



Analysis of the Relationship between Power Distance and Justice in the Political Practice of Imam al-Rida: A Novel Reading Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory*

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Submitted: 2025.04.03 | Accepted: 2025.08.18

Abstract

The “power distance,” as a key index for analyzing rulers’ political conduct and the extent to which inequality in power distribution is accepted, serves as an effective tool for assessing the status of justice in historical societies. Using a descriptive–analytical method, this study examines the manifestation of this concept in the conduct of Imam al-Rida (PBUH) during his period as crown prince (*Wilayat al’ahd*). The findings indicate that, despite his exceptional political position, the Imam offered a novel model of low-distance governance, which explicitly contrasts with the prevailing Abbasid discourse. The study identifies five main components in the Radawi political practice: (1) criticism of closed, circle-based relationships and emphasis on meritocracy in appointments; (2) opposition to authoritarianism and its symbols, such as displays of grandeur; (3) a responsible attitude toward public wealth; (4) accessibility to the general populace; and (5) respect for human dignity regardless of social distinctions. Collectively, these indicators reflect the Imam’s approach to justice in its distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. Significantly, by conditionally accepting the position of crown prince, the Imam deliberately refrained from exploiting the privileges of power, thereby practically demonstrating that reducing power distance is a

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* Earlier version of this paper were published in the proceedings of the *Fifth International Congress on Imam Reza (AS): Civilizational Thought*, held by Scientific and Cultural Organization of Astan Quds Razavi on May 13, 2024 at Mashhad, Iran.

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prerequisite for realizing comprehensive justice. This model is not only unique in historical Islamic studies but can also serve as an applicable paradigm for contemporary governance in Islamic societies. From a methodological standpoint, the present work is innovative in being the first systematic study of power distance during Imam al-Rida's tenure as crown prince.

Keywords: Imam al-Rida, power distance, authoritarianism, procedural justice, interactional justice, distributive justice

1. Introduction

In cross-cultural studies and the analysis of governance discourses, the identification of comparative evaluation indices holds a special place. Such indices not only reveal societies' cultural distinctions but also enable the assessment of the state's influence on the process of culture formation. Geert Hofstede's (1928–2020) theory of Cultural Dimensions stands out as one of cultural anthropology's most systematic theoretical frameworks. It marked a methodological shift by quantitatively operationalizing qualitative concepts (see Hofstede 2001, 11–16).

In his seminal work (2001), Hofstede introduces six fundamental dimensions for cultural analysis, among which power distance is strategically important. This concept examines the extent to which inequality in power distribution is accepted at various levels of society. His findings indicate that societies characterized by six traits—inclination toward collectivism rather than excessive individualism, long-term planning, flexibility in interpersonal relations, institutional trust-building, gender equality, and low power distance—tend to follow more advanced cultural patterns and are closer to justice and democracy (Hofstede and Minkov 2010, 116). Building on this theoretical framework, the present study analyzes the conduct of the eighth Imam of the Shi'a, particularly during his tenure as crown prince, to demonstrate how his teachings align with the criteria of a progressive culture in Hofstede's theory.

1.1. Problem Statement

According to Hofstede, power distance refers to the degree to which members of a society accept unequal distribution of power and positions (Kim and Leung 2007, 86) and the tendency for power to be concentrated in the hands of a limited group (Hofstede 1991, 37–43). Thus, it serves as a measure for assessing the extent to which inequality in the distribution of power and resources is tolerated by members of society (Khairullah & Khairullah 2013, 1–12)—a criterion that divides societies into “low-distance” and “high-distance” types.

In high-distance societies, the substantial benefits associated with leadership and holding office foster a greater tendency toward centralization of power and the emergence of dictatorial behavior (Bates and Plog 2008, 339–346)—behavior which, in political science, is referred to as authoritarianism, denoting the entitlement to and presumed legitimacy of unchecked power for officeholders (Bashiriyeh 2017, 37). In such contexts, ambition—considered one of the strongest human drives—prevails (Russell 1938, 16). Leaders, therefore, regard themselves as superior, as if leadership is a summit whose air is different and whose vistas extend beyond what those below can see (Jouvenel 1949, 116).

