Research Article

Capabilities and Shortcomings of Different Approaches to Western Studies: Towards a Phenomenological Model

Hadi Salehi[1], Mohammad Ali Tavana[2*], Alam Saleh[3]

1. Assistant Professor of Public Law, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
2. Associate Professor of Political Sciences, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
3. Associate Professor of Middle East Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

Abstract

Any encounter with a phenomenon is inherently accompanied by a theoretical approach that unconsciously influences various aspects of understanding the subject. This means that the conscious or unconscious application of a theoretical approach impacts the entire cognitive process. Theoretical approaches to understanding the West are no exception to this rule. However, what capabilities and shortcomings does each of these approaches possess? Broadly speaking, three common approaches to understanding the West can be distinguished: Western-centric, anti-Western, and indigenous. In the Western-centric approach, indigenous lived experience is often either underestimated or analysed under the rubric of Western-constructed ideologies and their inherent dualistic oppositions. The anti-Western approach has either utilised concepts generated within its own tradition, which usually leads to hermetic thinking (closed-mindedness)

* Corresponding author: E-mail address: tavana.mohammad@yahoo.com

in understanding the West, or it has fundamentally employed parts of Western thought to critique the West, generally adopting a selective stance. Thinkers who have adopted the indigenous approach have also typically reconstructed and refined their concepts and ideas in engagement with other concepts and ideas (i.e., those from the West). Based on this premise, the present article seeks to reconstruct the indigenous approach based on a phenomenological model.

Keywords: Iranian thinkers, Western studies, Westernism, Anti-Westernism, Nativism, Anti-essentialism.

Introduction

All knowledge is intertwined with a theoretical approach. Specifically, a theoretical approach refers to a set of mindsets, ideas, and assumptions that are themselves constructed within a socio-historical context, enabling the knowing subject to connect with the object. This means that the theoretical approach of thinkers influences the understanding of a phenomenon (the object) and unconsciously guides the research path. In essence, approaches determine how we engage with phenomena. Like paradigms, approaches are not only historically situated but also generally derive their assumptions and presuppositions from the prevailing social and psychological milieu of researchers (Kuhn, 2014: 38). On that basis, they define the boundaries of legitimate science (normal science) and illegitimate science (pseudoscience or non-science) (Kuhn, 2014: 39-40). Based on this, what image of the West, and of our relationship with it, do theoretical approaches to Western studies present?

Broadly speaking, three approaches can be considered as types of engagement with the West: Western-centrism, anti-Westernism, and critical approaches. What capabilities and shortcomings does each of these approaches possess in understanding the West? This article will delve into the ontological and epistemological assumptions of each of these approaches and analyse their logical consequences.

Is an objective understanding of the West possible? What is objective understanding fundamentally? Objectivity is the most crucial criterion for knowledge in modern science (Trigg, 2007: 43). There is no single definition of objectivity, and each methodology defines it in terms of specific characteristics tailored to its perspective. For instance, while according to the positivist paradigm, objectivity means an external, observable (verifiable) phenomenon (Benton & Craib, 2010: 39), in the falsificationist paradigm, objectivity means the falsifiability of ingenious conjectures, or more precisely, determining counter-instances and evidence that can refute a hypothesis (Popper, 2018: 88). In the interpretive paradigm, objectivity means the intelligibility of the claims and reasons put forth by the researcher (Fay, 2004: 287). Drawing inspiration from the interpretive paradigm, this article identifies two fundamental

characteristics for objective understanding: 1) intersubjectivity, and 2) criticizability.

Based on this, objective understanding is a process in which the researcher transparently articulates their dependencies, attachments, presuppositions, and ideas, exposes them to the critique of others, and is prepared to accept the strengths of others' viewpoints and the weaknesses of their own (Fay, 2004: 302-303). Thus, in this sense, objectivity means clarifying one's assumptions, expressing them intelligibly to others, being open to other ideas, and being ready to revise them. The present article, by leveraging an intersubjective perspective and employing a phenomenological methodological model, seeks a path towards an objective understanding of the West. To this end, it critiques the assumptions of each common approach and then proposes an alternative.

1. Literature Review

Most works dedicated to Western studies have focused on the manner of engagement with the West or on its consequences. Examples include "Approaches to Western Studies in Secular Intellectuals and Religious Science" (2005) and Mosleh's "Preliminaries for Western Studies." However, the analysis of Western studies from a methodological and theoretical approach perspective has been less common. Nevertheless, there are works on this topic. For instance, Taheri and Hemmati, in their article "An Introduction to Approaches to Western Studies in Iran" (2021), categorise approaches to Western studies among Iranians into imitative (Western-centric), interactive, and confrontational. In their view, essentialism, inflationism (understanding and critiquing based on Western concepts and ideologies), and affirmationism are the most significant pitfalls in Iranian thinkers' understanding of the West. However, they do not offer any alternative solutions.

Darzi, in "Interdisciplinarity in Western Studies: Nature and Types" (2020), critiques the mechanical perspective based on the separation of self/other in understanding the West and proposes an interdisciplinary approach as a solution. Darzi divides the interdisciplinary approach to Western studies into two categories: critical and theoretical. He notes that text-centrism, history-centrism,

and bias are the main criticisms levelled against the necessary approach. In contrast, he considers the theoretical interdisciplinary approach more suitable for understanding the West because it utilises case studies rather than broad, imprecise generalisations and relies on dialectical conceptualisation rather than pre-existing stereotypical assumptions.

