

A Model of Arabic Linguistic Studies by Modern Chinese Scholars in the Late 19th & Early 20th Centuries*

MA He-bin

School of Foreign Language, Northwest Minzu University, Lanzhou, Gansu, P.R.China

WANG John Qiong

Lanzhou City University, Lanzhou, Gansu, P.R.China

LIU Li-hua

Sun Yat-sen University, School of International Studies, Zhuhai, Guangdong, P.R.China

Al-Muttasig is a pioneering masterpiece of Arabic linguistics written by two modern Chinese scholars Ma Dexin and Ma Lianyuan after inheriting the academic achievements of Arab scholars in the study of Arabic linguistics, especially Arabic morphology, Arabic syntax and Arabic rhetoric, incorporating the elements needed by Chinese scholars in language learning. This academic work has become the basic language knowledge for Chinese Hui people to read books on Arab Islamic culture since modern times, which determines the semantic guarantee for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the essence of Arab culture. In order to facilitate the study, the author of al-Muttasig analyzes the main components and elements of Arabic lexical, syntactic and rhetorical elements in the arborescent form of schema style, which makes it the most prominent feature of language learning. The academic foundation of al-Muttasig comes from Arabia and through the innovative development of Chinese scholars; it has become an important evidence of the historical context and academic achievements of cultural exchanges between China and the Arab world, which has lasted for more than a century. In the field research, the author of the paper found that the work was widely spread among the people in the form of Arabic manuscripts and was regarded as a general textbook of linguistics for Arabic education in al-madrasah. It is also an important reference bibliography of Arabic linguistics in modern Arabic teaching in Chinese colleges and universities. The purpose of this study is to explore the significance of bilateral or multilateral ac/enculturation and common development in cross-regional cultural exchanges and mutual learning activities.

Keywords: Al-Muttasig, Arabic linguistic, great works, innovation & achievement, modern Chinese scholars

* **Acknowledgements:** The paper is supported by Academic Research Project Funding No.31920190036 & No.2020GJYLZY-06 of North-west Minzu University.

MA He-bin, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Foreign Language, Northwest Minzu University, Lanzhou, Gansu, P.R.China.

WANG John Qiong, Ph.D., Lecturer, Lanzhou City University, Lanzhou, Gansu, P.R.China.

LIU Li-hua, M.A., Lecturer, Sun Yat-sen University, School of International Studies, Zhuhai, Guangdong, P.R.China.

I Introduction

It is recorded that the official relationship between China and the Arab region began in 651AD of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Intimate friendships between the two had been built since then and continued with more beneficial exchanges in such areas as trade and culture. In the period of Song Dynasty (960-1279), people from the Arab and Persian regions, through the Indian Ocean trade, arrived at the ports in the southeastern China (Dillon, 1999, pp. 11-12). Although some of them had settled down in China and tried to learn the Chinese language, they were still regarded as foreigners. The Mongol occupation of China (1278-1368) brought a great number of Central Asian, Persian, and Arab Muslims to serve in the imperial court and other official positions (Petersen, 2006, p. 28), and their local-born children adopted Chinese names and learned the Chinese culture, which led to the emergence of a new ethnic group that mixed the genes of Arab, Persian and Central Asian: **Hui (回) people**. But after several generations, the Hui people or the so-called “native-born foreigners” began to see the waning of their traditional cultures, for there were fewer and fewer scholars who could interpret the true meaning of the Holy al-Quran and al-Hadith in Arabic, and there was even a lack of their own thoughts and ideas in the traditional Islamic culture (YANG & YU, 1996, p. 132). Consequently, new generations of the Hui people were unable to perform the religious duties as their grandfathers did. As the study of Mr. Kristian Petersen showed, the Hui People (Chinese Muslims) at that time felt that they were losing their distinct Islamic identity (Petersen, 2006, p. 29). As most of them were educated with traditional Chinese classics and gradually assimilated into the Chinese mainstream society, they had difficulty in reading the texts of Islam in Arabic or Persian.

Under the circumstances, some Chinese Hui people had thought about establishing the distinct identity that people had dual self-understandings about the traditional Chinese and Islamic cultures in their own community. *Jingtang Jiaoyu* (scripture hall education) that targeted Hui people was founded during the era of HU Dengzhou (胡登洲) (1522-1597). It was an educational system that included new curricula (such as Qur’anic primer, elementary Islamic textbook in faith, worship, fasting, Islamic law and philosophy and so on) and new styles of teaching languages (both Chinese and Arabic or Persian), with the aim of preserving Islamic knowledge from the principal level to the advanced level (YANG & YU, 1996, p. 132). Generally speaking, Mr. Hu’s systematic program of scripture hall education became the standard of Islamic education in the 17th century. The standardization and organization of the curricula and the teaching techniques made his system a great success and easy to be replicated throughout China (Petersen, 2006, pp. 31-35).

It is the author’s opinion that the best result of the Sino-Arab relationship in the history was that the Hui people had inherited traditions of those in language and culture. Some scholars of the Hui people had developed new methods of learning and studying language and culture. From that time on, most Hui people in China used the Chinese language in daily communication and were interested in the role of the Arabic language (both written and spoken forms) played in their personal affairs (Dillon, 1999, p. 153). Thus, learning and studying the Arabic language and culture had become a holy duty in the heart of the Hui people. This phenomenon even reveals in today’s situation.

