wider participation in Iran’s state-led program of economic nationalization during the 1930s, it is worth returning to the question of the Iranian merchant’s relationship to these same developments. In 1934, an Utaq-i Tijarat article entitled “Niru-yi sanati,” (“The Power of Industry”) was proud to announce that “within only five years (1310–1314) because of the state economic policy, imposition of rules, beneficial advice, encouragement of merchants, and domestic financiers… we have 178 factories.”

About four years later (in December 1938), Nikpour’s speech at a spinning factory on the outskirts of Qom was even more exhortative in its tenor. Besides outlining the Qom factory’s continual investment, he asserted that the “economic progress and industrial advancement of the country... is the duty of all residents… especially the merchant class.”

These statements indicate that Iran’s Chambers of Commerce—whose membership was comprised of merchants throughout the country—did not oppose the state economic reforms of the 1930s. Furthermore, rather than being marginalized by the Iranian government or

refusing to participate in its economic modernization drive, Nikpour and Utaq-i Tijarat implied that a significant number of Iranian merchants had assumed the mantle of their country’s economic expansion with a sense of responsibility, enthusiasm, and entitlement. Admittedly, merchants with greater economic resources and political connections were poised to benefit the most. However, Wilson’s assertion that the monopoly system “favoured the exploitation of the masses by rich merchants” would suggest that either his perspective was a limited one or else he was prone to exaggeration.\textsuperscript{57} On the contrary, the thematic detours taken in this article have intended to demonstrate that the word merchant itself is a complex categorical term. In the case of Iran, was a merchant largely defined by commercial operations in the bazaar (e.g., Nikpour)—or anyone involved in trade (e.g., Brothers Arzmanian, Farshji, and Bangiz)? Hence, the challenge of addressing these complexities invites future research concerning the Iranian commercial classes of this period.

\textsuperscript{57}Although Wilson deployed a Marxist trope in this case, it should be remembered that he was a long-time official of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), which was renamed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1935.


Assessing the Role of Iranian Entrepreneurs in the Interwar Period via *Utaq-i Tijarat*


