Both East and West: A Commentary on the History of Modernity in Iran

Afshin Matin-Asgari (California State University, Los Angeles)

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, many observers of Iran have viewed a country torn between Eastern history and ‘Western’ modernity. This divide between religion and secularity has clouded the analysis of political philosophy preceding the Revolution in this later dichotomy. Afshin Matin-Asgari instead proposes a revisionist work of intellectual history, challenging many of the dominant paradigms in Iranian and Middle Eastern historiography. In charting the intellectual construction of Iranian modernity, he focuses on broad patterns of influential ideas, which reveal an Iranian modernity that has been sustained by intense intellectual interaction with global ideologies. Turning many prevailing narratives on their heads, the Matin-Asgari concludes that modern Iran can be seen as, culturally and intellectually, both Eastern and Western.