

Iranian Perspectives on Communication in an Age of Globalization

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Abstract

Though much research is being conducted on Chinese and Asian communication, one area that has not received much attention in communication research is the Middle East, and more specifically, Iran. Iran is one of the leading nations in the Middle East region that has a culturally-rich history and civilization. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the state of the intercultural communication discipline in Iran and some of the recent thinking and writing in Iran that command the attention of scholars in intercultural communication. The movement in the University of Tehran, led by Dr. Saied Reza Ameli, toward the study of intercultural communication and globalization is examined for its impact on transforming Islamic identity. Ameli's research on cultural policy formation and cultural duality formation is also examined. The conclusion is that the efforts being made in Iran by Iranian scholars should be studied more and understood better by communication scholars so that research theory and practice in that country can take their rightful place in the globalization of communication study.

Keywords: Iran, intercultural communication, globalization, Professor Saied Reza Ameli, cultural identity, cultural policy, cultural duality, cyberspace, research in Iran

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe selected elements in the movement in Iran toward the study of intercultural communication and the consequences of globalization on communication from that country's perspective. Iran has not received enough attention in the study of intercultural communication. It has one of the most historic and rich cultures in the Middle East region. What motivates my study is a personal connection with Iran that goes back 35 years when early in my career I served a three-year term as president of Damavand College in Tehran, a liberal arts college for women, emphasizing cross-cultural studies.

Life is a personal journey. My journey began in the U.S. and took me to many places throughout the world, but two places that had a major impact on me and my research were Iran and China where I spent considerable time living and teaching.

These two countries have a special historical connection. In 2011, exactly a hundred years ago, an important event occurred in Guangzhou that changed China for generations to come. And also in 2011 exactly a hundred years ago in the country of Iran likewise a nation-shaking event occurred that changed that country for generations to come. And in the United States exactly 150 years ago, a nation-shaking event occurred that affected that nation for

generations. I refer to a national revolution in each case that sought freedom for the people from an entrenched tyranny.

In China, it was the 1911 Chinese Revolution initiated by Sun Yat-sen and others that overthrew the feudalism and imperialism of the Qing Dynasty (Xiao, 2000, p. 165). In Iran, it was the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution when Mozzafar-al-din Shah Qajar decreed a constitutional monarchy that marked the overthrow of the previous imperialism of the Qajar Dynasty (Nashat, 1983, p. 21). In the U.S., it was the 1861 freedom revolution (called The Civil War) led by Abraham Lincoln that overthrew the feudalism of the Slavery Dynasty. In all three cases, among other things, it was the rhetoric of “rendao” that led to the military overthrow of the previous dynasty. What do I mean by “rendao”? I take it from two Chinese words—“ren” and “dao”. “Ren” means “human” and “dao” means “way.” So “rendao” means the “human way” or the process of humanization — making society more human (Zhang, 2010). I’ll come back to this later in the paper.

With some exceptions, there are few studies in our journals or books on what is happening in communication study in Iran. There is a movement in Iran toward advanced study of intercultural communication that emphasizes research in cultural values, in communication practices, and in the development of communication theory in the Iranian context. Just as in the cases of Japan, China, Europe, and Africa, where researchers have been exploring in the last two or three decades the theories of communication indigenous to those geographical areas, so now there is and has been a developing interest in Iran in research in intercultural communication.

To highlight what is happening in Iran, I want to describe my findings with regard to the research on communication by one of the most prolific Iranian scholars in intercultural communication. His name is Professor Saied Reza Ameli at the University of Tehran. To help prepare us for understanding Professor Ameli’s work, I first describe the state of the intercultural discipline within Iran. I came to an understanding of this through my association and collaboration with one of his doctoral students, Mr. Ehsan Shaghasemi, who has been and is working with me on a number of communication research projects. He assembled the information about the discipline of communication and its development in Iran in response to a questionnaire that I sent him in 2010 (Shaghasemi, 2010a).