Rajabi, in "Western Studies: The Beginning of Insight and Inevitable Conceptual Insufficiency" (2019), critiques the dominant approach in Davari Ardakani's book on the West. In his view, while Davari's explication of the concept of the West demonstrates an ontological engagement with the idea, revealing the process of the West's construction within history to avoid the error of equating reality and truth and opening the door to other civilizational possibilities, this project remains incomplete. That is, it has not pursued the implications of its own positive aspects, including setting aside the concept of Western studies and instead using worldliness (jahanmandi). This is because Western studies still assume the West is external to us, whereas in worldliness, the West is part of our internal historical consciousness of the other, and it keeps the future open for other possibilities to replace it.

Abdolkarimi, in "The Necessity of Rethinking Reverse Orientalism" (2015), demonstrates that the logic of Orientalism and reverse Orientalism is the same. This means that Orientalism is an egocentric and Eurocentric movement, while reverse Orientalism is a power-centric and totalitarian movement, both built upon political and ideological conflicts. From Abdolkarimi's perspective, transcending Orientalism requires liberation from resentment and naive indigenisation of sciences on the one hand, and a phenomenological engagement with human historical traditions, including Western civilisation, on the other.

Bakhshandeh, in "The Encounter of Muslim Intellectuals with Modernity and its Impact on the Concept of Western Studies in Iran" (2013), argues that Western studies, unlike Orientalism, is not a confrontational discourse on the web of the West, but rather a natural reaction to resistance against Western dominance on the one hand and the preservation of indigenous identity on the other.

Kachouian, in his book "Studies of Modernity and Western Studies" (2011), while distinguishing Western studies from studies of

modernity, shows that most works written about understanding the West are studies of modernity, not Western studies. This is because, using the tools of Western humanities as products of the modern era, they represent the very characteristics that the West has portrayed of itself. Such a process hinders Western studies. To move beyond such a perspective, there is a primary need for an indigenous science, and only then can an image of the West as a distinct, not universal, civilisation emerge. However, this work falls within the discourse of Orientalism, which the present article endeavours to transcend.

2. Western-Centric Approach

The Western-centric approach to understanding the West can be defined as utilising assumptions, concepts, and ideas produced within the Western socio-cultural context. The most crucial assumptions of this approach are:

1. To understand the West, one must employ concepts, ideas, and theories generated by Westerners themselves. In other words, the West should be understood based on Western criteria.
2. Non-Western researchers lack the necessary indigenous concepts, ideas, and theories to understand the West.

According to this approach, to comprehend the West as a whole or one of its existential dimensions, a cognitive framework must be established that reflects the mindsets and actions of Western actors exactly as they understand themselves. In this approach, objective understanding requires a fundamental condition: evidence must be gathered from within the culture, history, and language of Western societies and then analysed based on one of the Western theories.
How can we critique our findings within this approach?

1. Demonstrate a lack of consistency between the ideas and ideals of Western actors and their culture, history, economy, politics, and ideology, as narrated by themselves.
2. Show that the actions taken do not align with the stated goals from the perspective of the same narrative.
3. Reveal that other aspects or pieces of evidence from Western history, culture, society, economy, and politics have been overlooked.

4. Show that the consequences of the actions taken contradict the goals and ideas presented by that approach.

5. Demonstrate that within the same approach, there are other narratives or readings that offer a different portrayal of the West. Firstly, given the existence of diverse narratives within the Western tradition, we can show that various readings of Western history, culture, etc., exist within that very tradition.

This theoretical approach can, however, be shifted towards a more objective (critical-intersubjective) understanding by making some modifications. First, the hidden conceptual model behind this approach must be extracted and then translated into one's own mental model (in an understandable form). This means that non-Western researchers who utilise Western frameworks to describe, explain, interpret, and evaluate Western culture and civilisation must use propositions and concepts that are understandable or at least translatable for other conceptual models.

Furthermore, internal critique should evolve into internal-external critique. Internal critique primarily emphasises the lack of correspondence (inconsistency) between mindsets, actions, and consequences within a specific framework or sub-mental model. At a higher level, it identifies and highlights other paths, choices, mindsets, and actions that could have occurred within the same framework but are absent, emphasising overlooked possibilities within that very framework. Overall, based on the external approach, while objective intersubjective understanding and external critique of the West are not easily achieved, avenues can be found that lead us to new evidence and results.

Additionally, for this purpose, one can draw upon other Western theories that, although different from the framework being used, are both considered internal to the entirety of Western culture-civilisation. For example, an Iranian thinker can employ genealogy or deconstruction to evaluate and critique the historical sociology method, thereby revealing other facets of Western history that have been overlooked within the framework of historical sociology. Of course, these other sub-frameworks must share a minimum commonality with the sub-framework being used; that is, at least some of their concepts must be similar or translatable to each other.

The final point is that it is clear that an "Iranian researcher" can use the mindset and language derived from Western thinkers and ideologies to understand the West, instead of their own lived Muslim experience or Islamic heritage. However, translation, understanding (explanation, interpretation, etc.), and ultimately evaluation and critique of the West based on this external approach largely disregard the lived experience of "Iranians" and diminish the critical power of the Iranian thinker. This is because this approach often justifies or normalises parts of the harsh reality of the West towards the "Iranian researcher."