In contrast, egalitarianism precedes low-distance societies, and more manifestations of democracy are evident. Indeed, power distance is directly related to distributive and procedural justice in social relations (Lee et al. 2000, 685–704). These concepts, respectively, pertain to how benefits and responsibilities are allocated among members of society (Höffe 1987, 222–228) and to the extent to which leaders consistently apply established laws and procedures in all executive matters (Schermerhorn et al. 2002, 13).

From an international perspective, power distance functions as a key index for comparing countries worldwide (see, e.g., <http://hofstede-insights.com>), thereby providing a basis for cross-cultural analysis. Notably, since its conceptualization, this metric has been applied to compare the cultures of contemporary societies and existing governments, yet it has not been used to examine past societies or to analyze the behavior of historical leaders. A thorough investigation of such concepts, however, requires a synchronic approach, one that, akin to philosophical, linguistic, and sociological inquiries, regards history as a continuum extended along the temporal spectrum (Lacan 1978, 46). Such a perspective allows for a more precise re-reading of concepts that emerged within the heart of history.

In light of the necessity of historical studies and the value of a synchronic approach in analyzing cultural–social concepts, the present research seeks to adopt a historically grounded method to investigate the manifestation of power distance in the lives of historical leaders. The case study here is the life of Imam al-Rida. Accordingly, the central question of this study is how, through a historical-analytical method and a synchronic perspective, power distance is manifested in Imam al-Rida’s conduct. In doing so, the research aims to enrich historical studies in power analysis and present a practical model of conscious engagement with power distance within a system of religious leadership.

1.2. Research Background

A review of existing literature reveals that studies on power distance within the framework of religion have produced the following notable works:

Tabatabaei Nodoushan, Mirhoseini, and Sahraei (2023), in an article titled “Analysis of Power Distance Based on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory and Its Application in the Disputes between Bani Hashim and Bani Umayya,” employed a historical-comparative method to demonstrate that differences in attitudes toward power distance accounted for 68% of the political disputes between these two clans. While this study successfully integrates theoretical foundations with historical data, its temporal scope is limited to the pre-Imam al-Rida period.

The same authors (2022), in “An Analysis of Imam Ali’s Managerial Behavior Based on ‘Power Distance,’” extracted key indices from *Nahj al-Balagha* to examine power distance in the Imam ‘Ali’s government. While the findings are valuable, contextual differences prevent their generalization to later periods of the Imamate.

Vuthouqi-Rad (2011), in “Power Distance from the Perspective of the Culture of the Mahdian Society,” using content analysis of narrations, outlined the ideal vision of zero power distance in the government of the last Shi‘i leader, believed by Shi‘a to be in occultation until his reappearance. Although theoretically significant, this study lacks practical applicability for current organizational management contexts.

This literature review shows that despite the importance of the subject, the period of Imam al-Rida—and particularly the unique circumstances of his position as a crown prince—has not been examined from the perspective of power distance. The present research is therefore innovative in being the first focused study of the political conduct of Imam al-Rida through the lens of power distance. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach and drawing on primary historical sources, it takes a novel step toward advancing knowledge in Islamic management studies.

1.3. Research Significance

This study is significant from theoretical, historical, and practical standpoints:

1. **Theoretical and Foundational Significance:** In contemporary management literature, power distance is recognized as one of the key components for analyzing the effectiveness of management systems. Multiple studies, including Hofstede (2011), demonstrate that reducing power distance can lead to higher job satisfaction, improved organizational performance, reduced employee turnover, and a marked enhancement in organizational culture.

2. **Historical and Model-Studies Necessity:** Imam al-Rida's historical experience during his tenure as crown prince represents a unique case of conflict management within unjust power structures. It offers a democratic governance model framed within Islamic values and demonstrates the successful integration of spiritual leadership with effective organizational management, providing a new framework for Islamic management studies.
3. **Practical and Organizational Applications:** This research is designed to address pressing managerial needs in the political behavior of leaders in the Islamic world. It can contribute to designing an indigenous model for reducing power distance in political leadership behavior, as well as to developing indices for evaluating power distance in workplace environments.

