

ARABIC TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CHINA AND JAPAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY¹

I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines Arabic teaching and learning in China and Japan, and compares historical and educational aspects of Arabic studies in these two countries. First, beginning with China, the historical background, Arabic instruction in higher education, Arabic instruction external to higher education, teaching materials and assessment systems, and the demand for Arabic fluency are explored. Second, these same aspects are then investigated in Japan. Third, a comparative analysis is offered, which includes an exploration of the significance of Arabic in both countries. This essay chiefly relies on past studies on Arabic teaching and learning in China and Japan, as well as on data from official statistics. The investigation of Arabic instruction in China depends mainly on works by Ding Jun 丁俊 [2012], Nakanishi Tatsuya 中西竜也 [2013], and Fu Zhiming 付志明 [2015], and in Japan, chiefly on several works by Sumi M. Akiko 鷺見朗子 and Sumi Katsunori 鷺見克典 [Sumi K. and Sumi M. A. 2016; Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016a, 2016b, (in print)].

China and Japan have followed separate paths to introduce and encourage Arabic instruction, in accordance with their own historical and religious developments. The growth of Arabic instruction in China gen-

erally has been supported by Islamic education conducted primarily by Muslim citizens of the country. Attaining a high competency in Arabic language is useful in China for one's future career, and for cultural and economic cooperation with Arab countries. Due to these circumstances, Arabic education has been conducted on a larger scale in China than in Japan. By contrast, interest in Arabic instruction in Japan is mainly generated via functions that are hosted to attract people who are interested in the Arab region and wish to deepen their understanding of the Arab people and their culture. Thus, between these countries, the most prevalent motives for learning and promoting Arabic language significantly differ.

II. CHINA

1. Historical Background

An early contact between the Chinese and the Arab *Dashi* 大食 people appears in a Chinese historical record which says that in the year 651, the third caliph 'Uthmān sent a delegation to the Tang Dynasty (618–907) in China [Ding 2012:21]. The Chinese emperor offered general approval for Islam as the religion seemed to be compatible with Confucianism. A later record notes that in 760, a few thousand Arab and Persian merchants were killed in a rebellion [Nakanishi 2013:15]. In the Yuan period (1271–1368), numerous Muslims (Arabs and Persians) migrated from Central Asia to China [Nakanishi 2013:15–16], and soon after, Muslims occupied high positions in both the political and social hierarchies of Yuan China. During the Ming period (1368–1644), however, those prominent positions were lost, and Muslim migration from Central Asia stopped. Muslims in China then became increasingly isolated and indigenized. In the late 16th century, competence in Arabic and Persian languages, and detailed knowledge of Islam among Chinese Muslims rapidly declined.

In response to this crisis, an initiative developed for the restoration of Islam in China. The teaching of Arabic, which is the language of the Qur'an, was promoted again as part of the mosque-based educational system (*jingtang jiaoyu* 經堂教育) in the late 16th century. Hu Dengzhou 胡登州 (1522–97) is considered one of the major pioneers who initiated this refreshed educational system in Shaanxi. He based the system on the madrasah, which had long existed in the Islamic world, and taught in Chinese private classes [Ding 2012:39; Nakanishi 2013:22–23]. This



**Photo 1. Yinchuan Nanguan Mosque
(Yinchuan Nanguan Qinzhenqi 銀川南關清真寺)**

mosque-based Arabic education system attained maturity in the early 18th century. Teachers were called *ahong* 阿訇, a term that was also understood to signify a Muslim scholar. Chinese Muslims formed communities based in mosques (*qingzhensi* 清真寺; see Photo 1 as an example), and invited erudite and virtuous *ahong* to teach local peoples. Sometimes these *ahong* came from places far away. The *ahong* would live in a mosque and, in addition to teaching, would administer a variety of affairs that required Islamic knowledge. Many *ahong* utilized not only the traditional religious teaching methods inherited from Arab countries but also Confucian ideas to interpret Islamic classical documents [Fu 2015].

Children in Chinese communities were thereby able to acquire an Islamic education, including Arabic language. Some graduated only having studied the basics of Islamic knowledge and elementary Arabic. But others studied more advanced knowledge with the aim to become an *ahong* themselves. Such *ahong* candidates, called *manlā* (from *mawlā* in Arabic), closely associated with their *ahong* teachers and lodged with them in their mosque [Nakanishi 2012:159].

Subjects in this mosque-based education system included Arabic

grammar (*naḥw*), morphology (*ṣarf*), rhetoric (*bayān*), logic (*mantiq*), and Islamic theology (*kalām*) and law (*fiqh*). More advanced students learned the Persian language and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), using texts written in Persian. When part or all of these subjects were completed (the process could take from 10 to 20 years), the *ahong* candidates graduated and became new *ahong* under the approval/license of their teacher *ahong*. Producing a great number of *ahong* of superior ability, the traditional mosque education system played an important part in the regeneration of Islam in China.