Orientalism, as a Western conceptual model, pursues a dual objective: 1) the understanding of the East; and 2) the definition or redefinition of Western identity. In other words, in Orientalism, from the perspective of Western tradition, history, and lived human experience, not only is the "other" (the East) invented, but in distinction from this "other," the identity of the "self" (the West) is also constructed. Thus, Orientalism is an external approach for the Iranian thinker; although seemingly a collection of concepts and theories derived from credible and neutral science for understanding the East, it is in reality a method for defining the identity boundaries of the West. Consequently, in Orientalism, the Western researcher not only invents, evaluates, and judges the "other" (the "Oriental") based on their own criteria and presuppositions, but also constructs a superior imaginary identity for themselves by defining specific characteristics for the "Oriental." The result of this phenomenon, according to Edward Said, is the cultural dominance of the West (Said, 2007: 22). This is because the West assumes that the East lacks the necessary cognitive framework for self-understanding, and consequently, Easterners must rely on criteria constructed by the Western researcher to understand themselves. It is evident that this cognitive framework, by creating dualistic oppositions between the self (Western) and the other (Eastern), establishes an unequal relationship between Easterners and Westerners (Said, 2000: 42-45).

3. Anti-Western Approach

Based on the internal approach, a researcher can understand phenomena using their own ideas, mindsets, and conceptual

frameworks. More precisely, according to this approach, the lived experience and values of the Iranian thinker can serve as the primary basis for describing, explaining, interpreting, and evaluating the West. The main assumptions of this perspective can be summarised as follows:

1. The Iranian thinker and their lived experience are at the centre of understanding.
2. The Iranian thinker can pose specific questions relevant to their own situated context.
3. The Iranian thinker can construct their own unique epistemological framework from within their own socio-political-historical context.

Based on this, aspects of the West that have remained hidden from Western actors and researchers, or are considered natural by them, should be analysed and critiqued.

In this approach, objectivity does not mean the conformity of the studied phenomena with a conceptual model produced within the Western cultural tradition, but rather the conformity of those phenomena with the Iranian thinker's conceptual model. Therefore, this approach, like the previous one, lacks intersubjectivity. Furthermore, in this approach, critique means identifying the gap between the goals, values, and actions of the "other" (in this case, the West) and the Iranian thinker's theoretical approach. It is evident that when there is conformity between these two sides, it is considered a virtue, and where there is no conformity, it is considered a flaw.

At first glance, the same logic of initial categorisation governing the external approach can be extended to the internal approach. This means that, at first glance, the internal approach — based on its emphasis on the subjective dimension, the objective dimension, or both — can be divided into interpretive, explanatory, and hybrid (interpretive-explanatory or explanatory-interpretive). Theoretically, there isn't much difficulty for this correspondence; that is, the Iranian thinker can undertake the discovery of the meaning of Western actions and phenomena based on concepts and ideas derived from their Islamic heritage. The fundamental condition is that the Iranian thinker carries out these processes by providing concepts and ideas based on the Islamic tradition. So, superficially, the use of Western

methodological approaches and models does not create a problem. However, there is a fundamental issue in this regard: conventional methodology is almost exclusively a Western product, and the theoretical approach governing it is intertwined with concepts and terms that generally reflect Western mindsets and ideas. Therefore, replacing Western concepts and ideas with Islamic ones is extremely difficult and likely to lead to distortion. In this approach, one is inevitably forced to find equivalents, and equivalency often leads to a reduction of the original meaning.

Another, completely different solution is to utilise indigenous methodological models. This solution also has a fundamental problem: the lack of indigenous methodological models. What are the methodological models that have developed within the Islamic tradition? For example, the methods of Peripatetic (Mashshai), Illuminationist (Ishraqi), or even Transcendent Theosophy (Sadra'i) philosophy; or rationalist and traditionalist theological methods; or even more dynamic jurisprudential methods like the Jawahiri method, etc. To what extent are they suitable, or have they been adapted for understanding the "other" (the West)?[1] Perhaps Ibn Khaldun's historiographical model can be considered one of the exceptions.[2] Based on this methodological model, one must first discover the laws of societal transformation and then, based on those laws, build stable socio-political systems.[3] According to Ibn Khaldun, the most important law for the formation and endurance of societies is 'asabiyyah' (group solidarity) (Ibn Khaldun, 2009: 248; 264; 294-295; 320). Now, the question is whether the concept of 'asabiyyah' as a driving and formative force in Arab societies can be extended to Western societies. Does this process of equivalency from within the Islamic heritage for understanding the existential dimensions of the

---

1. It seems that most uses of these methods require adaptation, and their application in the production of indigenous humanities and social sciences has largely remained at the level of feasibility studies or general reminders.
2. Some consider contemporary new historiography or historical sociology to be inspired by Ibn Khaldun (Manouchehri, 1997: 341; Nassar, 1987: 106-107; Schmidt, 2017: 19 & 45).
3. Of course, Ibn Khaldun's intended model is derived from the example of human life and death (periods of birth, youth, middle age, and finally senility and death) and has been extended to states (Ibn Khaldun, 2009: 324).

'other' (the West) truly conform to reality or not? This is why it can be said that external understanding will lead to more problems than an introverted understanding.