Al-Muttasig (孟泰希格) was a landmark achievement that modern Chinese scholars had made in the study of Arabic linguistics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in China. It is a volume of Arabic linguistic. With

nice and clear handwritten manuscript, it contains four major parts in contents, namely Arabic al-Sarf (Lexical Change of the Verb & Noun Form), al-Nahw (Sentence Structure), al-Mantiq (Science of Logic) and al-Balāghat (Rhetoric). Actually, al-Muttasig is an Arabic word, which means arrangement in order. The study of modern Arabic linguistics in a Chinese way was based on many original Arabic text-books that Chinese scholars had studied and innovations that Chinese scholars had made in line with Chinese characteristics. Al-Muttasig had been a useful schooling book since then, and it had been transformed into a famous work for Chinese scholars to study the knowledge of Arabic grammar, Logic of Arabs and Rhetoric (MA & MA, 2015).

The Arabic grammar consists of morphology and syntax from the 9th century. It has been inherited up to today and used both inside and outside the Arab region. Those places outside the region like China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey and Indonesia are not geographically far away from the Arab region and there are people studying the Arabic language in these countries. Many scholars had tried to find an easy way to master the Arabic language and thought about finding a singular model to learn it.

Arabic morphology is the very basic knowledge for learning the Arabic language. With every 3 or 4 letters called the root of verb and its formation order, many associated meanings can be produced. The verb of the Arabic language conjugates with the number (singular, double and plural) and the order of gender. Besides, it also conjugates with the tense (the past tense and the future tense). Thus, the conjugation of the Arabic verb is very difficult for non-Arabic speakers like the Chinese. If one wants to learn the Arabic language well, he or she has to master the verb conjugation in the beginning. As usual, a Chinese teacher of the Arabic language has learned a lot from the senior scholars. With generations' efforts, an easier way to grasp the language has been found and the teacher would teach all of it to his or her students. This has become a very special traditional approach to get knowledge of the Arabic language in China.

Formation of Arabic noun called Ilm-Eshtigāg (Science of Derivation) is very important for students to produce more meaning-associated words to practice the Arabic language. There are clear ways in Ilm-Eshtigāg to form new words with the same root (For example, *fā'il*, *fa`il*, *mafa'ūl*, *fualānu*, *fa`lāu*, *maf`alāt*, *mif`āl*) (Abdullah, 2000). The root of Arabic noun may produce such a large number of words as 516 (LA, 2014, pp. 55-59). These words with slightly different meanings share the same root, and their formation orders are different from each other (GUO, 1998).

In the application of the Arabic language, learners must follow certain rules, for the Arabic verb conjugation and Ilm-Eshtigāg have their own special patterns. In fact, these patterns are not easy for learners, especially for non-Arabic speakers. But some Chinese scholars had tried their best to find an easy way for Chinese learners, who had insisted on studying the Arabic language for many years until they had their success. Al-Muttasig, the successful work of studying Arabic linguistics in China, was discussed in this paper and some great information was shared with the readers.

The senior Chinese scholars put the al-Mantiq al-Arabiye (meaning Logic of Arab) into the series of Arabic grammar and rhetoric for thoughtful study and application. An Egyptian scholar, was surprised by this, and said that the knowledge of Arabic Logic is often used as a single subject for teaching in the field of Philosophy at many universities of Arab countries. But the Chinese scholars had made it into regular courses for whom had the desire to acquire more knowledge of Arabic grammar and others for more than 100 years, and it had been a successful task and a good innovation in the study of Arabic linguistics outside the Arab region. Indeed, the

Arabic rhetoric makes good use of Arabic words with distinct Arabic identity, and learners of the Arabic language are inevitably influenced by the unique culture of the Arab. The author of this paper thought that the Chinese may face the same problem in studying Arabic language from the early time to now. Here, we have to be thankful to those who had made more regular rules in applying the Arabic language, such as this great work *Al-Muttasig* in Arabic, which has been used by Chinese people for more than 150 years.

In fact, the model of Arabic language study described by *Al-Muttasig* has become the principle of the teaching method in Arabic language majors at Chinese universities since the 1950s up to now. It's said that all teachers of Arabic major in Chinese universities had been profiting from the *Al-Muttasig* at all.

II Materials of the Research

2.1 Subject Matter

2.1.1 Background

Al-Muttasig is not just a text book; it has become a very important traditional document in the field Arabic linguistics in China. The author's interest in this book was aroused by some pages of the manuscript copy in Arabic, owned by the nearly 80-year-old Mr. WANG in Dali of Yunnan Province, China, in the summer of 2012. Having read the copy, the author of this paper found that all pages of the copy was in well-written Arabic that the author thought it must have written by an native Arab. However, Mr. WANG told the author that it was written by Chinese scholars, and it had been used as an elementary textbook on Arabic linguistics for more than 100 years at China's madrasah. The author was surprised by this news and began to collect such manuscript copies from areas where the Hui ethnic minority is concentrated, such as Yunnan, Xinjiang, Gansu and Qinghai, expecting to understand the way Chinese scholars studied modern Arabic linguistics from these manuscript copies. *Al-Muttasig* is regarded as the best work on Arabic linguistics among the people. This is the original intention of the author to study *al-Muttasig*.

According to the collected materials, the *al-Muttasig* was completed by Mr. MA Dexin (马德新) in 1862 himself, and two years later (in 1864) he also finished *Al-Nahw* and *Al-Sarf*. The 4th part of *al-Muttasig* is *al-Balāghat* by Mr. MA Lianyuan (马联元), which was completed with woodcut style and printed within the period of 1874 to 1903. But there is no information about the exact printing time of it.