In modern times, however, the mosque education system has been questioned due to its lack of a promotion system and its inefficient methods of instruction. Namely, critics argued that the teaching content became ossified and the system was not adjusted to train its students to live in modern environments. Nakanishi believes that these defects caused Chinese Muslims to insufficiently understand Islam, to not acquire adequate Chinese language facility, and to neglect modern knowledge in various fields [Nakanishi 2012:160; 2013:26]. Consequently, a new system of schools (primary, secondary, and high schools) was founded in various places in the early 20th century. In 1907, Wang Haoran 王浩然 (1848–1919) established Arabic Language Normal School (Huiwen Shifan Xuetang 回文師範學堂) in Beijing. Other schools, such as Beijing Chengda Normal School (Beijing Chengda Shifan Xuexiao 北京成達師範學校), Shanghai Islamic Normal School (Shanghai Yisilan Shifan Xuexiao 上海伊斯蘭師範學校), Yunnan Mingde Secondary School (Yunnan Mingde Zhongxuejiao 雲南明德中學校), and New Moon Women's Secondary School (Xinyue Nüzi Zhongxuejiao 新月女子中學校) were founded soon after [Ding 2012:43]. These schools trained students in both Arabic and Chinese, and focused on reading, writing, listening, speaking, and translation in addition to general courses like mathematics, history, and art. This sort of education laid the cornerstone of Arabic instruction in modern Chinese higher education [Fu 2015]. The main figures in this new system of instruction were Ma Jian 馬堅 (1906–78), Na Zhong 納忠 (1909–2008), Liu Linrui 劉麟瑞 (1917–95), and Ma Jinpeng 馬金鵬 (1913–2001) [Ding 2012:60].

Following this reform, Chinese Muslims desired to rear youths who would be capable of elevating their political and social status by supporting political and social movements and general education, to say nothing of their religious education. They entertained aspirations to save China as the country was verging on a crisis while confronting the great powers [Nakanishi 2012:160; 2013:26].

Regarding study abroad, in the period of mosque-based education,

those who wanted the experience of studying in Arab countries had to carry out their plan as an individual. But in the 1930s, schools began sending their students abroad in groups. In 1931, Yunnan Islamic Association (Yunnan Yisilanjiao Xiehui 雲南伊斯蘭教協會) and Yunnan Mingde Middle School dispatched five students; among them were Ma Jian and Na Zhong. They studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Subsequently, Beijing Chengda Normal School and Shanghai Islamic Normal School likewise sent a group of students to the same university. After finishing their studies and returning to China, some of them contributed considerably as both teachers and researchers to the creation of Arabic programs in Chinese universities [Fu 2015]. Fu notes that they also played an active role in encouraging the Hui Nationalism movements in China [2015].

2. Arabic Instruction after Its Integration into Higher Education

Shortly before the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949, Arabic instruction was introduced into higher education. After hiring Na Zhong, Central University (Zhongyang Daxue 中央大學) in Chongqing 重慶 began to offer Arabic courses in 1943 [Ding 2012:77].² Peking University (Beijing Daxue 北京大學) established their Arabic specialization in the Eastern Languages Department in 1946, after employing the Muslim scholar Ma Jian [Ding 2012:77; Peking University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Arabic Language and Culture 2014:3] (see Photo 2 for an Arabic class in the university). Fu states that ten students, most of whom were Muslims with some prior experience of learning Arabic before they entered the university, were enrolled in the Arabic specialization program [2015]. After 1949, the new Chinese government (PROC) became interested in strengthening Sino-Arab relations [Zhang 2014:14], and so more universities opened an Arabic program. In 1954, University of International Business and Economy in Beijing (Duiwai Jingji Maoyi Daxue 對外經濟貿易大學) established an Arabic major. In 1958, Chinese Foreign Affairs University (Beijing Waijiao Xueyuan 北京外交學院) also established an Arabic major, and Na Zhong was appointed the Director. An Arabic major became part of the School of Asian and African Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University (Beijing Waiguoyu Daxue 北京外國語大學) in 1961 (see Photo 3 for a building there, devoted to Arabic and Islamic studies). In 1958, Shanghai Foreign Language Institute (Shanghai Waiguoyu Xueyuan 上海外國語學院; the present Shanghai Waiguoyu Daxue 上海外國語大學) also established an Arabic major. Later, Beijing International Stud-



Photo 2. An Arabic class with a native speaker instructor in Peking University



Photo 3. Shaykh Zāyid Center for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University

ies University (Beijing Dier Waiguoyu Xueyuan 北京第二外國語學院) and many other universities established Arabic specialization programs [Ding 2012:77]. In particular, Arabic teaching grew vigorously during the 1980s. Educational and cultural exchanges with Arab countries were promoted by sending students abroad to study, and by inviting native speaker teachers to visit and work in China. Fu states that in 2014, there were 46 accredited Chinese universities which offered an Arabic major in their undergraduate programs [2015]. A number of universities also had created an agreement with Arab universities regarding study abroad opportunities for Chinese students. For instance, Beijing Foreign Studies University presently has an agreement with more than ten Arab universities and institutions.

Arabic education is further bolstered by the Chinese government. For example, the government made an agreement regarding cooperation in the field of education with the League of Arab States as part of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2006–2008 [Zhongguo-Alabo Guojia Hezuo Luntan c2006]. The two sides agreed to expand their mutual study abroad programs and scholarships, in addition to promoting Arabic instruction in China and Chinese instruction in the Arab States.

According to Chen Jie 陳杰, Arabic major programs in China aim to develop five basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, as well as requisite Arab and Islamic knowledge. Examples of skills and topics taught in the programs are pronunciation, intensive reading, reading of newspapers and magazines, Arabic grammar, listening, translation, composition, rhetoric, the history of the Arabs, selected works of Arabic literature, the Qur'ān, the current situations of Arab countries, politics and diplomacy, and economy and industry in Arab countries [Chen 2014].

Regarding graduate schools, among those universities which have undergraduate programs for Arabic, at least ten are qualified to confer a master's degree, and at least four (i.e., Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing Language and Culture University (Beijing Yuyan Daxue 北京語言大學), and Shanghai International University) are qualified to confer a doctoral degree in Arabic and its related fields as of 2015.