It might be argued that in introverted understanding, concepts and ideas were also initially produced in the West and then gained general application. Yes, but the issue is who produced the first concepts and ideas, and how and through what mechanism were these ideas and concepts generalised, thereby presenting an image of themselves as a superior and authoritative entity? It seems that Western knowledge-producing frameworks have played a fundamental role in this superiority. Perhaps one of the most important actions to address the aforementioned problems and to produce an indigenous conceptual and methodological framework is to employ reverse Orientalism as a methodological model for understanding the self and the other.

Reverse Orientalism should be understood as one of the attempts by non-Western (and specifically Muslim) thinkers to comprehend both themselves and the "other." Reverse Orientalism is, of course, a reaction against Orientalism. It strives to alter the relationship between East and West, aiming to place the "Easterner" in a superior position to the "Westerner." However, Reverse Orientalism takes for granted Orientalism's ontological distinction between "self" and "other" and, on that basis, declares: East and West are two distinct worlds, with different cultures and peoples. Yet, it emphasises that the East must define itself based on its own authentic tradition—not through another's epistemological framework. As a result, Reverse Orientalism attempts to reveal its true standing by showcasing authentic aspects within its own tradition and their absence in the other's tradition (Belqaziz, 2017: 12-16; Boroujerdi, 2008: 26). Thus, Reverse Orientalism asserts that the East must speak for itself, reclaiming this right from the Western researcher, who had acted as the East's spokesperson.

However, Reverse Orientalism makes several fundamental errors:

1. It perpetuates the ontological confrontation between East and West, which is a construct of the Orientalist epistemological framework.
2. It assumes the "self" (Easterner) and the "other" (Westerner) are ahistorical and fixed, overlooking their transformations (Belqaziz, 2017: 56-57).

Therefore, it can be argued that the methodological model of Reverse Orientalism—built upon the subversion of the Orientalist discourse—still views the East through a Western conceptual lens. In this methodological model, the "self" is considered authentic and the "other" inauthentic. Consequently, the "self's" critiques of the "other" generally take the form of undermining the "other" (the West). Ultimately, the image that the "self" constructs of the "other" (the West) typically falls into one of two categories:

1. Optimistic scenario: Only certain aspects and parts of the West are represented, not its entirety (a selective engagement with the West, presenting parts of its reality as the whole). In this scenario, while evidence can indeed be found in the real world to support the presented image, significant parts and aspects of the West remain overlooked.

2. Pessimistic scenario: An imaginary and illusory entity of the West is constructed, generally stemming from the "self's" own mindset regarding the "other."

In both cases, the primary goal is to restore the lost dignity of the "self," and not necessarily to understand the "other" (the West) as it truly is. Overall, Reverse Orientalism is a reaction aimed at preserving the identity of the "self" (Easterner) against the cultural dominance of the "other" (Westerner). However, such a reaction is passive and opens the door to further conflict between the "self" and the "other." It emphasises the differences and specificities of these two worlds, generally ignoring their commonalities, thereby preventing a dialectical relationship from forming between the "self" and the "other."

Nevertheless, this methodological model can be modified to some extent. This means allowing the Muslim researcher to engage with the West based on their diverse experiences and to represent aspects of Western existence and history using their own mindset and language, provided that they accept their perspective as specific, not universal. In other words, they must accept that their Muslim narrative of the West is merely one of many internal and external narratives of the West, and not a complete or universally true narrative of the West as it is. In this understanding, the Iranian thinker must clearly articulate their principles and viewpoints, document their reasoned arguments for such a perspective, and recount them based on their own historical

experience. Crucially, they must remain open to other internal or external narratives of the West. In this sense, it must be accepted that the West is not necessarily holistic, unified, and homogeneous, and that a broad and sweeping characteristic cannot easily be generalised to the West.

Simply put, while such a perspective remains self-centred and represents the internal researcher's perspective on the West, if it accepts other narratives of the West and also exposes its own narrative of the West (or "Wests") to the critique of others, then progress can be made towards a dialectical relationship between the self and the other.
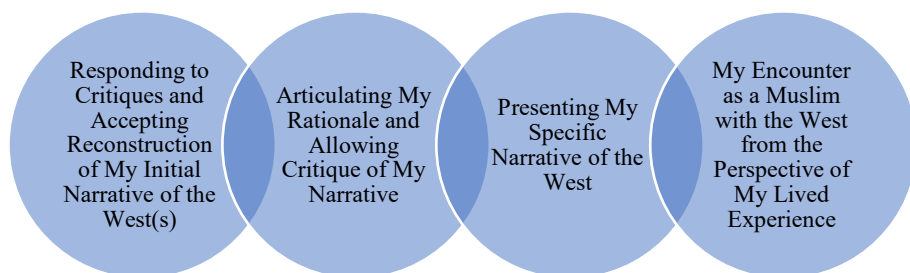
In general, the internal perspective, like the external one, offers a selective understanding of the West. Moreover, political and ideological motivations are strong in this understanding. Despite this, it opens the door for the Iranian thinker (with an Islamic conceptual model) to move towards objective understanding—that is, intersubjective and critical—and to mitigate the shortcomings of their initial perspective. Especially since the Muslim researcher, at least for the purpose of translating (rendering and finding equivalents for) Western phenomena into their own language, needs to step into the mental and linguistic world of the "other," which itself can pave the way for a synthetic (internal-external) perspective.

