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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the strong relationship between American universities and Iranian institutions of higher education from 1960 to 1980 and beyond. A review of comparative literature indicates that these relationships have had a lasting impact on Iranian education. The paper begins with a brief history of education in Persia beginning around 700 B.C. The main body of the document outlines: (1) Iranian higher education policies and programs; (2) the nature of cross-cultural relations in higher education between Iranians and Americans including the work of American educational missionaries, educational advisors, academic and technical partnerships, and the experiences of Iranian students in the United States; and (3) the internal and external factors that affected these links. Contemporary educational outlooks derived from Shiah Islam, the predominant religion in Iran, are analyzed and interpreted; and confrontations regarding higher education among various types of Iranian secular, modernist, and traditional Muslim academicians are discussed. The paper concludes with some suggestions for improving current educational relationships between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Contains 21 references.) (Author/LL)

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THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE ON DEVELOPING NATIONS: THE CASE OF IRAN

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INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE ON DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: CASE OF IRAN

A review of comparative education literature indicates that there has been a strong higher education relationship between the American universities and Iranian higher education from the 1960s through the 1980s. Obviously, a careful critical review of the literature proves that the relations have had a long lasting impact on Persian education in the past years and will continue to do so. Additional information form the American and Persian higher educational experts also indicates that relations were established through a variety of means.

Missionaries, business people, faculty and student exchange, and political linkages were instrumented to form educational relations. This paper was designed to obtain information about Iranian-American higher education relations from 1960 to 1980 and beyond. Specifically, three domains were investigated (1) Iranian higher education policies and programs, (2) the nature of cross-cultural relations in higher education among Iranians and Americans, and (3) the internal and external factors that affected these links.

Contemporary educational outlooks derived from Shiah Islam, the predominant religion in Iran, are analyzed and interpreted. Confrontations regarding higher education among various types of Iranian secular, modernist, and traditional Muslim academicians are discussed. Finally, possible ways to improve the currently poor higher educational relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran are suggested.

THE INFLUENCE AMERICAN CULTURE AND EDUCATION ON DEVELOPING NATIONS: THE CASE OF IRAN

M. Hussein Fereshteh

Introduction

As in other ancient civilizations, education in Iran began with religion around 700 B.C. Zoroaster (Zardusht), a teacher and religious prophet, founded Zoroastrianism and advocated, "Good thoughts, good words and good deeds" in his book Zande Avesta.

For over 500 years, Zoroastrianism and the government influenced the development and growth of the Persian education for religious, government staffing preparation, and military purposes. Zoroastrianism became the national and state religion with the support of Persian kings, Syrus the Great, other Achaemenian kings, and the Sasanied rulers. Persia became one of the world first powerfull empires of the time with a state religion, organized army, advanced road system, governing codes of law, state postal services, and independence for provinces.[1]

Around 465 B.C cultural and political relations between Persia and Greece was friendly, and Greek philosophers came to Persia to learn about Persian art, literature, and science.[2] Greek scholars brought western ideas and books to Persia. Later, wars and peace treaties between Persia and other western civilizations paved the way in promoting cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges. Persians, Greeks, and later Romans were in prolonged wars and peacemaking relations for a long time from 300 B.C. through 500 A.D. As the result of Alexander of Macedonia's (330 B.C.) attacks on Persia, western ideas, and education reached into Persia in the ancient time.[3] Persian kings, Syrous and Anoshirawan promoted religion, education, and military training. In 230 A.D. the University of Jundi-Shahpur, the first world higher education center, was the largest and most important scientific and cultural institution. There faculty of many nationalities offered instruction in astronomy, ethics, finance, government, law, literature, medicine, philosophy, and theology. "During the time that the Athenian Academies were shut down by the Byzantine Empire because of the religious restriction, it was Persia that became a refuge place for the Athenian philosophers and scientists."[4] The ruler, King Anushirwan, is reputed to have participated in seminars and his physician and tutor, Buzarjmihr, went to India to obtain a copy of the famed Fables of Bedpai. The book was translated into Farsi and has been used as a text for Persian madrasah (Iranian Islamic College). War and peace relations between Persians and Greeks and in particular Alexander's attack on Persia brought Greece and Roman culture to Persia. It is obvious, then, that Iran has a very long and rich educational history with some influences from Greek, Hindu, and Syrian cultures. Medcine was taught at the University of Jundi-Shahpour for over six hundred years.[5]