3. Arabic Instruction external to Higher Education

Alongside university education, Islamic schools based on the new system remained popular. Islamic Association of China (Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Xiehui 中國伊斯蘭教協會) established its first Islamic Institute in Beijing in 1955 [Ding 2012:101]. The institute usually offers a four-year program consisting of Islamic courses and other basic courses, such as history and geography. Students take unified examinations in order to enter the institute. After graduation, many of the students become religious leaders and/or scholars, and work in teaching-related jobs. In addition to the national religious schools, there are nine regional institutes, such as those in Xinjiang and Hebei [Fu 2015]. However, the success of these modern style schools has not fully eclipse mosque-based education in mosques. Having improved their curricula, teaching materials, and teaching methods, and also their instruction in Chinese language, some mosques still continue to conduct education [Nakanishi 2013:26].

Recently, following the economic reform in China, private Arabic schools have opened in various places in the country. They usually offer three to five-year education programs. Apart from Arabic, the students study other basic subjects too. Some schools offer finance, economics, trade, and computer-related courses. The graduates generally pursue employment in commercial or diplomatic occupations and in public institutions. Examples of large private schools are Changzhi Arabic School (Changzhi Alaboyu Xuexiao 長治阿拉伯語學校) in Shanxi, Linxia Foreign Languages College (Linxia Waiguoyu Xuexiao 臨夏外國語學校; formerly Gansu Linxia Zhong'a Xuexiao 甘肅臨夏中阿學校), and Beijing New Horizon School (Beijing Xintianfang Xuexiao 北京新天方學校; formerly Beijing Xintianfang Alaboyu Peixun Jigou 北京新天方阿拉伯語培訓機構) [Ding 2012:104; Fu 2015].

One of the non-governmental schools is Ningxia International Language College (Ningxia Guoji Yuyan Xuexiao 寧夏國際語言學校; see Photo 4).³ According to their homepage, its predecessor, Ningxia Muslim Vocational Training School, was founded in 2007 in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region [Ningxia International Language College]. This college is also reportedly the largest non-governmental school that teaches Arabic in China. They support 1,590 students and 128 teaching and administrative staff, including 56 full-time teachers, of which 43 are Arabic teachers, and 30 are native speaker teachers [Ningxia International Language College]. The native speaker instructors are from Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, Sudan, and Egypt. Many graduates go to universities in Arab countries to pursue a B.A. degree.



Photo 4. An Arabic class of female students in Ningxia International Language College

4. Teaching Materials and Assessment Systems

In the period dominated by mosque-based education, textbooks were chiefly chosen from authentic texts in the fields of religious and language studies. As those books were not suitable for contemporary Chinese learners, Ma Jian undertook the compilation of a textbook soon after the Arabic major was established at Peking University in 1946. Since the 1980s, numerous textbooks have been published (see Photo 5 for examples of the textbooks). Some university professors in Arabic major programs have compiled textbooks consisting of multiple volumes, ranging in number from two to ten volumes [Ding 2012:95–97]. To standardize Arabic teaching, the Chinese government produced “A Guide for Arabic Teaching in Higher Educational Institutions” (Gaodeng Xuexiao Alaboyu Jiaoxue Dagang 高等學校阿拉伯語教學大綱) and also created the standard test for Arabic majors in 2007. This test is evaluated to result in four rankings: excellent, good, pass, and fail [Ding 2012:98–100; Fu 2015]. The Ministry of Education (Jiaoyu-bu 教育部) issues certificates to those who pass the test. National examinations on Arabic translations

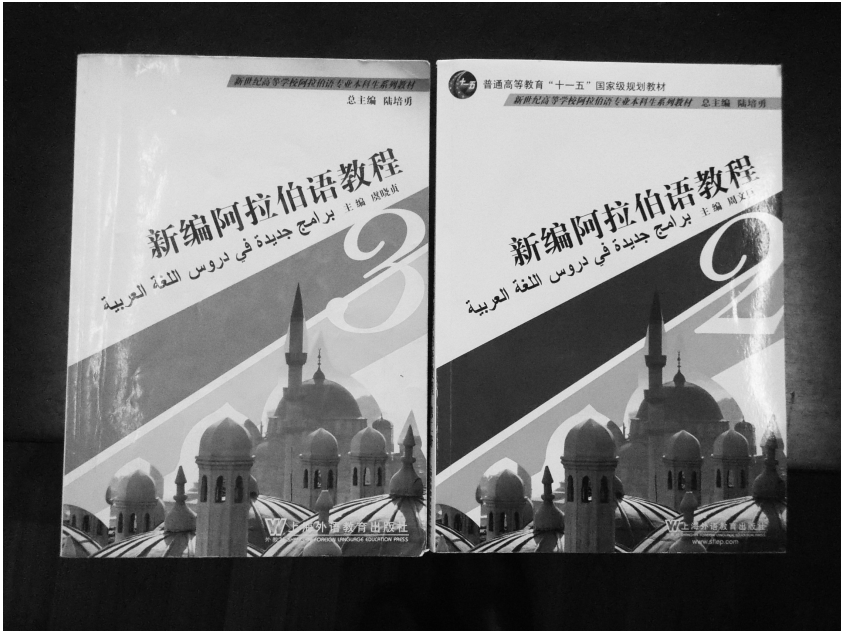


Photo 5. Examples of Arabic textbooks used in Chinese universities and schools

also are administered by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security [Fu 2015].