The Chinese scholars organized this work in accordance with the rule of Arabic linguistics, normally from the principal level up to the advanced level, to make learners, especially the Chinese learners, acquire the Arabic knowledge step by step, in the traditional order of degree from *al-Sarf* to *al-Nahw* with added *al-Mantig* and *al-Balāgha* together at *Al-Madrasahs* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was found that *al-Muttasig* explains the definitions of Arabic grammar, logic and rhetoric with many understandable examples. The important thing about *al-Muttasig* is that there are about 208 schemas to make the information of Arabic linguistics complete and clear from which 32 are in *al-Sarf*, 32 in *al-Nahw*, 29 in *al-Mantig* and 112 in *al-Balāgh*. In fact, from the late 8th century to the early 9th century, some Arab scholars had begun using schema to study the Arabic grammar, since it was a convenient and quick way to learn the Arabic grammar. From then on, this approach might have been passed down from generation to generation and has become popular in the fields concerning Arabic knowledge learning. The use of schemas by Arab scholars has been benefitting many scholars of the world in their research programs or courses, the Chinese scholars included. It's

to be said that Chinese scholars learned the schema rule from Arab scholars in the second half of the 19th century and made corresponding innovations, which became an important and successful example of the achievements Chinese scholars had made in the study of Arabic linguistics. It needs to say that schema is used not only in linguistics, but also in many other fields, such as History and Pedigree (Musab, 1982), Fiqh (Islamic Law) and Islamic Philosophy etc. in Arab countries today.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) first proposed the concept of schema in 1781AD. In 1932, Frederic Charles Bartlett (1886-196) elaborated it on the basic study of Immanuel Kant. After that, David E. Rumelhart (1942-2011) redefined the idea of schema again clearly. It is believed that Arab scholars' interest in schema was at least 900 years earlier than the western scholars. At another point, the Chinese scholars had already used schema frequently in studying Arabic linguistics before Kant put forward the concept of schema. Mr. Hu Long (虎隆) a specialist in the ancient book of Gansu Provincial Committee of China believed that the schema method made by the Chinese scholars has been a new type of thinking tool since then. It could help learners to envision hidden knowledge, visualize language information, break down large amounts of information into chunks that are easy to understand and remember, systematically and reasonably think about learning materials and graphically record their thought process to reach the effect of remembering in a way that is easy to extract without forgetting (Hu, 2019, p. 34).

2.1.2 Details

All information of al-Muttasig was made as follows. The first volume al-Sarf consists of the sort of Arabic words, al-harf al-lainy (Arabic Letter as Hamzah, Yāw and Wāw), active words and passive words, ending pronouns and ending words. All of these make it so clear to understand the formation of Arabic words in verb and noun. It needs to say that Arabic nouns contain the noun, pronoun, many kinds of active words in noun, passive noun, etc. The formation of verb has 3 root letters, and 2 simple sorts and 12 complex sorts subjoin one letter or two letters or even three letters to form a new word that links to the root letter. At another point, there are 4 root letters in verb, which have also simple and complex ways to form a word, with one or two more letters added to make up a new one. But in fact, the Arabic verb has 14 types of past tense verb and present tense verb alike. If it is made into passive voice, it must add 14 types both in past time and present time. Hence, the Arabic verb has 56 types to produce more words from the same source of the root letter. The way to get more words in Arabic noun with the root source is the same as the Arabic verb. Due to this, it's to be said that every 3 letters in Arabic could be growing a large number of more than 500 new words normally. This way in Arabic linguistic study is named *Ilm-Eshitigāg*, which studies the regular form and rules to increase new words in verb and noun with the same root source, and that has to follow its principal rule (MA, 1864).

After that, there is the subject named al-Nahw whose aim is to teach the structure of Arabic sentences in noun and verb only. The form of nominal sentence means the sentence starts with noun which has two parts that are noun as subject and object to explain the links of these two parts. The other one is the actual sentence that is formed as verb–subject–object+(others) to make clear the meaning of the subject's action at a specific time.

As for al-Mantig, it is getting the best way of thinking and reasoning in applying language to many subjects. In fact, al-Mantig was bought from scholars of Grace in earlier days of Abbasid Period (750-1258) (Hasan & Muhamma, year, pp. 45-64) through the Translation Movement that started in the early 9th century and ended about in the middle of the 10th century on the *Bayt al Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) that acted as a society founded

by Abbasid Khalifats in Baghdad. At that time, Arab scholars had made adaptations in the studying according to their need to make it regular knowledge in Arab to help people understand some questions of philosophy and Islamic Faith program. As usual, al-Mantig has been thought as a very useful and important subject to have correct knowledge of Islam. Therefore, Chinese scholars had to have it in studying Arabic & Islamic wisdom in the late 19th century and let it become a substantive course.

Al-Balāghah is applying a choice word in special contexts well with more linguistic processing. But Arabic al-Balāghah had already made the model in spoken or written language smoothly, kindly and even friendly from the 50th year of the 9th century to the 30th year of the 13th century in the history of Arab. As the study of an Egyptian scholar Shawqi Daif (1910-2005) showed, in the beginning some Arabs like poets, linguists, philosophers and al-Mufssarūn (who is a specialist in annotating the meaning of words in Holy al-Gurān) had applied a nice Arabic word in their communication or researching fields to reach a sanctifying result. These were doing fragmented not systematic work. It was fortunate that some Arabic linguists had studied Arab Rhetoric carefully and step by step. For nearly 400 years, there have been many interesting achievements of the Rhetoric, which have become a regular model of Arabic Rhetoric until today (Shawqi, 1995, pp. 59-219). Therefore, the Rhetoric has been regarded as an important course of Arabic linguistics in recent years to understand the Arabic language and culture by the best standard. Learning the Rhetoric has become a task for Arab students in the school and even for those who desire to learn more. Thus, modern Chinese scholars had willingly spent a lot of time and vigor on a great work about Rhetoric.