During the Islamic era, after 640 A.D. when Muslims conquered the Persian Empire, education in Atashkadeh (Zoroastrian Temple) was moved to the Massjid or mosque, the Islamic institutional center for religious, educational, political, and cultural discussions and policy making. Later, outgrowths of the Massjid, more specialized educational institutions such as maktab or literacy school, Islamic madrasah or continuation school, and madraseh elmiyeh or Muslim theological school or college were formed all over the Islamic world. Farsi, Arabic, the Koran, arithmetic, history, poetry, and the study of religious laws, ethical principles and moral customs were the contents of the curriculum at this time. Simple,

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informal gatherings called halgheh (getting together in a group and sitting on the floor in a circle), focused on basic learning, religious teachings, and intellectual discussion. Usually girls were separately educated by moalem-e sar-e khaneh (private tutors). By 1900, according to Issa Sediq, "there were a hundred maktabs (elementary schools), hundred-sixty mosques, and forty-six theological colleges functioning in the city of Esfahan alone."[6]

During the early nineteenth century, as the universal western style educational institutions were developing in different parts of the world, the first western style institution of higher education named Madraseh-e Darulfunun was established in Iran in 1851. This school is still functioning as a highly prestigious high school in Tehran. It was modeled on European institutions such as the polytechnical college.

The concept that the state has the responsibility for public education began to develop in Iran. In July, 1943, a law was passed to establish compulsory primary education. By 1972 schooling was actually available to 80 percent of school age children. Gradually school became available to all school age children and the state and family started stressing more education. The most recent estimate of Iran's literate population is 48 percent.[7] However, this number might be underestimated.

Throughout the century during which Iranian education was first being modernized, French influence was prominent. As in France, Iranian education was formed into a highly centralized system and it continued to be operated by the central government in Tehran up to the present time. All curricula and policies for primary and secondary schools are drawn up by the Ministry of Education, and the great majority of primary and secondary schools are state institutions. Some grants and private funds, however, are given to private schools. Elementary education in the state schools and at public universities are tuition free. Small fees are charged for attending the state-run secondary schools. Textbooks are published by the Ministry of Education and issued free of charge to the pupils in the elementary schools.

During 1982-83 approximately 9,386,348 students were attending 44,242 schools in Iran and approximately 4.46 million of this school population were primary school pupils.[8] In 1911, Iran had 136 primary schools, enrolling more than 10,500 children, and two secondary schools, attended by approximately 150 students; in 1940, 2,336 primary schools served more than 287,000 children, and 351 secondary school had total of more than 28,000 students in attendance.[9] There had been a great development of secondary and higher education for the past four decades. As Iranian education was growing and expanding in the western way of schooling, higher education was provided at state colleges, private technical colleges, universities. The extent of educational growth was so rapid at all levels that during the 1980s nearly 136,000 students attended institutions of higher learning in Iran and an additional 75,000 Iranian students studied abroad, chiefly in Europe and the United States.[10]

With its eleven constituent faculties, Tehran University, the second oldest Iranian university is the largest institution of higher education in Iran. Universities were also established in Ahwaz, Isfahan, Meshad, Rezayeh, Shiraz, Hamadan, Gilan, Mazandaran, and Tabriz. In Tehran several institutions, mostly technical institutes, were involved in preparing students and teachers of vocational subjects for secondary schools. A polytechnical school with courses in building construction, electrical engineering, mechanical work, and textile engineering was opened. There also was the National University, a private institution where the students paid high tuition to attend. The National Iranian Oil Company maintained an Institute of Nuclear Science at Abadon, and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) set up several institutes and training centers that were later turned over to the Iranian government. Teachers Education University (Danesh-saraie Alli-e Tehran), the first Iranian teacher

education university was established for training teachers, preparing school administrators, and making arrangements for the Iranian school system with many affiliate colleges in different provinces. Interestingly, many of these institutions had bilateral educational linkages with over 75 prestigious American private and public institutions of higher Education by 1978.[11]

During the revolutionary months of 1978-1979 over 41,000 American university administrators, educators, advisors, diplomats, and technical and scientific experts who had been working in many areas, including the Iranian educational system, left the country. After the departure of the Shah, the government did not have much time to become involved in higher education. However, at the time, the Iranian Muslim clergy and Islamic legal experts, the Ulama, were more interested in establishing new comprehensive Islamic Universities than touching the structure of the existing higher education system. As a matter of fact, the first Islamic university was established during the beginning of the Revolution in June of 1979 and was named after the seventh Imam, Jame Imme Al-Imam Al-Jafa-r Al-Sadegh (the seventh Imam of Shiah Islam who is considered to have been the most scholarly leader and Imam among 12 Imam of the Shiah Muslims). This purely Islamic university was inaugurated by Ayatollah Montazari, the most popular political Iranian leader after the Ayatollah Khomeini. The four objectives announced for this institution were: a) to develop an international language for the Ulama, b) to develop different fields of Islamic Studies in universities throughout the world, c) to publicize Islam by using modern communication systems, and d) to bring together a group of Islamic scholars to form a major research center to study Jafari Science (Islamic science, studies of Imam Jafar Sadgh, the Seventh Imam).[12]