4. The Third Approach (Indigenous/Contextual) for Understanding the West

Perhaps, based on post-structuralist assumptions, the two previous approaches can be combined to enable objective understanding

(intersubjective and critical). However, the synthetic model also has its own complexities, especially as the Iranian thinker faces a primary practical challenge: the possibility of leaning towards either the internal or external side, which itself leads to a weakening of objectivity. Overall, the most important assumptions of the synthetic perspective can be listed as follows:

1. The West is not a uniform and integrated cultural-social phenomenon; therefore, we are dealing with the Wests (the West in different times and places).
2. Not only are cultural-social worlds numerous and diverse, but one does not necessarily hold superiority over another. This means that the West should be considered simply one of many cultural-social worlds, and not its centre.
3. Societies do not necessarily follow similar historical trajectories. Therefore, the West cannot be considered to be at a more advanced stage of history compared to other societies. Simply put, this perspective accepts that different societies have their own unique histories. This means that the history of the West (or "Wests") is not the inevitable destiny of the non-Western human.
4. To understand the West, it is not necessary to follow only Western theoretical approaches. In other words, valid knowledge is not exclusive to those who use a Western conceptual model; rather, a non-Western theoretical approach can also lead to a valid, documented, and well-reasoned understanding of oneself and the other.
5. Understanding the West is always relative. However, this does not mean that all understandings are of equal value or equally valid, but rather that any understanding of the West is always a narrative from a specific perspective, whose strengths and weaknesses are determined in confrontation with other narratives.
6. A purely internal or external perspective is insufficient for understanding the West. Instead, it is essential to undertake an understanding of the West dialectically (internal-external). For this purpose, one must refer to the history, culture, economy, and politics of the West from the perspective of Westerners themselves, and also draw upon the lived experience of non-Westerners and their relationship with the West. In other words,

one cannot merely rely on Westerners' narratives of themselves; one must also refer to other non-Western narratives.

7. The combined perspective, while simultaneously rejecting one-sided epistemological ideas of self-centrism and other-centrism, places the "self" and the "other" in a dynamic relationship. According to this perspective, the "self" and the "other" not only do not remain unchanged, but are also never closed in on themselves, and they gain identity through interaction with each other. This means that not only should the changes of the "self" and the "other" be considered, but it should also be understood that we are dealing with "selves" and "others" in different historical and geographical moments.

Given these considerations, it seems that the synthetic perspective more readily embraces objectivity, intersubjectivity and criticizability. That is, it accepts that any claim must not only be well-reasoned but also understandable to both oneself and the other. At the same time, every claim must not only be open to critique, but a simultaneous critique of oneself and the other should be an inseparable part of the Iranian thinker's research plan.

However, two main challenges confront the synthetic perspective: one is the issue of openness to the "other," and the other is reaching a shared or at least translatable conceptual model.[1] The solution to the first problem likely lies in accepting the principle of difference, which requires a transition from absolutist ontology and epistemology and, ultimately, cultural tolerance. The solution to the second problem might be the establishment of a dynamic dialectic between the "self" and the "other," which itself necessitates the courage to step outside one's own framework and an initial familiarity with the language, culture, and history of Western societies based on their own narratives.[2]

However, the synthetic model also faces several key challenges. These include: should the synthesis begin with the Muslim researcher's mental framework or with the other's (Western)

---

1. Problems that existed, more or less, in the two previous approaches as well.
2. Although this second point seems to imply circularity, if we consider understanding as a process of exploring an ocean, there is a difference between an initial encounter with the ocean's surface and exploring its depths.

conceptual model?[1] The next challenge is selecting an appropriate methodological model. Given that methodological models are generally Western, the same problems previously raised concerning the external approach also confront the Muslim researcher. It appears that choosing a Western methodological model as a starting point remains the preferred option, at least until effective indigenous methodological models are developed or adapted for understanding the West.[2] Moreover, embarking on a critical dialectical process with these very methodological models can open new avenues. Based on this, the present article asserts that the synthetic model can create multiple methodological models. For instance, the phenomenological methodological model has been selected as an example.

5. Exemplar Methodological Model: Synthetic Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a Western method categorised under the interpretive approach. The present article endeavours to demonstrate, by employing this methodological model, an example of achieving a synthetic perspective at the initial level, namely the conceptual model. Perhaps the phenomenological method can bridge the gap between internal and external models and facilitate objective (critical-intersubjective) understanding.

In its simplest sense, phenomenology, as a methodological model, examines the appearance and manifestation of a phenomenon (Dartigue, 2008: 3). Phenomenology can be divided into three categories: transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology, and hermeneutic phenomenology (Haqiqat, 2006: 294). In transcendental phenomenology, the main question is how the world appears in the knowing mind; or, in other words, how the "knowing subject" becomes conscious of the world (Husserl, 1994: 25). In existential phenomenology, the main question is how beings (existents) are constituted in their encounter with existence (others, self, and the world). According to Heidegger, the issue of this type of

---

1. However, this article suggests beginning the synthesis with the "Muslim researcher's" mental-linguistic framework.
2. While still emphasizing exceptions such as Ibn Khaldun's historical sociological methodological model and the internal capabilities of other indigenous methods like Sadra's dynamic rational-intuitive method.