According to all the major points of Arabic linguistics from al-Muttasig, four important aims were concluded to make learners who are either Arabic speakers or non-Arabic speakers study knowledge of Arabic linguistics easily, quickly and correctly. As known, Arab scholars do not usually incorporate the Logic in the Arabic linguistics, but Chinese scholars did make the Logic for studying in the middle of the 19th century. Maybe there are some special reasons that people could not get it now. In fact, the Logic has become a specialized course in philosophy studying fields at the present time. Anyhow, ancient Chinese scholars incorporated the Logic into al-Muttasig for studying Arabic linguistics so that they could reach the level of Arabic native speakers in understanding and utilizing the Arabic language.

2.2 Authors of al-Muttasig

There were two great individuals who wrote al-Muttasig in the past.

2.2.1 Mr. MA Dexin. Mr. MA was born in a traditional Muslim family at Longwei Street, Xiaguan, Dali city, Yunnan Province in 1794 AD as the 52th descendant of Prophet Muhammad (YAO, 2019, p. 001). He was educated by his father who was a local Imam at an al-Madrasah teaching Arabic and principal knowledge of Islam, and then was sent to other Imams to learn more. For that purpose, Mr. MA traveled to Changan which is Xi'an city in Shaanxi Province nowadays to learn knowledge from his pleased Ustāze (means professor in Arabic language) for 8 years which was from 1834 to 1841, and had received what he wished. But Mr. MA was not satisfied with the knowledge that he had acquired from his Ustāzes in the motherland, and he planned to go abroad to acquire more from the Arab. Thus, he left his country on the 22nd of lunar November, 1831 AD, and reached Makkah al-Mukarramah in the Arabian Peninsula on May 1st, 1843 AD. Mr. MA Dexin spent his nice time at Makkah reading great books, visiting scholars and taking on more things that he could not find at

hometown. After that, he traveled to many other countries, such as Aden, Jeddah, Medina, Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Istanbul and Singapore (Petersen, 2014, pp. 356-365). His dreams fulfilled, he came back to China with some of his works on June 20th, 1849 AD.

Soon Mr. MA decided to compose some works to make Muslim people have a perfect understanding of Islamic knowledge in Arabic or Chinese with high-quality explanations. As counted, Mr. MA had finished 38 books in 55 volumes in Chinese or Arabic or Persian, or even in bilingual with Arabic and Chinese, or Arabic and Persian, with the theme covering linguistics, philosophy, literature and astronomy. What could be found from these works was that Ma Dexin's works provided several opportunities of exploring how Chinese Muslims used the technical vocabulary of all three languages (Petersen, 2011, p. 555).

As remembered that al-Muttasig is the best one among all his works on Arabic linguistics. Kristian Petersen thought that Ma's calculated inculcation of Arabic proficiency led to the presumption that this linguistic facility would serve as the basis of sustained intellectual engagement in a larger community of discourse (Petersen, 2014, pp. 356-365). It was studied that Mr. MA Dexin had devoted himself to academic research and the large number of his theoretical works focused on promoting the combination of Islam and Confucianism and contained profound connotations, which had developed and enriched the China's Islamic culture (MU, 2006, p. 115). He died in 1874 AD.

2.2.2 Mr. MA Lianyuan Another writer of al-Muttasig was Mr. MA Lianyuan (1840-1903), who was born in a traditional Muslim family at Longmen Village, Yuxi City of Yunnan Province. As known, Mr. MA Lianyuan acquired simple Arabic knowledge from family teaching in the beginning, and later from some scholars, Mr. MA Dexin included, at the local al-Madarasah at his early age. Mr. MA Lianyuan became one of MA Dexin's pupils in 1860s and later his follower in the academic field.

At the age of 22, Mr. MA Lianyuan was appointed as Imam of an al-Madarasah in Tonghai County of Yunnan Province to teach and guide Muslims in their regional activities due to his abundant knowledge and respected characters (HE & MU, 2012, p. 118). However, he was not satisfied with what he had achieved in that position and desired to learn more from the outside world, just as the deeply respected Master MA Dexin did. Thus, he followed in his teacher's footsteps and left his homeland in the autumn of 1863. He moved towards Myanmar from the northern part of Yunnan Province and reached Yangon, the capital of Myanmar. After that, he crossed the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea by boat and arrived at the Jeddah Port in the Arabian Peninsula, aiming to gain more knowledge of the Arabic language and Islamic information. After spending some nice days there, Mr. MA Lianyuan then went to Iraq, Egypt and Turkey to pursue more knowledge from different scholars and Qadis (Judges), and he collected many books along the way for his future research at home. It was recorded that he returned to China in 1872 AD (MA, 2011, p. 11). It is said that Mr. MA Lianyuan had stayed abroad for almost 10 years and the result of his extensive travel was that he became a scholar with independent thinking.

In 1873 AD, Mr. MA Lianyuan took his father's position and became Imam of Daying Town of Yunnan Province to teach and guide the local Muslims there. In September of 1900 when he was 60 years old, Mr. MA Lianyuan traveled back to Myanmar for the second time with many Arabic works. His stay at a stone-made factory in the Wah State of northeastern Myanmar was temporary, for he planned to have his Hajj task in Makkah al-Makarramah by passing through India. When he was in India, the Indian Muslim hoped him to stay longer and

teach them more Islamic knowledge. Mr. MA Lianyuan agreed to their request and began to write a book about Islamic Fiqh called *al-Tauidha* (means illustration) in Arabic, which was published in Mumbai, India in 1902. In India, he also translated a very famous book named *Sharh al-Latālif* that studies Islamic Faith (Philosophy) in Arabic and the translation came out on the press in Kanpur, India in 1320AH/1902 AD. Mr. MA Lianyuan passed away in Kanpur on the 19th of lunar May of 1903.