Accordingly, this article seeks to merge modern management knowledge with Islamic practical wisdom to present a historical–analytical model of Radawi management—an effective paradigm for redefining power relations in light of Shi‘i teachings and a novel step in the interdisciplinary study of management and Islamic history.

2. Discussion

By identifying the behavioral patterns of Imam al-Rida in his interactions with the Abbasid caliph, the administrative officials of the caliphate, and the general public, this study reveals multiple points of convergence between the Imam’s conduct and the leadership model found in low-hierarchy societies. The most significant of these are reflected in the following indices:

2.1. Avoidance of Circle-Based Relations

In low-distance societies, the use of circle-based relations in appointing individuals or granting special privileges to certain groups proves ineffective, whereas in high-distance societies, such relations serve practical functions. By circle-based relations is meant interpersonal ties constructed from kinship, tribal affiliation, and friendship, which confer advantages upon those within the circle of closeness—advantages from which outsiders are excluded (for details, see: Tabatabaei Nodoushan 2023, 106).

The effectiveness of such relations can mainly be examined in two domains: first, the distribution of power; second, individuals’ stance toward social norms. Regarding the first domain, unequal power distribution is a defining feature of high-distance societies. More precisely, in societies and organizations where power distance is great, the leader—endowed with wide-ranging authority—can promote or appoint whomever he wishes without being answerable to anyone, and all his decisions are

binding (Hofstede 1991, 45). Consequently, recruitment is not bound by formal criteria; competence, expertise, and commitment do not top the list of qualifications, and those within kinship or friendship circles are often entrusted with responsibilities. This issue directly relates to meritocracy—a deeply normative concept denoting an approach to state public appointments (Arrow et al. 1999, 14–18) and functioning as an indicator of distributive and procedural justice.

Unlike part of the Umayyad period, when circle-based relations were confined to the caliph's household, and another part when they extended to the caliph's friends and intimates (cf. Tabatabaei Nodoushan 2023, 106–108), in the Abbasid era, viziers often orchestrated such relations. A clear manifestation of this is the rise of the Barmakid and Sahl families: numerous members of the Barmakids held influential and central roles in the power structure from the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate in 132 AH (Jahshiyari 1988, 59) until 186 AH—fifty-four years (Ya'qubi 1994, 2:421). Likewise, the Sahl family, like the Barmakids, appointed many of their relatives and friends to significant posts within the caliphal administration (for example, cf. Ibn 'Asakir 1994, 122). This indicates that circle-based relations were regarded as a normalized political discourse during the period in question.

In sharp contrast to this discourse, Imam al-Rida emphasized the circulation of power among the worthy. For example, in response to al-Ma'mun's proposal to relinquish the caliphate, he stated:

If this caliphate is yours, and God has placed it in your possession, then it is not permissible to remove the garment God has clothed you with and give it to another. And if it is not yours, then it is not permissible to bestow upon others what does not belong to you. (Ibn Babawayh 1997, 69)

While this reasoning rests on one of the special rights of the Prophet's Household, as mentioned in the words of Imam 'Ali (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 2), it can also be understood from the meritocracy perspective. On another occasion, addressing al-Ma'mun regarding an appointment, the Imam warned him of the consequences of such decisions: "Fear God concerning the *umma* of Muhammad and the ruler you have appointed over them; you have corrupted their affairs and entrusted them to those who judge by other than the command of God" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 160).

The second sphere in which circle-based relations operate is when individuals are not treated equally before norms, resulting in the law being applied only to ordinary people while certain others are exempt from it—a phenomenon consistently present in high-distance societies and one that poses a serious challenge to procedural justice.

In that era, Imam al-Rida, adopting an approach of equality for all before norms—whether legal or religious—warned his close relatives against exploiting their kinship with the Prophet’s Household to commit subversive acts. For instance, addressing his brother Zayd—who, after violent actions against the Abbasids in Baghdad, became known as *Zayd al-Nar* (Ibn Miskawayh 1997, 4: 118)—the Imam declared: “Whoever is from us but does not obey God is not of us, and whenever you obey God, you are of us, the Ahl al-Bayt” (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 232). This served as a final admonition not only to Zayd but to all associates, subordinating circle-based ties to the divine Command and insisting on establishing procedural justice.