5. The Demand for Arabic Language Fluency in the Job Market

Expanded interest in Arabic learning and teaching in China can be explained by the increasing demand for Arabic speakers to facilitate the recent economic and commercial activities between China and Arab regions. Chen Jie says that university graduates with an Arabic major can find jobs in the areas of politics and diplomacy, the economy and commerce, academic and cultural institutes, education, the media, and the military [2014]. Students of Arabic institutes tend to easily find employment after graduation [Matsumoto 2012:291; Shinbo 2012:355]. One newspaper states that most of the Arabic graduates from Linxia Foreign Languages College obtain jobs as translators and interpreters after graduation [al-Sharq al-Awsat 2010]. They work on projects for Chinese trade companies which transact business with companies in Egypt, Libya, and other Arab countries. The source also reports that be-

cause of rapid growth in commercial exchanges between China and Arab countries during recent years, the employment rate of graduates from Arabic schools has risen greatly. The trade volume between China and Arab countries has steadily increased during the 10 years between 2004 and 2013: from 25 billion US dollars in 2004 to 238 billion US dollars in 2013 [Japan Business Press 2014]. This upsurge supports an increasing need for employees who are competent in Arabic.

III. JAPAN

1. Historical Background

One of the initial interactions between Japan and the Arabs occurred in China. According to Sugita Hideaki 杉田英明, the Japanese historical record *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, written in 754, relates that when the Japanese envoy Otomo no Komaro 大伴古麻呂 was sent to China during the Tang dynasty, he met there an envoy from “Daishi” 大食 (the Arab). While Komaro vied with an envoy from the Silla Kingdom (in the Korean Peninsula) concerning the seating order in an audience ceremony with the Tang emperor, the Arab envoy was placed before both of them [Sugita 1995:17]. Japan began to recognize the Arabs in the Tokugawa era (1603–1867). *Zōho Kai Tsūshōkō* 增補華夷通商考 by Nishikawa Joken 西川如見 (1648–1724) is a world geographical book based on a work by the Italian missionary, Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) published in 1708. This work introduced to Japan “Arabiya” (Arabia), which was said to be a region under the Ottoman Empire [Sugita 1995:53, 54, 66–72]. The words “Arabian desert,” “phoenix,” and “the Dead Sea” were explained in the book. The work likewise mentions Egypt, noting the deluge of the Nile and their development of astronomy.

Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725) introduced Islam, which Nishikawa had totally ignored, in addition to “Toruka” or the Ottoman Empire. In his *Sairan Igen* 采覽異言 (1713) and his *Seiyō Kibun* 西洋紀聞 (1715), Arai referred to the Sacred Book and the Messenger of Islam, and said that Islam is one of the big three religions—these being Christianity, Paganism including Buddhism, and Islam [Horiike 2009:8–9; Sugita 1995:76–78]. His works were based upon European and Chinese sources. An encyclopedia named *Wakan Sansai Zue* 和漢三才図会 (ed. Terashima Yoshiyasu 寺島良安), published in 1712 during the Tokugawa era in Japan, includes 15 entries which relate to the Arabs. Examples are frankincense, turban, the Nile, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the

Qur'ān [Horiike 2009:8–9; Sugita 1995:58, 78–82].

After the Meiji era (1868–1912), Japan continued to receive knowledge about the Arabs and Islam from literature, likely because there were few Muslims who visited Japan [Sugita 1995:145]. Because much of that literature was based upon European sources and contained biased views against Islam, Japanese people were obliged to develop an image of Islam by rectifying prejudiced aspects on their own initiative [Sugita 1995:151]. Three versions of the Qur'ān were translated into Japanese from European languages. However, most Japanese people were not interested in Islam [Sugita 1995:151]. In the same era, the first Japanese translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* (the *Arabian Nights*) was published in 1885 from an English version, and this was followed by a number of further publications of its translations, sometimes from other versions. This collection of tales created an image of “deserts and camels” within a framework of exoticism for the Japanese, and may have hindered Japanese people from understanding realities of the Arab world and Islam [Horiike 2009:9].

In the twentieth century, some Japanese converted to Islam. Early Japanese Muslims included Noda Shōtarō 野田正太郎 (1868–1904) and Yamada Torajirō 山田寅次郎 (1866–1957), who converted in Istanbul around 1902. The first Japanese to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca, Yamaoka Mitsutarō 山岡光太郎 (1880–1959), converted to Islam in 1909 in Bombay. These Japanese people converted in foreign lands—unlike earlier converts to Christianity and Buddhism, who were introduced to their religions by missionaries and Buddhist bonzes [Sugita 1995:153]. It is assumed that a few people learned Arabic in that period, including these Muslim converts [Sugita 1995:159].

2. Arabic Instruction after Its Integration into Higher Education

In 1925, Osaka Foreign Language College (Ōsaka Gaikokugo Gakkō 大阪外国語学校) began to offer Arabic. This was the beginning of formal Arabic education in Japan. Arabic was one of three languages (with English and Persian) offered as electives during the second year in the Indian and Malayan Department at the college (now the School of Foreign Studies in Osaka University). Seventeen students elected to study Arabic in that year. The first professor of Arabic was Matsumoto Shigeharu 松本重彦 (1887–1969), originally a scholar of Japanese history. He was sent to study Arabic in Germany from 1922 to 1924. After returning to Japan, he taught Arabic from 1925 to 1929 and relied on the German method of Arabic instruction, focusing on grammar in all stages [Ikeda

c1980:77].