Statistics showed that Mr. MA Lianyuan had written 27 books among which 25 had been published in Arabic, Chinese or Persian. Among the 27 books, 10 were written by himself, 3 compiled, 4 translated and commented, 6 collated and 4 annotated. According to Kristian Petersen, Ma Lianyuan's efforts were focused on promoting a greater understanding of the Arabic language and the primary knowledge of scriptural resources and practices, which were mainly centered on linguistic skills, introduction to basic practices, and preservation and dissemination of the Qur'an (Petersen, 2014, pp. 356-365).

The author of this paper believes that though more than 100 years have passed since Mr. MA Dexin and Mr. MA Lianyuan died readers inside and outside China are still interested in the larger number of books concerning many subjects in Arabic and Islam they had left and can still gain relevant knowledge from these time-honored books.

2.2.3 Significance of al-Muttasig

As mentioned above, with *al-Sarf*, *al-Nahw*, *al-Mantig* and *al-Balāghah* linked together, *al-Muttasig* introduces the main ideas and important knowledge about Arabic linguistics in series. It combines some information of the Arabic linguistic principle in a special way that allows readers to understand and learn easily and quickly. *Al-Muttasig* has been of great significance for the following reasons:

Firstly, it is a great innovation by Chinese scholars in studying Arabic linguistics in modern time.

Secondly, it is a great accomplishment completed with extensive studying, researching and discussion.

Thirdly, it is a work of scholars' wisdom in Arabic linguistics with continuous influences in China.

III Discussion

3.1 The Long History of Arabic Studying in China

History tells us that in the middle of the 7th century, an Arab Amīr sent his messenger to visit the Emperor of Tang Dynasty, which officially established the relationship between China and the Arab region. Subsequently, many Arab merchants traveled to China for trade and resided either in the capital or other large cities to deal with their business. They brought home lots of commodities from China and also had their local goods circulate in the Chinese market with great interest. It's said that official delegations of the Arab had visited China for 39 times from 651 AD to 789 AD. Meanwhile, business activities between the two witnessed a boom, with the Chinese silk and porcelain pouring into the Arab region and the Arab spice into China through the sea route and even the land route. Arab merchants who lived in the cities of China had established their own community called *Fanfang* (番坊), which means special living areas for foreigners in China's history. They were allowed to have the same way of living and communication as they had in their homeland without any interference from the Chinese. Under this situation, Islam was introduced into China in a peaceful and friendly manner, which opened the door of teaching simple knowledge of Islam and Arabic to the Islamic followers. Therefore, it's said that the teaching

of the Arabic language in China started from Tang Dynasty, and the Arabic language had become very important for communication between the Chinese and the Arab from then on.

More cross-cultural communication between the Arab and the Chinese followed in the periods of Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty. From 968 AD to 1168 AD, official delegations from the Abbas Empire had visited China for 49 times, and that means every four years on average, an official delegation was sent to Song Dynasty for visit (MA, 2006, p. 102). Hoping to strengthen the bilateral relationship, officials of Song Dynasty presented gifts to members of Suhar Oman's delegation when they returned to their homeland (GUO, 2015, pp. 52-53). As known, the Arab traders had been living comfortably in some cities like Guangzhou, Quanzhou and Yangzhou. These southern Chinese cities were famous international trade ports that provided favorable conditions for doing business and commodities exchange between China and the Arab region could be frequently seen here. Then, the Arab had married local Chinese women to build new family. Besides, out of religious needs, the Arab had begun building Masjid in the place they lived and the teaching of the Arabic language was also coming soon. The new generation of the Arab was the foremost group to study the Arabic language in China at that time, and they had made the teaching and studying of the Arabic language common phenomena. Therefore, teaching and studying the Arabic language had become very famous activities in the periods of Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty.

In Chinese history, those tremendous developments were made in ocean transportation and communication in Song and Yuan dynasties. That Mr. WANG Dayuan (王大渊) (1311-1350) could easily travel to other places to pursue exact information in person, which made his name engraved in the history of China-Arab cross-cultural exchanges. According to history, Mr. WANG got himself a commercial vessel and departed from the Quanzhou Port in Fujian Province in 1330AD. He sailed through the Hainan Island, Champa Kingdom, Malacca, Java, Sumatra, Myanmar, India, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, and crossed the Mediterranean to Morocco. And then, he returned to Egypt and cross the Red Sea to Somalia and Mozambique. He travelled back to Sri Lanka, Sumatra and Java by crossing the Indian Ocean and went back to Quanzhou via Australia to Kalimantan and the Philippines. It took him 5 years all together to finish these journeys. Through this overseas trip, Mr. WANG was able to gain the firsthand information about people's life, trade, industries etc. of the local areas. In 1337AD, Mr. WANG Dayuan once again sailed from Quanzhou and passed through South Sea Islands, the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Mozambique Channel of Africa and all parts of Australia. He returned to the Quanzhou Port in 1339 AD. Mr. WANG was called Marco Polo of the Orient, for he had sailed overseas for two times within 7 years and acquired much valuable information that could not be acquired before; written down in 1340 AD, *Note of Overseas and Islands* was an important work of Mr. Wang and was regarded as an ancient world geography book with high historical value; there are 100 information items in this book and 220 countries and regions Mr. WANG had travelled to were described in it (GUO, 2015, pp. 67-68).