Under the new Islamic Republic, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education were combined on July 5, 1979 and called Ministry of Culture, Science and Higher Education. Their first acts were to remove all administrators, faculty and staff members who were accused of having cooperated with the Shah and SAVAK (the Shah's secret police) or who were regarded as friends of the Shah. All faculty and staff who were known to have been fundamentally westernized were also dismissed. However, even these kinds of purges were not believed to be sufficient when ideological conflicts broke out among the Maktabiyoun, the true followers of the Ayatollah. The groups who were identified as democrats, liberals or conservatives, and all types of leftists were purged. They ordered all institutions of higher education closed to permit the formation of an entirely new Islamic educational system.

During a broadcast by Pars Radio on September 22, 1981, a speech inaugurating the new academic year for elementary and secondary schools, the Ayatollah Khomeini indicated that the universities would not yet be reopened until the fundamental purging had taken place. However, he mentioned that agricultural, medical and teacher training schools might function by the second term of the 1981-1982 academic year, provided their plans and new constitutions had been approved.

Very briefly, this is the background for relations between the educational systems of the United States and Iran. We can now trace four ways in which American higher education had some impact on Iranian schools. First, we will review the work of American educational missionaries. We will also consider the experiences of Iranian students in the United States. The work of American educational advisors will be outlined and discussed, and fourth, we will explore academic and technical partnerships between American and Iranian institutions of higher learning. Then, it will be possible to draw some conclusions about the influence that American higher education has had on Iran under the regime of the Shah and the Islamic government leaders.

American Missionaries

The influence of American citizens on the Iranian school system goes back to the early nineteenth century. It was in 1834 that the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions chose Reza-ayeh as the site of their first work in Iran and assigned Dr. Perkins to this station. One reason the Reza-ayeh had been chosen was that it was a multi-faith community where there were many Armenian and Nestorian Christians whom the missionaries hoped to revitalize. By 1836 Perkins had managed to establish a boy's school or Male Seminary in the town. Modeled on the New England academies seven boys were enrolled there to study arithmetic, reading, writing, rhetoric, English and indigenous languages, and scriptures. Some forty years later, this school evolved into a college (as had many of its American counterparts) that offered commercial, medical and theological course. Even in 1878 almost all of the students were Armenian and Nestorian Christians, but the doors of the institution were open to the interested Muslims too.[13]

Observing the success of the missionary institution, some Muslim parents wanted their sons to attend similar schools, so a special institution for boys known as the Marefat (Learning and Knowledge) was opened in 1904 with collaboration of Iranians and missionaries. Two years later that school was merged with the College to become the American School for Boys. By 1913, 120 Muslim students were enrolled, some of them members of leading Muslim families. At Reza-ayeh and other locations where there were American missionary schools, a new class of intellectuals was formed. Termed Roushan-Fekrr (Intellectuals) these people found themselves the products of a rather pious type of modern education living in a predominantly religiously oriented society. The American pioneer missionary educators in Iran were vigorous feminists, so they did not neglect the education of women. Using the system established by Mary Lyons at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts, they opened Fiske Girls Seminary in Reza-ayeh only two years after the boy's school had been opened. In 1906 a school for Jewish and Muslim girls was also opened and 193 women were attending this institution by the 1990s.

After the 1870s American missionary activities were gradually expanded to include institutions located in the cities of central and western Iran: Hamadan, Rasht, Tabriz and Tehran. Agencies other than the original American Board were now involved. By 1903 mission educational efforts had reached as far as the Muslim holy city of Mashad. In 1925 the first American college in Tehran (presently the Dabirestan-e Albours) was established. With it were affiliated elementary and high school level programs. With a charter from the Board of Regents of the State of New York, it was an accredited liberal arts college with a premedical program. Many of the American faculty members at this college were graduates of Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, which provided an informal relationship between the two institutions. Some Iranian citizens, however, were also faculty members at the college.[14]

Work in education by American missionaries paved the way for other official and independent American educational specialists to come to Iran. For example, it was partly through their intervention that arrangements were made to recruit three advisors through the United States Office of Education. They arrived in Tehran in June, 1951, just before the coup d'etat of Mohammad Mussadigh. In July, an educational division was formed, with Mr. Hoyt J. B. Turner as its chief. Several of the new American educational advisors were also assigned to some other Ostans (Provinces).[15]

Iranian Students in the United States

After the Second World War wealthy Iranian parents commonly sent their children abroad to become college educated. Some students attended expensive private colleges and schools in Europe or the United States. Other Iranian youths who went overseas for higher education had attended foreign or missionary schools in Iran. Some middle class parents sold their houses to pay their children's educational expenses abroad. In recent years Iranian students have been sent outside of the country to avoid social turbulence even though they were not fluent in any foreign language and had no orientation to the cultural values of the host society.