The first surge of Islamic studies in Japan occurred in the late 1930s, though Japan had become interested in Islam at the outset of the 20th century. In 1940, the Osaka Foreign Language College established an Arabic Department, which was the first in Japan [Ikeda c1980:78]. Japanese diplomats who had learned Arabic in Arab regions taught in the department. The college later became a university and was named Osaka University of Foreign Studies (Ōsaka Gaikokugo Daigaku 大阪外国語大学) in 1949 (in 2007, this became the School of Foreign Studies at Osaka University). From 1940 to 1975, the quota each year for the Arabic department was fifteen students. This was increased to 25 students after 1976, due perhaps to the influence of the First Oil Crisis of 1973.

Japan's interest in Arab-Islamic studies withered after Japan was defeated in the Pacific War in 1945. Nevertheless, a small number of scholars, including a well-known Japanese scholar of Islamic studies named Izutsu Toshihiko 井筒俊彦 (1914–93), continued to pursue their studies. Izutsu published *Arabia-go nyūmon* アラビア語入門 (Arabic grammar) in 1950 [Izutsu 1950]. A number of universities and institutes taught Arabic along with related subjects such as history, religion, and international relations from the 1950s [Ikeda c1980:79]. A second Arabic department was founded in Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku 東京外国語大学) in 1961. Ten students entered the department and studied Arabic with one teacher. Also established in 1961 in Tokyo, the Asia-Africa Linguistic Institute (Ajia Afurika-go Gakuin アジア・アフリカ語学院) began to teach Arabic in 1962 [Kōeki Zaidan Hōjin Ajia Afurika Bunka Zaidan: Ajia-go Gakushū]. During that period, Japanese people's interest in Arab regions increased, due in part to the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the fact that imported petroleum from the region supported the growing Japanese economy in the 1960s [Itagaki 1980:61]. A professor at Osaka University of Foreign Studies mentioned that their Arabic Department graduates were in great demand by employers in 1961 [Sawa 1961:3].

The First Oil Crisis of 1973 focused Japan's attention on the Arab region. Because of this event, the demand for Arabic language ability ballooned. TUFS raised its quota from 10 to 15 students each year. Osaka University of Foreign Studies increased its quota from 15 to 25 students per year. Private universities opened more Arabic courses. According to Itagaki, private Japanese enterprises sent hundreds of Japanese trainees in Arabic to Cairo in the early 1980s [Itagaki 1980: 61]. A private university, Shitennoji International Buddhist University (Shitennōji Kokusai Bukkyō Daigaku 四天王寺国際仏教大学; the present Shitennōji

Daigaku 四天王寺大学) also established a major for Arabic language and culture as part of the Department of Languages and Cultures in 1983. That program, which began with a quota of 30 students per year and five teachers, was discontinued in 2008.

There are no junior high schools in Japan that offer Arabic courses, based on the research done for 2007–2014 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan (Monbu Kagakushō 文部科学省) [Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016a:104]. Sumi and Sumi report that there were only three high schools in Japan that offer Arabic courses in 2016 [Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016a:105–106]. All of these are situated in the Greater Tokyo metropolitan area. As there were 4300 full-time high schools in Japan in 2014, these three high schools constitute a very small proportion of all the high schools in the country.

In Japan, Arabic instruction has been offered mainly in higher education. However, this does not mean that the proportion of universities offering Arabic courses is high. Only 6.2% (49 universities) of all the Japanese universities (781) offered Arabic courses in the 2014 academic year [Monbu Kagakushō 2016]. Additionally, Sumi and Sumi report that approximately 83% of those universities which offer Arabic courses are located in urban areas [Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016a:111–112].

Although there are no official detailed data concerning the number of universities which offered Arabic before 1997, it seems that since the 1960s the number gradually has increased.⁴ Figure 1 shows the data drawn from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan: 37 universities in 1997 grew to 50 in 2006 and 2008. From 2009 to 2014, the number fluctuated between 43 and 49. Therefore, it can be said that in the past ten years, the number of universities offering Arabic has been mostly stable. Figure 1 also offers a breakdown into three categories: (1) national, (2) public (i.e., prefectural or municipal), and (3) private universities. In this breakdown, private universities are predominant. In fact, the numbers of national and public universities have not changed much. For the most part, the increase in the number of universities offering Arabic has come from private universities. Several factors may have positively affected the opening of Arabic courses in universities. Momentous world events relating to the Arabs and Islam, such as 9/11 in 2001, may have been a factor, as the number 40 in 2001 increased to 50 by 2006. However, it is difficult to elucidate such influences.

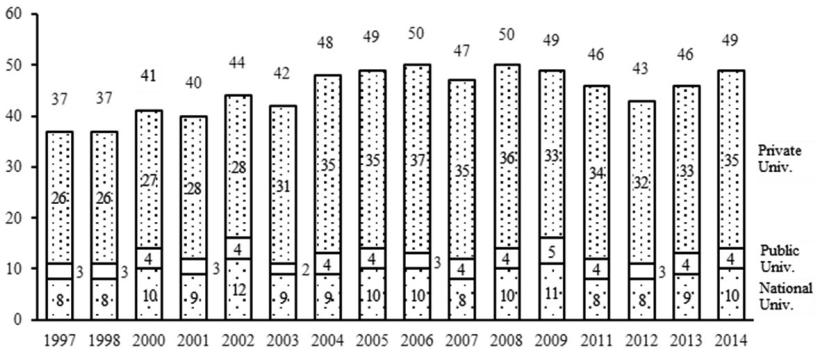


Figure 1. The number of 4-year universities offering Arabic courses in Japan from 1997 to 2014

Note: The number above a bar is a total of universities. There are no data for 1999 and 2010. This figure is based on Figure 1 in Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. [2016a] and Figure 3.1 in Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. [(in print)], which were drawn using data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan. The data of 2014 was taken from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan [Monbu Kagakushō 2016].