The State of the Intercultural Communication Discipline within Iran

There are numerous professional organizations in Iran for the study of communication, but they are not very active due to financial limitations. The most active one is the Iranian Association for Cultural Studies and Communication with headquarters at the University of Tehran. It meets every three months. This Iranian association publishes a quarterly journal, begun in 2005, called *Quarterly Journal of Association for Cultural Studies & Communication*. Another journal published with an Iranian focus is *Global Media Journal* published at Purdue University with a Farsi edition edited by two professors at the University of Tehran.

Another association is The Iranian Association for Studies in Information Society devoted to studying Iranian cyberspace. Members of its board are Professors Kazem Motamed Nejad, Shahiindokht Kharazmi, Younes Shokrkah and Mehdi Mohsenian Rad. Related to this is the Center of Cyberspace Studies in the Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran which

studies Iranian cyberspace. Professor Saied Reza Ameli, whom I will discuss at length, is the founder of this center. Shaghasemi (2010a) says, “This center has accomplished several projects on virtual cities, virtual services, cybercultures, and dual spaced cyber interactions. Almost all people working here are alumni of University of Tehran.”

In addition to professional associations there are several institutes devoted to the study of media and culture. One is the Institute for Social and Cultural Studies which is directed by the Iranian Ministry of Science. Another is The Bureau of Media Studies and Planning, established about 20 years ago to cover communication and media studies issues.

Mr. Shaghasemi (2010a) reports that there are several primary books in Farsi on Iranian communication. The following titles are the translated titles in English, but the volumes themselves are in Farsi. The first is *Law of the Press* by Professor Kezem Motamed Nejad who is also known as the father of the Iranian Communications. Professor Motamed Nejad is a distinguished professor in the Faculty of Communications at Allameh University. A second book on communication by an Iranian scholar is *Communicology* by Professor Mehdi Mohsenian Rad from Imam Sadegh University. A third is *Electronic Public Relations* by Professor Saied Reza Ameli of the University of Tehran. A fourth is *Cultural Studies, Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life in Iran* by Professor Abbas Kazemi, a young professor at the University of Tehran. All of these books focus on the communication theory and practice in Iran.

Mr. Shaghasemi says that one of the most important volumes on Iranian intercultural communication, which is in English, is the one I have selected to discuss at length because of its importance for the intercultural communication field. But before examining it, I want to share information which he has supplied about the departments of communication in Iran (Shaghasemi, 2010a).

The largest department of communication is at Allameh Tabatabaei University which has 600 B.A. students, 120 M.A., and 47 Ph.D. students with over 10 faculty members. Next in size is the University of Tehran which is considered the top university department with an emphasis in intercultural communication. This department was established 15 years ago and has 200 B.A. students, and 50 M.A. and seven Ph.D. students with over eight faculty with guest professors assisting from time to time. It has an emphasis in Media and Culture. The University of Tehran and Imam Sadegh University are the two main universities offering intercultural communication.

The University of Tehran’s Department of Communications, which is sometimes called the Department of Social Communication Studies, is the leading department in Iran for studying intercultural communication. Professor Saied Reza Ameli has been supervisor of eight theses and advisor to six theses in intercultural communication since 2004 and has been doing his own research for some time. The Department offers two tracks: Communication and Cultural Studies. It offers a graduate course in Intercultural Communication Studies taught by Professor Ameli. Professor Ameli also teaches a course on Cybercultures for Ph.D. students in which a part is devoted to intercultural communication on the Internet. The department has been trying to establish a course on “intercultural communication in cyberspace” for Ph.D. students. This proposal is waiting for final approval. Professor Masoud Kousari in the department teaches a course entitled “intercultural communications” for B.A. students. Professor Mehdi Mohsenian Rad from Imam Sadegh Universities teaches a course on intercultural communication at the

University of Tehran as a guest professor in the Department of Sociology for Ph.D. students in the Social Problems major (Shaghasemi, 2010b).

Emphasizing the important role that this university department is playing in Iranian communication, I report some of the research projects by students in Professor Ameli's department. One is an M.A. thesis, titled, "Intercultural Communication between Iran and the United States." In her thesis, Farnaz Namvar (2009) applied different theories of intercultural communication, such as schemata and cultural sensitivity. She found that Americans were more negative about Iranians and Iranians were more positive about Americans. Miss Namvar is now a researcher in the Center of Cyberspace Studies in the Faculty of World Studies at Tehran University and is now studying, among other things, what it is that Iranians think constitutes characteristics of civilization.