The Iranian students in the United States learned to function in an individualistic, industrialized, materialistic, and Judeo-Christian society, and they favored professional fields such as business administration, engineering, and medicine. Often they received the same instruction as the American students without consideration of how to adapt their new skills and knowledge to the Iranian context.

The new generation of Iranians educated in the United States quickly encountered a dilemma. They possessed extensive credentials and specialized qualifications that were often very difficult to apply satisfactorily in Iran. In some cases, their aspirations were quite high, but they were unable to find suitable employment. Others had become accustomed to American society and could not acclimate themselves in Iran. Therefore, a considerable "brain drain" took many talented Iranians out of their native society. A large part of the Iranian-American community in the United States now consists of these former students who did not or could not go home.[16]

Iranians educated in the United States had learned new concepts, methods and had values. They believed they understood what contemporary education should entail. When they held positions in Iran where they could influence educational policies and practices, they began rapidly to modernize the schools. However, from their perspectives, modernization was vital and long overdue if Iran were to progress. From the point of view of the more traditional segments of Iranian society, however, the modernists were threatening the entire Muslim social order. They were undermining Islamic culture and causing moral degeneration. Therefore, when the Islamic traditionalists came to power, they purged the universities of this new breed and concluded that the whole system of higher education had to be closed and completely reconstituted. This continues today. An Iranian proverb states, "Whenever you prevent a loss, you are making a profit." It is preferable to forego any higher education, assert the Islamic traditionalists, than to continue to be subjected to the cultural imperialism of the West.

American Advisors in Iran

After World War II, the American officials began to appreciate the economic, political, and strategic importance of Iran in the Middle East. By this time French and German influence had lessened, and the Americans had successfully countered Soviet attempts to get a foothold in Iran. The Americans still needed to displace the British, who, up to this time, had been very active in Iran. There were many avenues to increase the American presence in Iran, but one of the most visible was in education. As Raiesdana and Spencer assert,

> ...the Iranian government, in cooperation with American advisors, was able to influence actively the direction of educational reform. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the Shah arranged for the U.S. to send advisors to assist with reform. These advisors worked under the auspices of the Technical Cooperation Administration (an adjunct of the Agency for International

Development.[17]

The American advisors worked at all levels of the Iranian educational system and acted as counselors and trainers in most of the Iranian governmental agencies. Their aim was to solve Iran's economic and governmental problems, as well as to modernize the nation's curricula and schools. Few were fluent in Farsi, and fewer knew much about the cultural heritage of Iran or the philosophy of Islam. It is little wonder that the thousands of American specialists in Iran caused conflicts and confrontations. On the other hand, it is clear that these American educators did have an impact. Raiesdana and Spencer claim, "The presence of large numbers of American advisors, in every conceivable branch of education and training, was undoubtedly the main source of innovation."[18]

Unfortunately, they often instituted programs in which the vast majority of Iranians felt they had little stake. One example, the Sepahe-Denesh (Army of Educational Enlightenment) was organized along the best American philanthropic lines to be an indigenous Peace Corps. To function effectively in Iran, however, a campaign to eradicate illiteracy had to be geared to the values and realities of this Muslim society. Sadly, the American planners and their Iranian colleagues simply were unable to design an approach that caught the vision of Iranians and addressed their perceived needs. In 1963 the educational planners promised to wipe out illiteracy in twenty years, but according to recent statistics more than forty six percent of Iranians still can not read or write.[19]

The American advisors also reorganized Iranian higher education, beginning, in 1958, with the University of Tehran. Unfortunately, higher education in Iran was largely modeled on French practices, which the Americans did not favor. Older Iranian academics were Francophones and they soon found themselves threatened by brash young American advisors or by Iranians fresh from universities in the United States. The University of Tehran functioned as a mother institution for other newly opened universities in Iran. Gradually, the basic changes affected other institutions, and the University of Shiraz (Pahlavi University) became the first, fully American-style university in Iran. The American impact was undoubtedly the strongest at Shiraz, but it permeated the other 242 institutions of higher education in the country prior to 1979.