phenomenology is understanding being-in-the-world (Collins & Selina, 2006: 59). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the main question is how meaning is constructed in the encounter with the "other" (this "other" can be the world of a text or even the self at different historical moments); of course, the discovery of meaning usually leads to a deeper understanding of the self (Grondin, 2014: 94).
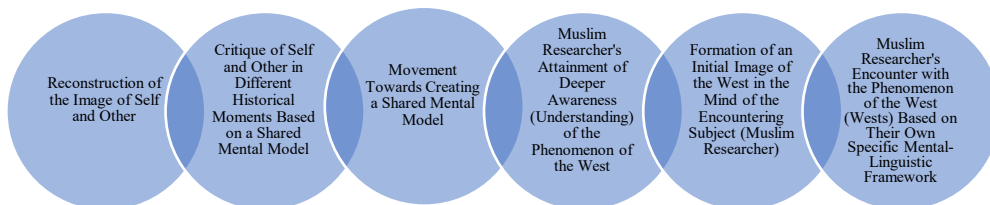
The present article bases its work on Husserlian transcendental phenomenology and attempts, with modifications, to adapt it for internal-external understanding. According to Husserlian phenomenology, understanding a phenomenon involves four main stages:

1. Epoche or, in other words, phenomenological reduction, which means bracketing a phenomenon (Kauser, 2018: 21).
2. Eidetic reduction, which means understanding the actual and real experience of objects as an abstract whole.
3. Discerning the mode of constitution of objects of knowledge in cognition.
4. Intuiting the essences of the phenomenon (Nakhchinikian, 1994: 7-14).

By expanding Husserlian phenomenology, a methodological model can be designed that illustrates the different stages of encounter between the non-Western knowing subject (here, the Muslim researcher) and the phenomenon of the West. According to this model, understanding begins with a dynamic process of encounter and continues with dialectical critique and correction. Based on this model, the encountering subject (as the knowing subject) initially approaches the phenomenon with their own presuppositions. That is, the Iranian thinker encounters the West with a conceptual model derived from their Islamic experience. Immediately upon the Iranian thinker's encounter with the phenomenon of the West, an initial image of the West forms in their mind. As a result of this encounter, some Western ideas and concepts become clearer to them. The Iranian thinker has the right to initially critique the West with their specific assumptions, but this is not the end. In the next stage, they must translate the internal narratives of Westerners about themselves into their own language. As the encounter continues, the Iranian thinker comes to know more aspects of the existential dimensions of the phenomenon of the West, and as a result, their initial image either

becomes clearer or is transformed. This stage is the stage of deeper awareness or understanding. At this same stage, the Muslim researcher judges and evaluates the West. In this stage, the Iranian thinker must transcend their own mental framework and construct a newer mental framework that is, to some extent, shared between the "self" and the "other." It is clear that this framework can be weak or strong; that is, it can have little or much commonality. Then, based on the shared conceptual model, two tasks must be carried out: first, finding the similarities and differences between the "self" (Muslim) and the "other" (West or "Wests"); second, critiquing both the "self" (or the Muslim condition) and the "other" (West or "Wests"). This cycle of encounter between the "self" and the "other" must begin again from the beginning and continue, bringing about changes in the image of the West, the shared conceptual model, and the understanding of both the self and the other. Overall, with each encounter, the initial image construction, the understanding of self and other, and the critique of self and other will likely change and deepen.

The phenomenological methodological model for achieving a synthetic conceptual model can be represented as follows:

Reconstruction of the Image of Self and Other — Critique of Self and Other in Different Historical Moments Based on a Shared Mental Model — Movement Towards Creating a Shared Mental Model — Muslim Researcher's Attainment of Deeper Awareness (Understanding) of the Phenomenon of the West — Formation of an Initial Image of the West in the Mind of the Encountering Subject (Muslim Researcher) — Muslim Researcher's Encounter with the Phenomenon of the West (Wests) Based on Their Own Specific Mental-Linguistic Framework

In this model, the initial question is: with what concepts and mental framework should one approach the West? Are neutral and unbiased concepts and language truly available? In this model, understanding begins from the Iranian thinker's position as the knowing subject. That is, the initial encounter commences with a conceptual model derived from the Islamic heritage, within which the Iranian thinker lives. Naturally, the concepts, ideas, and language that the Iranian thinker employs are dependent on their time, place, and lived experience. However, this is merely the beginning of the journey, not its end.

Instead of falling into the trap of fixed and unchanging assumptions, one must move towards clarifying (transparency) and even critiquing these initial assumptions (this process, of course, must be dynamic and continuous).

Next, one must undertake an internal re-reading of Western history based on the diverse and varied narratives of Westerners themselves. From these internal re-readings, terms and ideas must be extracted for both describing and critiquing the West, as well as for describing and critiquing oneself. Then, with those same terms and ideas, one should proceed to critique diverse historical and cultural selves and others, and critically re-read both one's own and others' narratives about themselves. In the interaction between self-other concepts and ideas, a newer conceptual model for re-engaging with the West should be formulated. This dialectical process should continue indefinitely, with each understanding replacing another, and each critique replacing another.