Another research project explores cultural values and beliefs in Iran. It involves the analysis of five trajectories in the cross cultural schemata students at Tehran University have of transsexuals. This one has been done by Hosna Masoumi, a graduate student in the department. She is involved in another intercultural study on sexual identification and immigration. She writes, "I am trying to focus on this phenomenon regarding intercultural communications' definitions in this research because I can find a blank space of such issues among intercultural communications' researches" (Masoumi, 2009).

Another Iranian colleague, Goudarz Mirani, is a graduate student in the department who has assisted with, "Iranians and Americans: Beyond the Media Construct" (Shaghasemi, Heisey & Mirani, 2009). He presented this paper at an international conference in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and it was also presented in the U.S. and is under review for publication. This study reviews the considerable research that has been done on Iranian and American perceptions of each other.

My colleague, Ehsan Shaghasemi, is a Ph.D. student and researcher in the Tehran University department. He is a member of the International Academy for Intercultural Research and has completed and published numerous studies in intercultural communication. One that was published in *Intercultural Communication Studies* is "The cross-cultural schemata of Iranian-American people toward each other: A qualitative approach" (Shaghasemi & Heisey, 2009). This is one that we completed together. He presented the paper at the IAICS conference in 2009 in Beijing. The study finds that Iranians are three times more positive in their perceptions of Americans and that Americans are twice as negative in their perceptions of Iranians. What we found was that the media are perceived to be the primary source for both positive and negative perceptions for both groups.

Mr. Shaghasemi (2009) also edited an interview with me on "Ethnic Differences in Iran" which he published in a Farsi journal, *Farasoo* [Beyond] where he serves as one of the editors. Mr. Shaghasemi has also published in Persian in *Global Media Journal* a study on the consequences of internet-based relationships of Iranian users of the Internet (Shaghasemi, 2006).

Mr. Shaghasemi is also conducting studies on the communication dimensions of the Iranian blogosphere. Shaghasemi's study (2010c), "The image of the Other: Cross-cultural schemata Iranian bloggers have of American people," was presented at the International Communication and Media Conference 2010 in Malacca, Malaysia. His qualitative analysis of 1500 Persian

weblogs in four main blog service tools showed that the election of Obama as U.S president has affected Iranian bloggers more than any other issue regarding the American people.

The Intercultural Communication Work by Professor Ameli

One of the most prolific scholars in Iran today in intercultural communication is Professor Saied Reza Ameli. He has an outstanding educational background that has prepared him well for his work. He graduated from John F. Kennedy High School in the U.S. in 1977 and then studied for but did not complete his B.A. degree in engineering mechanics from the University of Sacramento from 1977 to 1979. In 1982-1994, he studied reason and philosophy in an Islamic seminary. During part of this same time, he studied the social sciences and received his B.A. degree in 1994 at the University of Tehran. And in 1995 he received the MA in Sociology of Communications at the University of Dublin. In 2001 he was awarded the Ph.D. in the Sociology of Communications from the University of Royal Holloway of London (Ameli, 2010c).

Positions he has held include 1997-2005, founder and member of the Regents Board of the Islamic College of Advanced Studies in London, 1997-1999 founder and Dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies in London, 1997- founder and member of the Regents Board of the Islamic Commission of Human Rights in London, 2002- member of the International Committee of Global Studies in London, 2001- faculty member in the Department of Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran, 2004-2008 founder and Dean of the Institute for North American and European Studies, University of Tehran, 2006- Research member of the Department of American and Canadian Studies, University of Birmingham, 2008- founder and Dean of the Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, 2008- Vice President of Policy and Planning, University of Tehran. We can see from this background of training and educational experience that he has high credibility for doing research in intercultural communication and is as well highly placed within the administrative structure of important institutes, faculties, and in the University of Tehran (Ameli, 2010c).