Mr. WANG Dayuan was neither the first one nor the last one to have traveled to the Arab region to seek original knowledge in the history of China-Arab communication. As known, Mr. DU Huan (杜环) had lived in the Arab region over 10 years and finished his work *Note of travel* in Tang Dynasty, which became the earliest record to understand Arab in China. However, Mr. WANG outperformed Mr. DU in terms of studying Arab. In the meantime, there had been a large number of Arabs and Persians and their descendants serving as government officials in Yuan Dynasty. It's to be remembered that the government of Yuan Dynasty set up a high-level official

school called Central Foreign Academy to train translators and Arabic was the foreign language taught in it. The truth of this opinion is yet to be examined.

In Ming Dynasty, developments of the sea transportation and communication had allowed the Chinese people to interact with people of other countries. According to the historical materials, Mr. ZHENG He (郑和) (1371-1433), who was also called Hajji Mahmud Shamsu-din and a son of Muslim parents in Yunnan Province, had sailed overseas for seven times from 1405AD to 1433AD under the order of the Emperor of Ming Dynasty. He had visited more than 30 countries, including many places in the Arab Peninsula and East Africa like Hormuz, Mogadishu, Aden, Makkah and etc. within 28 years, and the total travel distance reached 50,000km (31056mi) (Habeeb, 2015). It was recorded that he travelled from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean to the west coast of West Asia and Africa, passing through more than 30 countries and regions. Mr. ZHENG's voyages were 87 years earlier than Columbus', 92 years earlier than Da Gama's and 114 years earlier than Magellan's.

Mr. ZHENG's voyages had contributed to the friendly relationships between Ming Dynasty and other countries and regions, promoted trade at both the official level and the grass-root level, safeguarded national security, disseminated the Chinese culture and, opened up the ocean business. To make the exchange of ideas more easily, Mr. ZHENG had brought with him some officials and translators who could understand the Arabic language (Brown, 2015). This served as a proof that the Arabic language was commonly used in Ming Dynasty and it received more attention as it became an important official language in foreign affairs. Mr. ZHENG He died in Calicut, India in 1433 AD.

ZHENG's seven maritime expeditions had marked the beginning of the great navigations in the 15th century and made outstanding contributions to the global ocean business (FAN, 2005, p. 201). It seems that ZHENG's voyages were unrelated to the studying of the Arabic language, but there was close association between these two things, for ZHENG's retinues understood the Arabic language and culture well (MA, 2005. pp. 84-88), so they were able to acquire more information on the Arabic culture, its geography and local customs (SONG, 2005. pp. 5-10). Zheng He Navigation Chart, or The Map of Treasure-ship Fleet Sailing to Barbarian Countries from Longjiangguan Pass, was one of the great results of ZHENG's voyages in history and was regarded as the earliest existing nautical map in the world; throughout the voyages, a host of islands and place had been named, and natural resources and historical culture had been encountered (MA, 2019, pp. 86-87).

In the time of Ming Dynasty, Chinese scholars had created a special education system called Madarasah where both Arabic and Chinese were used in the rule of teaching and examination of textbooks for the first time, and the Arabic and Chinese cultures were also mixed together. Many Chinese had had a good command of the Arabic language and a good understanding of the Arabic culture after they received their education in that system. Gradually, the Arabic language was seen as a common communicational language. Most of the scholars were Muslims at that time, and they could use the Arabic language to write down their ideas or translate something into Arabic or Chinese. These scholars also tried to explain the Islamic thought in a Chinese way, leading to the integration of Confucianism and Islam. On this point, it's believed that the Arabic language has a long history in China.

3.2 Chinese Scholars Had Tried Their Best to Study Arabic Linguistics

It's said that Chinese scholars who were culturally related to Arab, Persia or central Asia would have a natural preference for the Arabic language in their life, which made the continuation of the matriarchal culture still possible even if they were far away from the land where their forefathers had lived. This had become a tradition for generations to come since the Arab settled down in China. Even nowadays, the custom still exists: father of a traditional Muslim family would take his 4-year-old child to an Imam to learn Arabic letters, such as Alif, Baw, Taw and so on, and some simple words like *Asslāmu Alaikum*, *Bismllahi a-Rahmān –Rahīm* for communication. Thus, Chinese Muslims could learn the Arabic language or literature very well by themselves, without any external force.

When Chinese scholars created the rules of education in Ming Dynasty, they regarded learning and studying Arabic as a holy duty in their entire life. There was a clear trajectory for these Chinese scholars at that time. First, they acquired some Arabic from their fathers at home. Then they went to a local Imam for more. After that, they left the hometown to follow an educated scholar and were requested to complete all the compulsory subjects before they were allowed to graduate. Following graduation, they returned to the hometown and began their teaching to others.

In the Masjid, many Chinese scholars had their teaching work in several subjects like pronunciation of Arabic letters and science of al-Tajwīd (Pronosiation), al-Sarf, al-Nahw, al-Tauhīd (Philosophy), Tafsīr al-Gurān al-Karīm, al-Hadīth al-Sharīf, al-Balāghatu al-Arabiyyah, al-Figh and al-Mantig al-Arabia. All these subjects had been taught in the Madrasah where Chinese scholars had gotten a large number of copies on these subjects from their Ustāz. Since the knowledge of one subject may have been written in Arabic, they had to meet around to read all pages from A to Z until they fully understood. After this, they tried to summarize it themselves and therefore made it easy to read and comprehend for readers. That was the principal way of Chinese scholars studying the Arabic language at that time. To become expert in this field, one has to invest much time and consistent efforts. It's to be said that the special method Chinese scholars had concluded in studying Arabic made them veritable masters of Arabic linguistics.