Not only were official advisors sent to Iran by American agencies, but there was also an influx of what can best be called American educational "carpetbaggers." These were paid representatives of some private colleges and universities of higher education in the United States who were sent to recruit students. Between 1974 and 1976, when the American economy had put many marginal colleges in jeopardy, these agents advertised their wares in the Iranian newspapers, Keyhan and Ettelaat. Statements such as "We will get you an I-20 Form within twenty-four hours from the best American school" were common. They would be signed by the Golbaz Daftare Moshaver Deneshjooyan (Private Educational Advisory Institution). The legitimate exchange of students and educational personnel between Iran and the United States began to appear exploitative and sinister.

U.S. Iranian Technical Assistance and Academic Partnerships

Technical assistance from the United States to Iran began as Asle-Char (Point Four) in 1950. It was based on President Truman's Act for International Development, designed to speed post-war recovery. Almost immediately Dr. Franklin Harris, of the State Department was sent to Iran to negotiate an agreement with the Iranian government to provide technical assistance. Soon Utah State University was participating, under Point Four, in the field of agriculture and agricultural training. Between 1951 and 1963, experts from the United States

worked at the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture and also developed Karaj Agricultural College during 1960s.

The creation of a Public Administration Institute at Tehran University was another Point Four activity, this time with the University of Southern California as the partner. Over the last thirty years numerous American universities have had contracts to assist Iranian educational programs. Among them are Harvard, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, George Washington, MIT, Brigham Young, Illinois, Florida, and CUNY. Other institutions were involved as well, but this sample indicates that many affluent and prestigious schools in the United States had Iranian connections.

During 1979 and 1980, one year after the Islamic Revolution of Iran, all universities were closed. Why were the Iranian universities and other institutions of higher education unable to become indispensable to Iranian society? Was part of the problem that they, too, became caught up in the late Shah's impractical dreams of grandeur that "Iran soon becomes a new Japan of Asia." He claimed that Iran would reach the level of a great, modern, industrialized civilization by the year 2000.

Possibly their ultimate failure was due in part to economic factors such as inflation and the increasing costs of higher education. Certainly one aspect of the problem was the policy of importing American educational products such as audio-visuals, books, computers, and entire training programs. Many of the advisors and instructors were also stamped, "Made in the U.S.A." As a traditional Iranian proverb puts it, "She wanted to make up her eyes, but instead she blinded herself." Obviously, Iran attempted so hard and so fact to improve its educational system, and in the process of borrowing from external sources, the system lost it's Iranian identity.

Conclusion

As we previously noted, on July 5, 1979, 242 Iranian institutions of higher education were officially shut down. They were not to be reopened until their new constitutions were finalized. The interim was to be a period of pak-sazi (cleansing-by which is meant purging these institutions of everyone who was not regarded as faithful to Islam). It was clear that the Ulama who were ruling Iran suspected that the modernized higher education system would undermine them, so had to be completely altered.

The universities, as the pinnacle of the national educational system, had to be changed, but the whole system was also to be reformed. The Islamic Republic of Iran wanted no American style higher education system, but certainly did not want to borrow anything from the Soviet Union either. Thus, the regime established the Komiteh Enghelab-e Farhangi (Educational Revolutionary Committee) in 1979. The first Minister of Education under the new government, Iranian educated Mohammad Ali Rajai, said, "The whole system of education is made in western laboratories, not in Iranian culture and Islamic society. It must be replaced entirely."[20]

The next Minister of Education was Ayatollah Ba-Honar, a clergyman with a doctorate in theology from Tehran University. He had also received part of his religious education at Huzehi Elmiieh (Islamic University) in the City of Qom. His general view on Iranian education was that, "in connection with education we are going to educate human beings with the exalted values of Islam."[21]

At that time, American influence on Iranian education was under attack and to some degree this trend continues today. It may well be that many elements of the modernization and westernization of Iranian education during the last one hundred fifty years could be eliminated. But accomplishing such a complete turnabout seems unlikely in the long run.

After all, Islam itself is also a borrowed heritage that has often been in tension with older, indigenous Iranian cultural values. A large portion of the present Iranian intellectual elite has been prepared in western, often American style, institutions of learning. In order to be an agent of change in Iran, religious-political leadership groups must develop an ideology whereby modernization and scientific inquiry will no longer be regarded as foreign to Iranian culture. The need is for a truly indigenous approach to education that is no longer simply a patchwork of borrowed ideas and methods from other nations. Considering that Western education has had at least three generations during which to blend with the three thousand year tradition of Iranian culture and the great heritage of Islamic civilization, it seems possible that out of the present crisis a new educational paradigm may emerge that does not reject contemporary technology in order to preserve basic Iranian values.

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