Professor Ameli's publications are too numerous to mention here, but he is widely known in Iran and Britain for his work on globalization, cultural studies, virtual studies and identity studies. He has published seven books in English and eight books in Persian on topics in communication and culture. He published in 2003 a presentation for the Islamic Human Rights Commission called, "Globalization, Ideological Democracy and Islamophobia" (Ameli, 2010c). He has written other work on Eurocentrism and islamophobia. However, his most important book is *Globalization, Americanization, and British Muslim Identity* in 2002, which I have reviewed elsewhere (Heisey, 2011). In this volume, Ameli argues that globalization has had a significant impact on the formation of personal and collective identity for Muslim people in Britain. His main concern is "the impact of globalization on British Muslim identity, i.e. on the identity of Muslims born and brought up in Britain" (Ameli, 2002, p. 17).

Professor Ameli's work falls into three areas of emphasis. One is the concept of cultural identity formation. A second is the concept of cultural policy formation. A third is the concept of cultural duality formation.

Cultural Identity Formation

For communication scholars, his book is of considerable interest for the careful analysis of the characteristics of globalization and the cultural theoretical models upon which his research is based. It is an empirical study that reports the data he found in a selected town (the London Borough of Brent) in England regarding the Muslim citizens and their views of their beliefs and their lives as to what their identities are. He found that two paradoxical responses occurred.

Two simultaneous processes are taking place in this community as a result of globalization impacting their British Muslim identity. Ameli argues, “One of the central, if paradoxical themes of globalization, is the generation of two simultaneous processes, heterogenization, which has produced the fragmentation of identities, and homogenization, which has created domination by Western culture, in particular American culture, all over the world” (Ameli, 2002, p. 226). The development of these processes of homogeneity and heterogeneity is similar to the findings in the intercultural literature where globalization is seen to be creating a tension between these two forces. Chuang claims that a “central problem of globalization is the dialectic tension between homogenization and heterogenization” (Chuang, 2000, p. 19).

From his findings, and adapted from Castells’ (2004) classification, Ameli identifies three different categories of Muslim identity. The first response to globalization is “resistance identity” which includes those persons who are traditionalists, Islamists and nationalists (Ameli, 2002, p. 271), or “if their ties to home culture are very strong” (Ameli, 2010b). The second group consists of those who have “legitimizing identity” which results from adequate adaptation within the norms of the host culture, a Western society (Ameli, 2002, p. 271), or from a “positive response to dominant norms and values” (Ameli, 2010b). The third group has a “projective identity” which has two subgroups: a hybrid identity that inclines toward both the original culture and the new culture and the “undetermined identity” that rejects both cultures (p. 272). The important point, he says, is that “minorities do not have similar characters, [so] it depends to what extent they are attached to the home culture and host culture” (Ameli, 2010b).

Ameli concludes in his extensive study, “Therefore this interaction has created a new ‘glocal’ culture, the specific nature of which can only be assessed through close analysis of the particularities of the local culture in its concrete relationship with global forces – and not all global forces, but those which have a particular, discernible impact on the local cultural situation” (Ameli, 2002, p. 273). This means, Ameli argues, “the absolutism of religious truth has to some extent given way to a more pluralistic concept of religious values,” while “the social and political dimensions of the globalization process, together with the domestic sociocultural parameters, have clearly had a significant impact on religious identity, creating a reactionary resistance to ‘glocal forces’, as they are perceived as inherently Western, and therefore they result in an intensification of religiopolitical identity” (p. 276).

Ameli hopes in his research “to have formulated at least a preliminary typology of British Muslim identity that accurately reflects the diversity and fluidity of the perceptions that Muslims have of themselves, their religion, their environment – both local and global, hence *glocal* – and the complex interplay between all these factors” (Ameli, 2002, p. 288). This is an important study disclosing the dimensions of a cultural identity in a local community that represents a religious culture in a democratic state. It provides another perspective on identity formation that

represents the Islamic response to globalization. In this way, Ameli, as an Iranian scholar, adds to our understanding of what identity consists of and what its dimensions are. This confirms Guo-Ming Chen's argument that identity is a concept that takes on different forms depending on what the philosophical and experiential backgrounds are of the person or community. Based on one's philosophy, there is "an alternative view of the self and the identity" (Chen, 2009, p. 114). In the same way that Chen says the Buddhist, or Taoist, or other religious orientation provides a view of identity, so Ameli says the Islamic religion provides an alternative view of identity.

Thomas McElwin (2009) of the University of Stockholm says of the Ameli book,

"Saied Ameli contributes to the honing and refining of a concept that has been increasingly shown to be fluid at least in the post-modern era. A realistic grasp of identity in the post-modern, multi-cultural situation that is the focus of this study is bound to be complex." McElwin says further, "It goes beyond definite contributions in definition and methodology, and the synthesis of many major contributions to the study of globalization in previous works. It challenges Americans and the world to take an objective look at what Americanization is and must be in the light of the inexorable forces that history has to bear upon it. To answer that challenge is to rise above the level of sloganeering and self-deception that too often mar our perceptions of the impact of politics and economics on society, culture and religion." McElwin says that the book is "worthy of perusal by sociologists, anthropologists, historians of religion, and any interested in the interrelations between religion and society." I am arguing that scholars in communication and especially in intercultural communication would also find this book worthy of close study as it has implications for intercultural communication beyond the Muslim context.

Cultural Policy Formation

A related area of intercultural research that Ameli, along with colleagues, has published by the Islamic Human Rights Commission in England is the series of six volumes between 2004 and 2007 reporting the results of quantitative and qualitative studies on the views of Muslims living in Britain about their identity, their image, and their treatment by the media and the government as minorities in a democratic society. They examined 1125 responses to a questionnaire and the responses from 52 personal interviews of Muslims living in various cities within the UK. They included a range of respondents in age, education, gender, and economic class. They studied their views on dual citizenship, social discrimination, secular vs. Islamic education, the meaning of the *hijab*, the rule of law, and the representation of Muslims by the media. In all these case studies, the researchers addressed the issues of what policies in British society needed to be considered for the protection and growth of the Muslim citizens.

The strength of these studies is in the intercultural approach taken and the comprehensive nature of the investigation in looking at the topics as seen in the literature as well as the results of their extensive array of questions on numerous topics related to their perceptions of the consequences of living in a majority culture. Each volume ends with the views of leading citizens on the given topic and a list of recommendations for the British government to consider at the policy level as a result of the findings.

I'll briefly mention the essence of just three of the volumes. In the study of the meaning of the

hijab, they found that there were numerous meanings given by respondents, such as protection, liberalization, identity, empowerment, piety and obligation. However, they conclude, “one of the most significant findings here was the articulation of the idea of Hijab as a ... genderless concept that requires different but equally significant manifestations between genders for the purpose of exterior social harmony and interior spiritual humility” (Ameli & Mirali, 2006, p. 22). Ameli’s research into the cultural meaning of a religious practice opens further our understanding of identity formation in intercultural communication as well as the implications for policy formation in the larger society regarding the wearing of the *hijab*.

A second study deals with education policy in England as it relates to the Muslim minority. The study connects with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (quoted in Ameli, Azam & Mirali, 2005, p. 8). The research “seeks to tease out the positive implications for these rights, not simply as a tool to promote the desires of parents of minority faith communities, but as part of a discourse of duality that we argue is inherent in the British Muslim psyche and which is of essential and positive benefit to society as a whole” (p. 8). The conclusion of their research on education policy in Britain for Muslims is: “Muslim schools strive to renew a culture of spirituality, virtue and service to the common good in an increasingly materialist and individualistic global market. The existence of Muslim schools constitutes part of the religious critique of the secular without which both culture and freedom would be diminished” (p. 71). One of the many recommendations of the research on education is that the government should modify the national curriculum and in so doing open it up for dialogue on the role of faith and religion in society (p. 76).

The other study to be mentioned here is the representation of Muslims in the British media. Ameli, et al., (2007) found that “the media is one of the main factors which cause social discrimination” against Muslims. In a statement that has considerable import for intercultural communication, they conclude: “The prevalence of domination in the discourse prejudiced demonisation regardless of intention, and this is of great significance in that demonisation as an ideology no longer needs to be the result of a conspiracy or project or the accumulation of deliberate malice – domination of the majority now necessarily means demonisation of the minority Other” (Ameli, et al., 2007, p. 34). In a conclusion that affects policy formation regarding the treatment of minorities, they found, “All the respondents unanimously pointed to the media as being the chief instrument of Islamophobia” (p. 64).

Not only in the media, but in academic circles, objectivity toward Islam leaves something to be desired. Ameli found in his recent research that scholars in the West have examined Islam and its history in inaccurate fashion. He says, “...only a marginal number of them [studies] (947 out of 9089) have, away from historical prejudices and scientific enslavement, tried to present Islam as it truly is and to understand diversity among Muslims and their identities, free from a common will to oversimplify and generalize” (Ameli, 2010a, p. 13).

Another Iranian scholar has written on the identity crisis as it has been impacted by the media. Babran (2008) argues that to respond adequately to the challenge of the dominating culture, “developing societies must come up with reasonable and practical solutions to this problem and not only preserve and protect their identity, but also provide means to integrate into the globalization process” (p. 219).

Ameli's research on British policy on minorities adds to our understanding that we have from how other societies have handled the situation. Globalization has pressured many cultures to respond to the protection of minorities within their borders. Immigration in the US has caused problems in Arizona and other places where people are reacting to how laws should be formulated to protect or otherwise treat minorities. China, for example, has had to deal with this problem since the founding of the People's Republic. Heisey (2005) argues that China is striving for the ideal response by "treating the minorities with special negotiation by law in allowing and encouraging their indigenous development and their cultural preservation" (p. 33).

These studies produced by the Islamic Human Rights Commission of London are important in increasing awareness of the perceived dimensions of the Islamic culture, Islamic identity, and the implications for policy making in a democratic society. These dimensions include the perception that, according to Ameli, "Democracy becomes a tool of soft power and a good and acceptable excuse for legitimization of war against poor and oppressed societies such as Iraq and Afghanistan" (Ameli, 2010b).

Cultural Duality Formation

A third area of Professor Ameli's research is the fascinating study of the role of cyberspace in making "a bridge between reality and virtuality." In a major study (2009) published in the *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* called, "Virtual Religion and the Duality of Religious Spaces," Ameli says, "...so one can argue that by the emergence of a new, virtual world, we are now experiencing new levels of modernity which is a combination of virtual modernity and physical modernity or one can call it 'viphysical modernity' or 'vireal religion'" (p. 210).

Ameli develops three kinds of virtual religion. They consist, first, of "their kind of presence" in virtual space. Second is "the form of their presence" in the virtual community which does not require face-to-face interaction, but can be a "general image of a collective identity" (Ameli, 2009, p. 218). Third is "the purpose of their presence" which includes different "vireal identities" (p. 219). Ameli says that moving from place to space can evolve into a "ubiquitous religion," one that is "present everywhere" and "is accessible from everywhere" (p. 220). He concludes, "The virtual space overcomes the limitation of time and place, and makes parallel interaction possible, since religiosity in different places and times comes true for religious people, and the noted limitation would be minimized or removed" (p. 221).

What is significant for intercultural communication is that this line of research, as Ameli argues, — this dual globalization of the real and the virtual — has the potential for "the development of global exclusivism and inclusivism for the domination or inclusion of a particular ideology or religion" which can help bring about more tolerance. He continues,

In other words, the marginalization of social factors like ethnicity, race and even gender differentiation would allow the related factors of "religious context" to reinforce "common value" internally among the followers of a particular religion. However, this can play an important role to empower the toleration of differences and even bring an influential resolution for conflicts and serious challenges. So, world society will witness a strength of consciousness and a weakness of dogmatism. Here, universal values which are the common denominators of

divine religions would emerge — values such as combating oppression, and advocating social justice in social movements like combating the destruction of the environment, advocating global peace and campaigning against war. (Ameli, 2009, pp. 227, 228)

Ameli says that the universal values are what we should advocate and this does not include war. Ameli adds, “We cannot create goodness by bad behavior, we cannot [impose] culturalized democracy by war” (Ameli, 2010b).