Despite the remarkable achievements they had made at home, Chinese scholars still desired to go to the Arab region to gain more original knowledge of the language and culture. During their stay in Makkah, they often visited the local scholars and participated in their discussions on many topics to enhance their communication with the Arab; they also visited the local cultural relics and collected books that they could not find in China. On the way to their destination, they also visited some places in between, such as Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Turkey, India and Singapore. They always focused on finding interesting knowledge which they would then copy and bring back to China, and the local scenery rarely caught their attention.

There were two major approaches of Chinese scholars acquiring the Arabic knowledge in history. One was they were educated by the local traditional system in the Masjid, and the other was they went to the Arab region personally and wrote down what they had learned after careful consideration, comparison and selection. Thus, it was not difficult to understand why Chinese scholars' tasks were attached so much importance to, for they had combined theory with cases in their studying of Arabic linguistics, which was a model that fitted in well with the Chinese readers.

3.3 Al-Muttasig is a High-quality Work on the Cross-cultural Communication Between China and the Arab Region in History and Its Influences on Both the Parties Will Continue in Future

To claim that al-Muttasig was a book of Arabic linguistics only is incorrect, for it was also regarded as the best result of cultural exchanges between the Chinese and the Arab in the history of human culture communication. Officials, businessmen, travelers and scholars had all participated in the cultural exchanges between China and the Arab region, but only the scholars had stayed in the local. The scholars completed their missions through linguistic communication and recorded the information they had acquired from linguistic communication in paper.

In modern times, language has recorded the results of cross-cultural exchanges in written books or notes, and Chinese scholars had done it so well in this regard. British scholar Michael Alexander Kirkwood (M.A.K.) Halliday (1925-2018) remarked that language has three meta-functions, including the ideational meta-function and the interpersonal meta-function in the social world. The Chinese scholars had already completed some works with magnificent ideas before Halliday put forward his theory, and these ideas were exchanged between writers and readers. Halliday said that language is not a passive reflection on material reality, but an active participant in the constitution of reality, for language is the greatest source of power and its huge potential cannot be underestimated (Halliday, 2015, pp. 3-4). In order to establish a cultural mechanism for exchanging ideas, they began thinking about spreading one specific culture among people. As known, language is the carrier of culture and Arabic is no exception. Arabic words originate in the tribal environment of the desertification region, just as the Arabic derivative words all share one common root. Based on this common root, a lot of new words can be produced. The types of Arabic sentences include nominal sentences and actual sentences. The Arabic nouns are divided into either masculine nouns or feminine nouns, which does not happen in Chinese. There are singular, double and plural numbers of nouns in Arabic, while there are only singular and plural numbers in Chinese. Information that people acquire from materials in Arabic may be different from that in Chinese. Therefore, the Chinese scholars first tried their best to acquire the basic knowledge and information from the Ustāz in their hometown, and after that, they traveled to the Arab region and spent several years there pursuing the original knowledge and information.

It's said that Chinese scholars who studied the Arabic language had to be proficient in both Chinese and Arabic so that they could apply themselves when inside China and exchange with Arabs when outside China. At present, activities like trade, international academic conferences, technological cooperation and information sharing have made cross-cultural exchanges more common, and language is the key to reaching high-level consensus in these activities. Cultural exchanges among people from different regions have boosted the progress of human civilization. It is because of language that human civilization can be preserved until today and even into the future. Thus, the particular effect that language has on recording traditional information and knowledge won't be completely substituted by modern technologies like films, recorders, memory sticks, NAND-flash and so on.

More than 100 years ago when Chinese scholars learned Arabic, they not only studied al-Sarf and al-Nahaw as the principal knowledge in the beginning, but also carefully studied al-Mantig and al-Balāgh in a higher level to pursue more information about the Arabic culture. For this purpose, the scholars followed their seniors' footsteps in learning and studying the Arabic language in the hometown, and they even travelled to the Arab

region. Therefore, the scholars restudied again all information that they acquired from people they had met outside China. After returning to the hometown, they created their new works in an innovative way to fit in the learning and understanding of the Arabic language and culture by Chinese readers. It was a simple idea at first, but their works had benefited many Chinese readers since 1860s. The works in which they had invested time and efforts combined all information of the Arabic language and culture together in a Chinese way, which became a fine example of the cultural exchanges between China and the Arab region in history.

It was found that in the book of *al-Muttasig*, many Arabic concepts were explained with Arab scholars' ideas, which could lead readers to return to the original books for more exact information. By this standard, it's to be said that Chinese scholars themselves had internalized the knowledge and information of the Arabic language and culture, and they reorganized the knowledge and information from the Chinese readers' point to make it easier to learn and study the Arabic language. By doing this, not only was the basic information and knowledge of the Arabic language and culture kept intact, but also the model fitted in with Chinese readers. The cultural exchanges between China and the Arab region had enhanced the mutual understanding of both sides and opened up the possibility for deeper study of each other's culture in the future. The study of cultural exchanges between China and the Arab region by the Chinese scholars served as the foundation of the completion of *al-Muttasig*.

IV Conclusion

Al-Muttasig has been one of the best works on Arabic linguistics in China since 1860s. This work is unprecedentedly detailed, and it has been considered as a masterpiece of cultural exchanges between the Chinese and the Arab in linguistics.