2.2. Avoidance of Authoritarianism

A defining characteristic of societies and governments accustomed to high power distance is that authoritarianism dominates public life. Authoritarianism is a set of behaviors concerning how governance presents itself to the people—conduct akin to the elder-like posture of an aristocratic Arab tribal chief. In such societies, power is fully centralized and sustained through political repression and the elimination of potential opponents (Vestal 1999, 17). Lapidus confirms that authoritarianism occurs where power is not representative of the whole society but serves as a privilege for specific individuals or groups, exercised through a network of supporters and clients (Lapidus 1992, 13–25).

In these contexts, those in power disregard professional and democratic norms, deny the legitimacy of opponents, promote violence, and show a marked tendency to restrict the civil liberties of dissidents (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 33–37). As Hofstede notes (Hofstede 1991, 40), such leaders base their conduct on magnifying and aggrandizing themselves (Mehraban 2018, 54–55)—a pattern already present in the behavior of the Umayyads, referred to as the “Byzantine disposition” (Madelung 2004, 346). These behaviors persisted, and even intensified, under the Abbasids, manifesting in practices such as the construction of numerous palaces—particularly under al-Mutawakkil—lavish banquets, and extraordinary financial largesse (Suyuti 2004, 350; Khwarazmi 1894, 76–83).

Al-Ma’mun’s assumption of religious authority has attracted the attention of historians. Some Orientalists interpret his policy of promoting debates and disputations as an attempt to wrest the standard of religious authority from the *‘ulama’* and concentrate it in the person of the caliph (Gutas 1998, 82). For this reason, certain Shi’i sources consider the purpose of organizing debates between Imam al-Rida and scholars of other religions to have been Ma’mun’s effort to undermine the

Imam's scholarly stature and diminish his rank in the eyes of the people.¹ Another manifestation of Ma'mun's authoritarianism was the *miḥna*, which can be regarded as a form of inquisition (see Nawas 2015).

The relevance of this discussion to the overall topic lies in the fact that, during part of the Abbasid caliphate, Imam al-Rida accepted the offer of the crown prince's position. Although his acceptance was conditional and driven by specific considerations, one must not overlook that this placed him in a position from which, by employing tools of self-aggrandizement and social pressure, he could have pursued the restoration of certain political and social rights for the 'Alids, or at least enjoyed the material benefits of the position. Had this occurred, it would have been noted in historical sources. Instead, the available historical reports and narrations consistently indicate that the Imam's conduct bore no resemblance to the manifestations of authoritarianism. These sources predominantly describe his behavior in terms of the following concepts:

a. Accessibility. One of the most prominent features of authoritarian behavior is fostering a perception of inaccessibility to create an impression of elevated status. In practice, this was a well-established tradition among Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, achieved through the appointment of gatekeepers, the use of heralds to clear the way in public, and restricting audiences to a few designated days (Ya'qubi n.d., 49; Qazvini Isfahani 2020, 55).

By contrast, Imam al-Rida, during his tenure as crown prince, consistently made himself accessible to the people. This approach was rooted in the mission-oriented character of the Shi'i Imams, who were obliged to be available for the guidance of the people—a vital truth encapsulated in expressions such as “We are the support in the middle of the path for the umma” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Wisdom 109).

Evidence for this can be found in the Imam's own words to al-Ma'mun, wherein he likened the ruler to “the central pole of a tent,” thereby underscoring the necessity of officials being accessible (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 160; Majlisi 1983, 49: 165). This was not limited to his crown prince period; the Imam had also maintained direct interaction with the public prior to it. Supporting this is his own statement: “I would sit in the Prophet's Rawḍa, and when the scholars of Madina were unable to answer a question, the people would be referred to me” (Tabarsi 1996, 2: 64). Historical sources also attest to his regular presence in al-Masjid al-Nabawi to address the religious questions of the people (Ibn al-Jawzi 1992, 10:119).

Based on this, maintaining a bond with the people held a special place for Imam al-Rida—a place whose value never diminished over time and which showed no difference before or after his acceptance of the crown prince position.

b. Avoidance of Self-Aggrandizement (*Farahmandī*). In the historical trajectory of the Islamic caliphate, one recurring feature—especially from the time of ‘Uthman and Mu‘awiya among the Umayyad caliphs, and in most of the Abbasid caliphs—was their tendency toward self-aggrandizement and the deliberate projection of grandeur. This is precisely the trait Hofstede identifies as characteristic of powerful figures in high-distance societies (Hofstede 1991, 40).

In contrast, the Shi‘i Imams—and, in the context of this study, Imam al-Rida—consistently distanced themselves from such displays, presenting instead an authentic image of themselves to the public. A striking example is the Imam’s conduct during the ‘Id al-Fitr prayer: he set aside ceremonial formalities, walked barefoot, and joined the people on foot. This behavior was poised to challenge both the high power distance and monarchical customs of al-Ma’mun’s court, offering the people a model of dignified conduct and the proper lifestyle of public officials. However, at the urging of some of the caliph’s entourage, the event was halted (for details, see Ibn Babawayh, 1999, 2: 150).

Such examples were not limited to this occasion. Ibrahim b. ‘Abbas reports that the Imam never stretched out his legs in the presence of anyone, nor did he recline when in company (‘Attarudi 1992, 1: 45). To appreciate the connection between this practice and power distance, one must recall that in the socio-discursive context of the early centuries of Islam, reclining while eating—or in the presence of others—was viewed as a royal behavior imbued with arrogance born of power, a point noted in explanations of why the Prophet refrained from reclining while eating (Hurr ‘Amili 1989, 8: 93).

Another illustration of such conduct is the incident of the bathhouse attendant (*dallāk*). When the man, after requesting the service, recognized the Imam, he apologized and attempted to show him deference. Yet the Imam continued to massage him, thereby modeling a form of service-oriented humility that entered the recorded civilizational heritage of Islam (Ibn Shahrashub 1960, 4: 362).

From these reports, it is evident that the Imam never saw himself as set apart from others; he considered himself equal to the people in creation and treated them with innate dignity. It is narrated that when his dining cloth was spread, he would invite all servants and attendants—even doorkeepers—to join the meal (‘Attarudi 1992, 1: 45),

regardless of their skin color, ethnicity, or tribe. ‘Abd Allah b. Salt, quoting a man from Balkh, recounts:

I was with the Imam on a journey to Khurasan. One day, when the tablecloth was laid out, the Imam summoned his black servants and others to eat. I said: ‘It would be better if you prepared a separate table for them.’ He replied: ‘Be silent. The Lord is one, the mother is one, the father is one, and the reward of each is according to his deeds.’ (Kulayni 1987, 8: 230)

In another report from *al-Kafi*, the Imam instructed his servants that if he stood over them while they were eating, they should not rise (Kulayni 1987, 6: 298).

Historically, it should also be noted that in addition to avoiding self-aggrandizement, Imam al-Rida sought to remain unseen in many of his charitable acts. Like his pure forefathers, he would give alms secretly, under the cover of night, so that the recipients would not know the identity of their benefactor (‘Attarudi 1992, 1: 45).

His scholarly humility—despite having been described by his father as *‘Ālim Āl Muḥammad* (“the Scholar of the Family of Muhammad”) (Tabarsi 1996, 328; Arbili 2002, 2: 327)—is another expression of his effort to present himself as ordinary and to avoid self-aggrandizement or ostentation. In a poem attributed to him, the Imam states:

If I am confronted with the ignorance of someone of lesser standing than I, I restrain my soul from responding to his foolishness; if he is my equal in intellect and rank, I act with forbearance to surpass my peer; and if he is superior to me in virtue and wisdom, I acknowledge his precedence, merit, and superiority. (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 174)

This is consistent with the very nature of Imam al-Rida’s mission of guidance: his scholarly humility and efforts to remove barriers—such as high power distance—created an environment in which others felt encouraged to ask questions. The most famous historical example is his debate with scholars of various religions and sects—arranged, albeit coercively, by al-Ma’mun. At least two statements in the reports of this event illustrate the Imam’s deliberate strategy to open the space for scientific discussion. The first is his invitation: “Let anyone who has a question ask it without fear and without consideration of my status as the crown prince” (Ibn Babawayh 1977, 430)—a reassurance that allowed the debate to proceed most finely.

The second statement relates to ‘Imran al-Sabi, who affirmed that without the Imam’s personal assurance, he would not have asked his questions, being influenced by the perception of the Imam’s position and authority (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 168). This assurance created a comfort zone that fostered a scholarly atmosphere, allowing

critical and doctrinal objections to be raised without fear of inquisition, accusation of heresy, or reprisal.

Contrary to such openness, the Abbasid caliphs—like their Umayyad predecessors—promoted a deterministic doctrine to present their rule as divinely ordained. By adopting the title *Khalīfa Allah*, “God’s vicegerent,” they sought to confer sacred legitimacy upon their governance (Mas’udi 1989, 3: 43; Baladhuri 1995, 5: 20). Al-Mansur al-‘Abbasi—considered by some as the true founder of the Abbasid caliphate (Daniel 2011, 445–505)—in his inaugural sermon called himself “God’s caliph on earth” and claimed: “God is the creator of our caliphate, and the servants have no choice in it” (Termanini 1965, 1: 85; Crone & Hinds 1990, 13–15). The appearance of the caliph’s name, like al-Ma’mun’s, alongside that of the Prophet on coins—*Khalīfa Allah* beside *Rasūl Allah* (Moshiri 1974, 614)—further demonstrates the Abbasid s’ attempt to magnify their status. Presenting the caliphate as a divine institution and using the title *Khalīfa Allah* served two primary purposes: to justify governmental decisions by appealing to divine Will and to limit public criticism by sacralizing the caliph’s position.

Moreover, al-Ma’mun adopted the Shi’i conception of Imamate and applied it to the caliphate, thereby elevating the caliph to the rank of divinely chosen leader, empowered to define and interpret religious doctrine and Islamic law² (Lapidus 2002, 1: 103). For this reason, he styled himself *Imām al-Hudā* (“The Imam of Guidance”)³ (Cooperson 2000, 67; for poetic attestations of this title, see Abu Hilal al-‘Askari 1998, 119).

c. Noble View of Public Wealth. In high-distance societies, officeholders often approach public wealth with a self-centered outlook (Mehraban 2018, 63–64), treating it as personal property and monopolizing financial resources to restrict potential competition. This mindset fosters misuse of public funds and inequitable distribution of resources.

A historical example of such a view can be found in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. The creation of a private treasury under Mu’awiya reflected his personalization of public wealth (Ya’qubi, n.d., 2: 218)—a notion also voiced by ‘Uthman.⁴ This private treasury persisted under the Abbasid s (Tabari, n.d., 8: 221) as an institution separate from the public treasury, with its own revenues and expenditures, covering a broad range of discretionary uses—from personal expenses to gifts and stipends (for details, see Sabi 1990, 71; Shabashti 1986, 157; Rashid b. Zubayr 1984, 92).

In contrast to this ruling-class discourse, Imam al-Rida held no such view. In a letter to al-Ma'mun listing the essentials of pure Islam, he subtly criticized the events of early Islam, expressing aversion toward those who monopolized wealth and those who circulated the wealth of Muslims solely among the rich (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 126).

d. Special Attention to Human Dignity. Egalitarianism and democracy are hallmarks of low-distance societies. They ensure that individuals are treated according to a single standard—such as the law and human dignity—regardless of ethnicity, race, language, or even creed.

Although the society of Imam al-Rida's time was characterized by high power distance, his conduct embodied the traits of a low-distance society. A notable example is his historic ruling regarding the will of a Zoroastrian from Nishapour: when a judge ordered that the deceased's wealth be distributed only among poor Muslims, the Imam annulled the verdict and directed that an equivalent amount from Muslim charity funds be given to needy Zoroastrians (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 15). This decision demonstrated both his defense of minority rights and his commitment to universal justice.

Imam al-Rida—whose mother was a Nubian bondswoman—like other Shi'i Imams, viewed humanity through the lens of generosity, making human dignity the basis of his relations, rather than external markers such as race or lineage (Tabatabaei Nodoushan 2023, 149–154). Significantly, some Imams married bondswomen after their emancipation; in some cases, these unions gave birth to the next Imam. For instance, the fourth, seventh, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth Imams were born to mothers of Persian, Maghrebi, Nubian, Berber, and Byzantine heritage (ʿAmili Nabati 2005, 2: 138–139).

Returning to the main discussion, Imam al-Rida viewed those around him with generosity, regarding human dignity as the foundation of life. Accordingly, he regulated his conduct and interactions to preserve human dignity rather than socially constructed or positional status. This approach earned him the title *al-Rida* ("the One with Whom All Are Pleased"), which, according to a narration from Imam al-Jawad (PBUH), was bestowed because everyone was pleased with him (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1: 13). Imam al-Jawad also referred to him as *al-Imām al-Raʿūf* ("the Compassionate Imam") (Majlisi 1983, 99: 55), a description that reflects the Imam's extensive compassion toward all people—an attitude that can be interpreted within the framework of transactional justice (Karatepe 2006, 72).

e. Rejection of Violence and Oppression. As noted earlier, authoritarianism is invariably accompanied by violence, whereas Imam al-Rida's conduct was entirely devoid of such traits. Closer examination shows that he opposed authoritarian behaviors in theory and practice, firmly preventing the exercise of violence and oppression against any individual. Evidence of this stance can be found in several instances:

- His unequivocal statement: "The first to enter the fire of Hell will be the unjust ruler who did not act with justice" (Attarudi 1992, 42).
- His direct confrontation with al-Ma'mun when pointing out the injustices inflicted upon the people of Madinah and reminding him of the duties of governance (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 159).
- His intervention to prevent the execution of a man who owed al-Ma'mun a small sum (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 165).
- His emphasis that a true Muslim is one from whose hand and tongue others are safe, and that anyone who commits even the smallest injustice against a neighbor is not among the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 2: 24).

In the final analysis of this section, it should be noted that the combination of authoritarianism and high power distance enables those in power to evade social accountability and to practice discrimination. This erodes procedural justice and encourages rulers to use violence to preserve personal interests—a course that ultimately sacrifices justice to selfishness.

3. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that power distance has no place in the intellectual system of Imam al-Rida as a model of Islamic civilizational leadership. The findings indicate that his practical conduct was grounded in rejecting hierarchical power structures.

Imam al-Rida opposed, both theoretically and practically, the manifestations of authoritarianism, such as self-aggrandizement, violence, and discrimination. He demonstrated in practice that justice—across its distributive, procedural, and transactional dimensions—was essential for all members of society, irrespective of religion, race, or social position.

The present study is also significant from a methodological perspective. Applying the power distance theory to the analysis of Imam al-Rida's conduct shows that contemporary theoretical frameworks can yield a more precise reading of Islamic history. Such an approach enables the discovery of previously overlooked aspects of

the Infallibles' conduct and the extraction of practical models applicable to the contemporary era.

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Notes

1. Imam al-Rida stated: "When I argue with the People of the Torah by their Torah, and with the People of the Gospel by their Gospel, I shall compel them all to acknowledge the truth of my words. At that point, al-Ma'mun will realize that he has chosen the wrong path and will surely regret it" (Ibn Babawayh 1999, 1:156).
2. Whereas previously, whenever an issue arose that required clarification or lacked precedent, it was the consensus of the religious scholars—and not the decision of the caliph—that had to serve as the criterion (Goitein 1966, 157).
3. Some, by referring to the research of Orientalists, have traced this matter back to the influence of Sasanian Iranian culture—transmitted through scribes—and to the impact of Ibn al-Muqaffa's teachings (Lambton 1985, 53–54; Shaban 1970, 139–140).
4. "Indeed, this wealth belongs to us; therefore, if we need it, we shall take it—even if certain people are displeased" (Mufid 1992, 71).