Ameli has also written about the impact of considering virtual reality on geography which has implications for intercultural communication. He is interested in studying the role of virtual time and virtual space on the process of communication, on the geography of cities and cultures, as well as on the practice of religion. For example, he says, “If we pay attention to the capacities of virtual space, we realize that ‘movement’ in virtual space takes place within the logic of soul and thought, not the logic of matter. Just as soul, mind, and thought have the power of slicing and going through the ‘wall of time,’ so in virtual space we face a fluid, dynamic current, freed from the tyranny of time and place” (Ameli, “Duality of time: Physical and Virtual Time: Building of historical parallel cities,” TBP-to be published).

He continues, “The most important functional difference between physical Iran and virtual Iran is the variable of time. Virtual time is faster, geometrical, and ubiquitous. In fact in virtual space we encounter the compression and density of time. On the other hand in virtual space time escapes the linear course, thus giving us a kind of ‘geometrical interaction of time’ in which past, present, and future are juxtaposed and in a sense time gains the flexibility of spirit. This flexibility has very serious cultural, economic, and political consequences” (Ameli, TBP). One of the most important of these is, according to Ameli, that “This evolution is the beginning of geo-globalization of the individual” (Ameli, TBP). We see from Professor Ameli’s work that if we can engage virtual time, space, and cities, we can do so with virtual cultures and virtual communications. This second virtual world has the potential of unlimited possibilities in imaging, in connecting with others, and in creating a reality of our own making.

Ameli’s application of the concept of virtual religion and virtual time and space in the duality of virtual and real reality is prompted by globalization. Ameli says of it, “Dual Globalization is a very comprehensive paradigm to explain cause and method of an approach to the reality of society and to instruct for a safe and healthy society” (Ameli, 2010b).

Perhaps his “vireal” duality brings us back to where I started with the Chinese concept of “rendao” — the humanizing way. This application of the duality concept to the process of intercultural communication suggests that it is possible for “cultural differences to be marginalized” and “cultural common values to be essentialized,” to use Ameli’s terms. He sees in the future that “This development would occur in the religious domain as well as in political, cultural and economic domains” (Ameli, 2009, p. 228). He concludes that “second space is not only internet environment but also before that it is about space of mind. As the Iranian poet Sa’di of Shiraz said:

Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,

Other members uneasy will remain.
 If you have no sympathy for human pain,
 The name of human you cannot retain.” (quoted in Ameli, 2010b)

This Iranian poetic expression captures the Chinese concept of *rendao*—the humanizing way and the Taoist notion of wholeness and interconnectedness.

Ameli is making an impact on several fronts in the study of intercultural communication in the Iranian context. Ameli’s Muslim identity studies, the Muslim policy studies, and the cyberspace studies all demonstrate the impact of globalization on Iranian communication.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to provide an overview of the scholarly activity going on in Iran in the area of intercultural communication that may not be well known outside the country. Professor Ameli’s work in cultural identity formation, cultural policy formation, and in cultural duality formation commands our attention if we want to be informed of the research in intercultural communication in Iran. In his most recent work, he argues for a “polycentric” approach to the study of culture and civilizations. He says, “Polycentrism...focuses on commonalities, avoids value judgments, and dismisses power hierarchies. Polycentrism promotes peace and respect among civilizations,... opposes assimilation and cultural imposition and favours communication and dialogue” (Ameli, 2010a, p.2). What interests me about this research is the independent character it possesses, remaining true to Iran’s own history and Islamic orientation, and the concern it has for making the spiritual dimension of one’s identity both individually and collectively a matter of greater importance than is often given in the West.

It has been my purpose here to highlight the nature of this research so as to interest other scholars in probing deeper into the study of communication with an Iranian perspective. This will enrich the broader understanding of cultures in this age of globalization. More research collaboration between Iranian and Western scholars would be a valuable direction for increasing this understanding. The author intends to continue the collaboration already under way with his Iranian colleagues.

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