Universities offering Arabic courses can be divided into two types. One is universities that offer Arabic for Arabic major students, who take it as required subject. These universities have an Arabic major program.⁵ The other type of university offers Arabic as an elective for non-Arabic major students. The two types are very different in their language teaching intensity. Arabic majors study Arabic in an intensive manner, while most non-Arabic majors take an Arabic course that requires them to attend one class for 90 minutes per week (though some take two classes of Arabic per week, according to their universities’ module system).

Currently, only two universities have an Arabic major program in Japan. One is Osaka University, and the other is TUFUS. Both are national universities, with master’s and doctoral programs in Arabic and its related fields. Both also offer Arabic courses as electives for students who are not Arabic majors. The remaining 47 (of the total 49) universities offer Arabic courses only as electives.⁶ Most of these universities offer an Arabic course once a week, and many offer Arabic for only two years. Thus, it is very difficult for non-Arabic major students to reach a high level of competency.

In this situation, the two universities which have an Arabic major

program are precious. Arabic major students choose Arabic as their major before they enter the university, and acquiring Arabic language credit hours is required for them. Their Arabic curriculum consists of more than five Arabic classes per week (the length of one class is usually 90 minutes). Their Arabic study focuses on modern standard Arabic, though they also take a few courses in Arabic dialects. An example of the curriculum of courses for an Arabic major is Arabic grammar, conversation, composition, listening comprehension, and reading. The students are also required to take Arab-related subjects, such as history, politics, religions, linguistics, and literature of the Arab region. These two universities have study abroad programs for students who wish to study in Arab countries.

Although the number of universities offering Arabic as electives did not change (49 in 2005 to 49 in 2014; though there was a brief decrease to 43 in 2012) during the past ten years, Sumi and Sumi report that the number of Arabic courses offered as electives almost doubled from 138 in 2005 to 273 in 2014 [Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016a:108] (see Photo 6 as an example of an Arabic class). This increase shows a growing interest exhibited by the universities and their students to promote the study of Arabic. Open University of Japan (Hōsō Daigaku 放送大学),



Photo 6. An Arabic class with a native speaker instructor in a Japanese university

which conducts distance education, also has offered an introductory Arabic course via TV each semester during the 2006–2016 academic years. Two to six hundred students from various regions of Japan have taken that Arabic course per semester [Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016a:114–115]. As was stated earlier, the locations of universities offering Arabic are unevenly distributed, and most are in urban areas. Therefore, Open University of Japan offers an opportunity to those who have no other chance to learn Arabic.

Students who study Arabic, both Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, show a strong interest in Arabic culture. This includes Arab history and archaeology, literature and cinema, politics and conflicts, tourist resources in the Arab region, and Islam, based on Sumi and Sumi's research [Sumi K. and Sumi M. A. 2016; Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016b]. The results of their study also prove that an increase in the study of Arabic culture is closely linked to improvement in motivation, confidence in one's ability to learn or acquire skills, and goal-orientation among Japanese students [Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. 2016b:172–173].

3. Arabic Instruction External to Higher Education

Outside of formal education, there are language institutes and other projects for the teaching of Arabic in Japan. Two language institutes, which are comparatively old, are located in Tokyo. One is the Asia-Africa Linguistic Institute, established in 1961. Arabic is one of the three languages which the institute teaches in a specialized program (the other two languages are Chinese and Hindi) [Kōeki Zaidan Hōjin Ajia Afurika Bunka Zaidan: Ajia-go Gakushū]. The institute has been valuable for people who wish to study Arabic, particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s when only a relatively small number of universities offered Arabic courses. The other institute, the Arabic Islamic Institute in Tokyo (Arabu Isurāmu Gakuin アラブイスラーム学院), was founded in 1981. This is the Tokyo branch of Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. Their goal is to promote the understanding of Arab-Islamic culture among Japanese people, based on Arabic instruction. Their Arabic courses generally are conducted by native speaker teachers, including instructors of Egyptian and Sudanese nationality, who focus on the development of conversation ability [Arabic Islamic Institute in Tokyo].

An intensive short camp for the study of Arabic has been held in Kyoto, Japan in 2015 and 2016 [Arabia-go Shūchū Kōza Gasshuku]. The length was a week each time. During the camp session, the participants made a pledge to use only Arabic, which is similar to the practice in the



Photo 7. Japanese students learning Arabic calligraphy with an Arab calligrapher in the intensive Arabic camp



Photo 8. Japanese students learning Arab dance (*dabkah*) in the intensive Arabic camp

Middlebury Language Schools program [Abdalla 2006]. The participants in each year were about 50 students from diverse regions of Japan. They were chosen from over 80 applicants and divided into three levels in the camp. The instructors consisted of three or four Japanese, and four or five native speakers. The goal of the instruction was to train the students to communicate, with a particular emphasis on speaking and listening skills. Another goal was to deepen their understanding of Arab culture by having the participants take part in various cultural activities, such as Arab dance (*dabkah*), Arabic calligraphy, cooking, singing, and plays (see Photo 7 and 8).

4. Teaching Materials and Assessment Systems

One of the early teaching materials for Arabic in Japan was a short course text written by Kikuchi Keiichirō 菊池慧一郎 in serial format within the magazine *Kaikyō Sekai* 回教世界 (Islamic World) [Kikuchi 1940]. Izutsu's *Arabia-go nyūmon* came out in 1950,⁷ as was stated earlier. Since the 1960s, numerous books on Arabic learning have been published. Concerning textbooks, the majority are elementary level, but there are a limited number of textbooks for the intermediate and advanced levels. Textbooks that are used in universities include Kuroyanagi and Iimori [1976], Ikeda [1976], and Sasaki [1997], which all adopt a grammatical syllabus that emphasizes the structure of the language. Honda [1993, 1998], Sumi [2006, 2011], and Takeda [2010] contain a skit, vocabularies, grammatical explanations, and drills in every chapter, and are used in some universities. These textbooks mostly are used in Arabic courses offered as electives. The professors at TUFS composed a series of textbooks in 2013, 2014, and 2016, which are mainly for university students who major in Arabic.⁸ In addition, certifying examinations for Arabic are offered by a NPO corporation, Japan Association of Arabic Certifying Examination (Nihon Arabia-go Kentei Kyōkai 日本アラビア語検定協会), founded in 2007. The association has six levels of certification exams, but the highest two levels have never been given. Only the lower four levels were being offered as of 2016 [Nihon Arabia-go Kentei Kyōkai].

5. The Demand for Arabic Language Fluency in the Job Market

It seems that jobs which require Arabic are not so common in Japan. One reason is that Japanese companies do not have high expectations for Arabic language ability. A questionnaire study that examined 21 Japa-

nese companies with close relations to Arab regions, as well as branches and factories in Arab countries, reported that those companies do not attach much importance to Arabic fluency in their businesses [Suzuki 2006]. For the survey question “if an applicant for employment in your company demonstrates his/her Arabic ability, will you take that into account while evaluating the candidate,” 52.4% of the companies answered “No.” Only 19.0% of them provide Arabic training, either in Japan or in Arab countries—the remaining 81% do not. Furthermore, they state that the most essential required language ability is English, and that Arabic is supplementary. In fact, these companies stress English ability more than Arabic in the following four skills: interpretation, translation, negotiation, and computer-related skills. During candidate assessments, they give from 4.5 to 4.9 out of 5 points for English fluency in all of the four skills, and from 2.6 to 2.7 out of 5 points for Arabic fluency in the four skills. Thus, they value English fluency approximately 1.8 times as much as Arabic fluency.

On the other hand, for the question “is the employee’s fluency in Arabic before entering the company one of the criteria for being placed in charge of an Arab division,” 66.7% of the companies answered “Yes.” The study also states that these companies demand that their Japanese employees understand Arab-Islamic culture and that they will be capable of speaking and negotiating with their Arab clients. This suggests that the companies may wish to project that they desire a high level of Arabic competence among their employees, but perhaps in reality do not really expect such a high degree of training. It is obvious that these Japanese companies do not depend upon their employees’ Arabic fluency for their business. Consequently, it may be difficult for graduates with Arabic majors to find jobs in Japan which require use of that language.

This tendency toward low demand for Arabic is partly due to the fact that foreign language education in Japan has long concentrated on English. Whereas English was offered in 95.3% of all the Japanese universities in 2014, Arabic was offered in only 6.2% of them [Monbu Kagakushō 2016]. On the other hand, economic cooperation between Japan and Arab countries has been promoted. For instance, the Japan-Arab Economic Forum was held in 2009, 2010, 2013, and 2016 [Gaimushō 2016].⁹ Japan also relies on Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE for imports of crude oil—more than 75% of Japan’s total oil imports, according to 2013 statistics [Keizai Sangyōshō Shigen Enerugi-chō 2015]. Nevertheless, it is speculated that occupations related to Japan-Arab economic cooperation do not contribute to the perceived need for Arabic language fluency.

IV. COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION

In this section, a further comparative examination is offered of the situations of Arabic instruction in China and Japan. In addition, the significance of Arabic in the two countries is more deeply explored because it is likely that differences in the current states of instruction are due to the varying significances assigned to Arabic language ability in the two countries.

1. Historical Background

As our survey of the historical background in China and Japan indicates, Arabic teaching and learning has been more intimately linked with the development of Islam in China than in Japan. To review briefly, Islam reached China in 651. Soon after, some Chinese people adopted Islam and welcomed its culture in their society. Because Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, learning Arabic was indispensable for Chinese Muslims. The mosque-based education system, which began in the late 16th century, contributed to the foundation of Arabic instruction in China. In the early 20th century, schools of a new system began to dominate Islamic education. With great efforts by main figures who were trained in this new system, such as Ma Jian and Na Zhong, Arabic teaching was introduced into Chinese higher education in the 1940s. Also, there appears to have been great interest among Chinese Muslims to study Arabic in language schools outside of higher education.