Conclusion

This article examined three different mental models (perspectives) for understanding the West. Each of these models possesses its own specific strengths and weaknesses. More precisely, neither the internal nor the external perspective, on its own, can achieve an objective (intersubjective and critical) understanding of the West. In other words, their understanding of the West also takes place based on a closed conceptual model. As a result, their scientific validity is reduced, and they are acceptable only to believers in that same conceptual model. In contrast, the synthetic model, by employing the logic of dialectics, attempts to partially address these weaknesses to draw closer to an objective (intersubjective and critical) understanding of the West.

However, the synthetic model is not the end of the road; not only must it move towards new perspectives, but efforts must also be made to invent indigenous methods. Moreover, in constructing and applying methodological models, the issue of objectivity (intersubjectivity and criticizability) must be taken seriously, which itself necessitates

avoiding self-centrism or other-centrism.[1] For this purpose, one must avoid absolutism and remain open to internal and external critiques. Indeed, to achieve a shared perspective, one must understand the strengths and weaknesses of both oneself and the other.

At the same time, we must not forget that we are facing diverse "selves" and "others." Therefore, the variety of lived experiences of the Iranian thinker and the Western other must be considered. This is because, despite sharing an Islamic heritage, not all Muslims live in identical historical-cultural situations, nor do they have an identical or similar experience of the West. Consequently, attempting to consolidate these experiences and present a single, shared metanarrative of the West is extremely difficult. Furthermore, criticizability requires moving beyond prejudices and redefining the self.

The next point is that for objective (intersubjective and critical) understanding, one must move towards constructing a more dynamic and effective conceptual model, because understanding is impossible without a conceptual model. In other words, these conceptual frameworks determine the scope, dimensions, and even the nature of the phenomenon under study. It is clear that theoretical approach conflicts will not easily disappear (and perhaps can be said to be permanent), but establishing a dialectical relationship between these models is like simultaneously using two cameras with different angles of view to observe a phenomenon. Thus, it's clear that a more complete view—compared to using just one camera—can be obtained. At the same time, a solution must be found for the clarity and precision of these models.

For this purpose, solutions can be proposed. For example, in addition to employing synthetic approaches and methodological models, perhaps the most essential tool is to invent new vocabulary that gives us greater explanatory and interpretive power compared to common terms (just as the term "imperialism" can better reflect the

---

1. Typically, self-centrism and other-centrism are built around an ontological and epistemological presumption of superiority of either the self or the other, leading to serious consequences. For instance, self-centrism results in overlooking one's own weaknesses and fostering an illusion of self-sufficiency. Conversely, other-centrism leads to neglecting the weaknesses of the other, while simultaneously causing a loss of self-esteem and indigenous identity.

mindsets and actions of global capitalism than the term "colonialism"). Of course, it's abundantly clear that language is conventional, and there is no inherent relationship between the signifier and/signified. However, the greater explanatory power of a new signifier can contribute to its general acceptance (in fact, a signifier specifies its semantic range in two ways: first, through the set of concepts and instances it refers to, and second, through its usage in a specific context). So, creating new vocabulary can help us penetrate the more hidden and difficult elements of the phenomenon under study (in this case, the West). Although a synthetic theoretical approach may provide the Iranian thinker with more dynamic and general epistemological tools for explaining and interpreting the existential dimensions of the West, it is not sufficient, and the need to produce indigenous methodological models is still keenly felt.

References

Anderson, P. (2009a). *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*. Translated by Hassan Mortazavi. Tehran: Nashr-e Sales. [In Persian]

Anderson, P. (2009b). *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. Translated by Hassan Mortazavi. Tehran: Nashr-e Sales. [In Persian]

Belqaziz, A. (2017). *The Arab and Modernity: A Study in Modernist Discourse*. Translated by Seyyed Mohammad Aal-e Mahdi. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi Publications in collaboration with the Research Institute of Culture, Art, and Communication. [In Persian]

Benton, T. & Craib, I. (2010). *Philosophy of Social Science*. Translated by Shahnaz Mosamma Parast and Mahmoud Mottahed. 3rd ed. Tehran: Agah. [In Persian]

Boroujerdi, M. (2008). *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*. Translated by Jamshid Shirazi. 5th ed. Tehran: Farzan Rooz. [In Persian]

Chalmers, A. F. (2008). *What Is This Thing Called Science?*. 8th ed. Translated by Saeed Zibakalam. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian]

Collins, J. & Selina, H. (2006). *Heidegger*. Translated by Saleh Najafi. Tehran: Pardis-e Danesh and Shirazeh. [In Persian]

Dartigue, A. (2008). *What is Phenomenology?*. Translated by Mahmoud Navali. 4th ed. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian]

Fay, B. (2004). *Paradigms of Human Sciences*. Translated by Morteza Mardihaha. Tehran: Strategic Studies Research Institute Publications.

Feyerabend, P. (1975). *Against Method*. London: Vestro.

Flick, U. (2017). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Translated by Hadi Jalili. 9th ed. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney. [In Persian]

Freund, J. (2008). *Theories of Human Sciences*. Translated by Ali Mohammad Kardan. 5th ed. Tehran: University Publishing Centre. [In Persian]

Fulberg, M. & Skocpol, T. (2013). Determined Paths: Perry Anderson's Historical Sociology. In *Insight and Method in Historical Sociology*. Edited by Theda Skocpol. Translated by Hashem Aghajeri. 2nd ed. Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz. [In Persian]

Gillies, D. (2008). *Philosophy of Science in the Twentieth Century*. Translated by Hassan Miandari. 2nd ed. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian]

Grondin, J. (2014). *Hermeneutics*. Translated by Mohammad Reza Abolghasemi. Tehran: Nashr-e Mahi. [In Persian]

Haghighat, S. (2006). *Methodology of Political Science*. Qom: Mofid University Publications. [In Persian]

Husserl, E. (1994). *Ideas Of a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by Abdolkarim Rashidian. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi Publications. [In Persian]

Ibn Khaldun, A. (2009). *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun* (2 vols.). Translated by Mohammad Parvin Gonabadi. 12th ed. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi Publications. [In Persian]

Iman, M. (2015). *Qualitative Research Methodology*. 3rd ed. Qom: Research Institute of Hawzah and University Publications. [In Persian]

Kaiser, C. (2018). *Foundations of Radical Philosophy*. Translated by Fuad Habibi and Amin Karami. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi Publications. [In Persian]

Khorramshahi, B. (2010). *Logical Positivism*. 4th ed. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi. [In Persian]

Kowsari, Masoud (2008). Quantitative Method. In *Approach and Method in Political Science*. Edited by Abbas Manouchehri et al. Tehran: Samt, pp. 213-253. [In Persian]

Kuhn, T. (2014). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Translated by Saeed Zibakalam. 4th ed. Tehran: Samt. [In Persian]

Little, D. (2007). *Explanation in Social Science: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sociology*. Translated by Abdolkarim Soroush. 4th ed. Tehran: Serat Publications. [In Persian]

Manouchehri, A. (1997). Ibn Khaldun and Contemporary Historical Sociology. *Journal of Culture and Communication Studies*, 17(4), 341-357.

Nabavi, L. (2005). *Foundations of Logic and Methodology*. Tehran: Tarbiat Modares University Publications. [In Persian]

Nakhchinikian, G. (1994). Translator's Introduction. In *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Abdolkarim Rashidian. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi Publications. [In Persian]

Nassar, N. (1987). *The Realist Thought of Ibn Khaldun*. Translated by Yusuf Rahimloo. Tehran: University Publishing Centre. [In Persian]

Niazi, M. (2011). Mixed Research Methods: The Third Methodological Movement in Social Sciences. *Iranian Journal of Social Studies*, 5(2), 158-181. [In Persian]

Popper, K. (2004). *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Translated by Abbas Bagheri. Tehran: Elm. [In Persian]

Popper, K. (2005). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. New York & London: Routledge.

Popper, K. (2018). *Conjectures and Refutations*. Translated by Rahmatollah Jabbari. 2nd ed. Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami Enteshar. [In Persian]

Prabhakaran, et al. (2018). *Philosophical Methodology*. Translated by Haniyeh Mofidi. Tehran: Tamadon-e Elmi Publications. [In Persian]

Said, E. (2007). *Orientalism*. Translated by Lotfali Khanji. Tehran: Amirkabir Publications. [In Persian]

Sarookhani, B. (2006). *Research Methods in Social Sciences: Quantitative Methods: Advanced Statistics*. 2nd ed. Tehran: Nashr-e Didar. [In Persian]

Sayyid, B. (2000). *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*. Translated by Gholamreza Jamshidihaha and Musa Anbari. Tehran: University of Tehran Press. [In Persian]

Schmidt, N. (2017). *Ibn Khaldun: Historian, Sociologist, Philosopher*. Translated by Gholamreza Jamshidihaha. 2nd ed. Tehran: Cultural and Social Studies Research Institute, Ministry of Science.

Scholes, J. (2017). *An Introduction to the Experience of Deep Culture*. Translated by Abdolaziz Tatar. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi Publications. [In Persian]

Seyyed Emami, K. (2008). *Research in Political Science*. 2nd ed. Tehran: Cultural and Social Studies Research Institute, Ministry of Science and Imam Sadiq University (AS). [In Persian]

Shariati, A. (2006). *What Is to Be Done?* (Collected Works Vol. 20). Tehran: Ghalam Publications. [In Persian]

Shariati, A. (2011). *The Class Orientation of Islam* (Collected Works Vol. 10). Tehran: Ghalam Publications. [In Persian]

Sheikh Rezaei, H. & Karbasi Zadeh, A. (2017). *Introduction to Philosophy of Science*. 4th ed. Tehran: Hermes. [In Persian]

Shot, E. (2008). *Continental Philosophy of Social Science: Hermeneutics, Genealogy, and Critical Theory from Ancient Greece to the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by Hadi Jalili. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney. [In Persian]

Skocpol, T. (2013). The Sociological Historical Imagination. In *Insight and Method in Historical Sociology*. Edited by Theda Skocpol. Translated by Hashem Aghajeri. 2nd ed. Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz. [In Persian]

Soroush, A. (2007). Introduction. In *Explanation in Social Sciences: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sociology*. Translated by Abdolkarim Soroush. 4th ed. Tehran: Serat Publications. [In Persian]

Stroll, A. (2008). *Twentieth-Century Analytical Philosophy*. Translated by Fereydoon Fatemi. 3rd ed. Tehran: Markaz. [In Persian]

Trigg, R. (2007). *Understanding Social Science*. Translated by Shahnaz Mosamma Parast. 2nd ed. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney. [In Persian]