The authors of *al-Muttasig* and their generations had mixed blood of Arabs and Persians in history. They had inherited both the Chinese and Arabic cultures and made it their important task to arouse people's interest in the Arabic language and culture. *Al-Muttasig* was considered as some kind of traditional Chinese culture, for it was written by two Chinese from the perspective of Chinese readers, which allowed readers to get the ideas easily and quickly. After studying *al-Muttasig*, it was found that the authors of the book summed up studies on certain academic issues by quite a few scholars with detailed explanations or annotations. Actually, in the Arab region, the same academic issue was studied by many scholars in different approaches. Therefore, the academic issues were described with few words, while the clarifications were added with long sentences or more words. Arabs might like this kind of paper, but not the Chinese readers. Thus, comprehensive notes and quotes were made in the book of *al-Muttasig*.

Al-Muttasig has been taught as a text-book at *al-Madarasahs* since it was completed, and many students who studied Arabic linguistics have gained benefits from it. It has also become a very important reference book for the teaching program of Arabic-majored students at Chinese universities. *Al-Muttasig* has been used in China for more than 150 years. It was regarded as a symbol of cultural exchanges between China and the Arab region. Although *al-Muttasig* has been used in China over one and a half centuries, it is still very popular with readers. Its effect is also long-lasting in China. As Francis Bacon (1561-1626) said that studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Then, it may be trusted here which people would also acquire delight, ornament and ability in their studies of *al-Muttasig*, for it is an exquisite work on Arabic linguistics in China.

Due to some reasons, al-Muttasig had been popular in civil society rather than in the academic community in China since it was written down. As usual, people wanted to have a handwritten copy of the part of al-Muttasig that they were studying. Therefore, there were many copies of al-Muttasig in China, but some of them were greatly damaged due to dampness and insects gnawing. All of these were witnessed by the author of this paper 5 years ago, and that was unfortunate. Thus, it is important to do some rescue work to protect these precious cultural heritages immediately.

Fortunately, the Commercial Press set up in 1897 had decided to print al-Muttasig late time in Peking. Its timely printing would again make it popular with scholars.

References

- Abdullah, A. (2000). *Al-Eshitigāg (Arabic)* (2nd ed.). Cairo: Library of al-Khānjī.
- Brown, C. S. (2015). Chinese admiral in the Indian ocean [EB/OL]. Retrieved from website:<https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/big-history-project/expansion-Interconnection/exploration-interconnection/a/zheng-he>
- Dillon, M. (1999). *China's Muslim Hui community migration, settlement and sects*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- FAN, J. M. (2005). The position of ZHENG He's voyages to the western seas in the history of world navigation. *Jiangsu Social Science*, 1, 201.
- GUO, S. H. (1998). *Ilim al-Mufradāti al-Arabiyyah*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- GUO, Y. D. (2015). *The history of relationship between China and Arabs*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Halliday. (2015) *On language and linguistics*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Hasan, al-Shāfiā, & Muhamma, al-Said al-Jalīnde. (1999). *Logic and methodology (Arabic)*. Cairo: Al-Zahrāi Library.
- HE, Z. M., & MU, S. (2012). MA Lianyuan's contribution for scripture hall education in China. *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Studies*, 4, 118.
- Hu, L. (2019). Studying MA Liaoyuan's works III. *China Muslim*, Value 1, 34.
- LA, M. X. (Ed.). (2014). *The basic course of Arabic language and culture*. Beijing: Central Minzu University Press.
- MA, D. X. (1864). *Muttasig al-Sarf*. As a manuscript printed in 1864.
- MA, D. X., & MA, L. Y. (2015). *Al-Muttasig*. MA Minkang (Ed.). Tonghai Masjid, Yunnan Province.
- MA, G. D. (2005). On the influence of muslim on the Zheng He's navigation to the western oceans. *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Studies*, 2, 84-88.
- MA, H. (2019). *YINGYA SHENGLAN*. C. Jun FENG (Annotated). Beijing: Huawen Chubanshe.
- MA, M. L. (2006). *The history and prospects of the exchanges between Islamic civilization and Chinese civilization*. Beijing: China Social sciences Press.
- MA, Y. L. (Eds.). (2011). *MA Lianyuan's family in Islamic education*. Kunming: Yunnan Minzu Chubanshe.
- MU, Z. J. (2006). Preface 2 for the MA Dexin's thought studies. *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Studies*, 2, 115.
- Musab, al-Zubaidī. (1982). *Pedigree of Guraish (Arabic)*. Cairo: Dāru al-Ma`rifah.
- Petersen, K. (2006). Reconstructing Islam: Muslim education and literature in Ming-Qing China. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 23(3), 28, 29, 31-35.
- Petersen, K. (2011). Understanding the sources of the Sino-Islamic intellectual tradition: A review essay on *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic thought in Confucian terms*, by Sachiko Murata, William C. Chittick, and Tu Weiming, and recent Chinese literary treasures. *Philosophy East & West*, 61(3), 546-559.
- Petersen, K. (2014). Shifts in Sino-Islamic discourse: Modelling religious authority through language and travel. *Modern Asian Studies*, 48(02), 356-365.
- Salloum, H. (2015). Zheng He: China's most famous Muslim navigator [EB/OL]. DEC 16, 2015, Retrieved from <https://www.arabamerica.com/zheng-chinas-famous-navigator/>
- Shawqi, D. (1995). *Rhetoric, develop and history (Arabic)* (9th ed.). Cairo: Dāru al-Maārif.
- SONG, J. (2005). Zheng He's navigation and Muslim culture. *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Studies*, 3, 5-10.
- YANG, H. Z., & YU, Z. G. (Eds.). (1996). *Islam and Chinese culture*. Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe.
- YAO, J. D. (Ed.). (2019). *Collection of ancient books in Hui Muslim at Yuannan* (Vol. 1). Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe.