



The Distinction Of The Political Approach From The Philosophical Approach To The Concept Of Westernization In The Thought Of Al-Ahmad And Shaygan

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to compare the concept of Westernization in the intellectual literature of Iranian intellectuals specifically focusing on Dariush Shaygan and Jalal Al-Ahmad to understand the root of the differences in their views. By analyzing their attitudes toward this concept, the research will explain the two distinct political and philosophical approaches that characterize Iranian intellectuals' responses to the dominance of Western culture and civilization in Iranian society, and evaluate and compare their strategies for addressing this situation. An analytical-comparative method has been employed in this research. By applying this approach, the study seeks to analyze the concept of Westernization in the intellectual literature of these two intellectuals and examine the relationship between their intellectual origins and intellectual frameworks, highlighting their fundamental distinctions. The main finding of this research indicates that the primary difference in the concept of Westernization between Al-Ahmad and Shaygan is rooted in their divergent philosophical and political approaches when examining the relationship between modern Western civilization and non-European civilizations. The general result reveals that Al-Ahmad's political and economic approach has led to a post-colonial interpretation of Westernization, while Shaygan's philosophical view, grounded in an ontological critique of modernity, has guided his perspectives toward post-modern attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Westernization emerged during a period when Iran's confrontation with the West and the broader issue of modernity were prominent concerns in Iranian society (Qaysari, 2004: 145-146). The concept of Westernization represented one of the most significant theoretical contributions of Iranian intellectuals, profoundly influencing Iranian thought and culture for decades. A notable aspect was the distinctive interpretations of this concept across different intellectual literatures, which analyzed intellectualism, cultural dynamics, and Iranian society's relationship with modernity.

Jalal Al-Ahmad and Dariush Shaygan stand as two pivotal figures among Iranian intellectuals whose perspectives on Westernization and the relationship between Iranian society and Western modernity cannot be overlooked. Although both intellectuals initially borrowed this concept from Ahmed Fardid, their attitudes toward Westernization diverged substantially.

The main question of this research is: What is the primary difference between the concept of Westernization in the thoughts of Al-Ahmad and Shaygan? The main hypothesis is grounded in their distinct approaches to understanding Westernization. Al-Ahmad employs the concept of Westernization in its political context, specifically addressing the political and economic domination of Western colonial powers¹². In contrast, Shaygan utilizes the concept to describe the ontological domination of European modernity over non-European (Eastern) societies, focusing on the destruction of their spiritual heritage.

2. Methodology

The method employed in this research is the comparative method, a prevalent approach in human sciences that addresses fundamental challenges related to essentialism and the adaptation of social and human phenomena across cultures and religions. This method serves multiple critical functions:

Key Objectives of the Comparative Method

- Clarifies the dimensions of studied phenomena
- Enables critical analysis and re-evaluation
- Facilitates dialogue and cultural interaction

In contemporary humanities and social sciences, the comparative method is fundamentally designed to:

- Activate intellectual historical perspectives
- Stimulate dynamic intellectual engagement
- Generate innovative scholarly insights
- Philosophical Foundation

The comparative method is rooted in the philosophical premise that truth is manifested across world history, society, and nature. By confronting historical intellectual data in a fluid, dynamic manner, this approach enables the emergence of novel perspectives and understanding.

As noted by Sadeghi Shahpar (2008), the comparative method:

- Generates new mental data
- Advances human societal progress
- Continuously generates potential future problems
- Creates innovative subjective insights (Sadeghi Shahpar, 2008: 76-77)

3. Findings

In Al-Ahmad's intellectual framework, Westernization is portrayed as a critical pathological condition affecting Iranian life and culture. He presents the consequences and damages of this phenomenon as a

serious warning and fundamental threat. The suffix "Westernization" itself signifies a diseased state, suggesting that the core essence of the culture has been fundamentally altered and compromised. Essentially, Al-Ahmad argues that the traditional culture has become ill through this transformative connection. (Ashuri, 1997: 134-135)

Shaygan's critique of Western civilization is notably more complex. While he does not deny Western culture's capabilities, he characterizes it as the most dynamic, innovative, and simultaneously tragic human culture. (Shaygan, 1994: 37)

The critical aspect of Shaygan's perspective lies in the relationship between Western and Eastern civilizations. He perceives this relationship as:

- A passive intellectual and cultural imitation
- An unconscious submission by Eastern societies
- A process he terms "Westernization"

This "Westernization" represents a state of profound ignorance towards the West—specifically, a lack of genuine understanding of dominant thought elements that constitute the world's most aggressive and pervasive worldview. (Shaygan, 1977: 51)

4. Discussion and conclusion

A comparative study of Shaygan and Al-Ahmad's perspectives on Westernization reveals significant distinctions in their conceptual understanding and application:

Al-Ahmad's Perspective:

- Utilizes Westernization in a political context
- Focuses on political and economic colonial domination
- Emphasizes resistance against imperial powers
- Rooted in a Marxist intellectual framework
- Employs journalistic, popular, and accessible language
- Targets a broad, general audience

Shaygan's Perspective

- Interprets Westernization through an ontological lens
- Highlights Western modernity's spiritual destruction of Eastern societies
- Prioritizes philosophical and cultural analysis
- Employs complex philosophical discourse
- Targets specialized, intellectually sophisticated audiences

Philosophical and Methodological Distinctions

The core difference in their approaches stems from their intellectual backgrounds:

Al-Ahmad: Primarily a political intellectual who views politics and economics as central to understanding societal distinctions

Shaygan: A philosophical thinker who perceives politics and economy as derivative of deeper ontological foundations

Key Characteristics

1. Al-Ahmad's approach:

- Political-economic focus
- Marxist-influenced critique
- Accessible, direct language

2. Shaygan's approach:

- Philosophical-ontological analysis
- Cultural and spiritual critique
- Complex, nuanced philosophical language

4. Conclusion

Their divergent perspectives demonstrate the multifaceted nature of intellectual engagement with Westernization, reflecting different methodological and philosophical orientations in understanding cultural transformation.

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