By contrast, the contacts for Japan with Islam and the Arabic language historically have been far fewer. In the early 20th century, some Japanese embraced Islam. But after more than a century, the current population of Japanese Muslims is no more than several thousand (this estimate excludes 60,000 to 100,000 foreign Muslim residents in Japan) [Horiike 2009:7]. By contrast, it is reported that there are now more than 20 million Chinese Muslims [Horiike 2009:7]. These figures demonstrate that Japanese people's experience of Islam and the Arabs is far more limited than Chinese interactions. Generally, until the Meiji era (1868–1912), Japanese people's interest in Islam and the Arab regions was sparse, and their knowledge of these subjects was acquired primarily from literature derived from the West and China. Moreover, since that era Japan has entertained a general image of the Arabs as exotic, much like they were depicted in the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

2. Arabic Instruction after Its Integration into Higher Education

Based on our examination of the more recent situations of Arabic instruction in China and Japan, Arabic instruction in China currently is conducted on a larger scale than in Japan. This can be illustrated by the fact that the number of universities and schools offering Arabic education are very different in the two countries. Though there is a large disparity in national population and in the percentages of students who attain the university level in each country, the number of universities offering an Arabic major program in Japan is still very small—only two universities do so. By contrast, 46 universities offer an Arabic major program in China. Although 49 universities (including the two universities with an Arabic major program) offer elective Arabic courses in Japan, approximately 80 % of them offer only one class of Arabic per week, which does not appear to be sufficient to develop the high competency that enables students to engage in an occupation that requires Arabic fluency. The situation regarding Arabic language institutes or schools is similar to that of the universities. Whereas numerous elementary and secondary Arabic schools, including Islamic schools, exist in China [Ding 2012:166–169], only three high schools and no junior high schools offer Arabic courses in Japan. There are a large number of Arabic language institutes in China, while there are only two institutes that provide Arabic teaching as a specialty in Japan.

Textbooks and assessment systems are among the most important tools in the production of good educational results. Though it is difficult to compare the state of Arabic textbook publications in the two countries, it appears that textbooks written by university professors and published in multiple volumes for higher level studies [Ding 2012:157–160] are more abundant in China, compared to Japan. This also signifies the greater need in China for Arabic speakers with a high degree of fluency. Standard examinations are offered in both countries, but governmental initiative seems to be stronger in China than in Japan. The standard test in China is certified by the Ministry of Education of China, which also has issued a guide for Arabic teaching in higher education institutions. It can be said that a more authorized testing system is provided in China than in Japan, and the Chinese government tries to maintain the quality of Arabic teaching by promoting their official guide.

3. The Significance of Learning Arabic

The institutional development of Arabic education is closely connected

to the needs of the society, and generally the significance of Arabic for learners is likewise associated with perceived social needs. In the case of these two countries, two main goals motivate learners to study Arabic: the hope for related employment and interest in Arab-Islamic culture. These two goals also guide perspectives concerning the purpose of learning Arabic: either to study the language for practical use or to do so in order to enhance one's knowledge and cultivation, or both. It is possible that employment ambitions focus learners on attaining practical fluency, while language competence may be less important for those with only an interest in studying Arab-Islamic culture to enhance their knowledge and cultivation.

It is obvious that the current demand for Arabic fluency in the job market in China is much greater than in Japan. Backed by Chinese economic growth since the late 1990s and increasing Sino-Arab commercial and economic activities, it appears that there is a growing demand for Arabic fluency in Chinese companies which deal with Arab countries. Naturally, students will choose a major that will most likely lead to secure employment opportunities after graduation (though they also may have a personal interest in learning Arabic and its related cultural subjects). If universities and institutes gain more applicants for a certain field, they tend to accept more students and to expand their programs. Other universities that do not offer the field may then plan to newly open a program in it. This phenomenon may account for the recent growth of institutionalized Arabic instruction in China.

On the other hand, there seems to be limited demand for Arabic competency in the Japanese job market. According to the results of the aforementioned research in 2006, Japanese companies do not expect or demand a high level of Arabic competency when hiring employees because their main reported need is for English fluency. This trend in business lowers the perceived national need for Arabic and is regrettable, considering that a recent assessment suggests the economic value of Arabic will soon increase [Mochizuki 2014]. The ratio of the Gross Language Product (a means to evaluate the economic value) of Arabic is expected to rise to 3.6% in 2018 (up from 2.6% in 1995). In 1995, Arabic was the 10th among the ten major valued languages, but it will be in the 6th position in 2018 [Mochizuki 2014:22]. Therefore, it may be beneficial to the economy if Japan makes a greater effort to train people to be proficient in Arabic by expanding its teaching capacity and deepening the level of instruction by including introductory courses at lower grade levels in Japanese schools.

From a cultural angle, it is important for Japanese people to engage

in and promote deeper understanding of the Arabs and Islam because Japan's experience with them to date has been slight, as we have seen. It is worth noting that Japanese students of Arabic demonstrate strong interest in Arab-Islamic culture. Many students currently learn Arabic mainly to enhance their awareness and global knowledge rather than to seek future career opportunities. While that is good, this situation may be partly because the vast majority of Arabic courses in Japan are offered for non-Arabic majors who usually attend one class of Arabic per week. Further immersion at deeper levels of engagement with the language may lead to even more contacts with people from Arab countries, and consequently, to more intercultural and business or political opportunities in the future for Japanese people. Though Arabic instruction has expanded within Japanese higher education (as many as 49 universities currently offer Arabic courses, though mostly as electives), this basic foundation can now be further enhanced and promoted to increase mutual understanding between the Japanese and Arabs, and to build larger cooperative ventures between Japan and Arab regions. In order to pursue this possibility, the educational environments for Arabic instruction must be improved, both in quality and quantity. In particular, the number of Arabic major programs must be increased.

V. CONCLUSION

Arabic teaching and learning in China has been advancing considerably in the past few decades. Likewise, interest in Arabic learning has developed—though to a smaller degree—in Japan, and the number of Arabic courses in Japanese higher education has doubled in the last decade. Other new active projects, such as intensive Arabic camps and distant teaching have been conducted in Japan as well. But the job market has been expanding for Chinese learners of Arabic, who can pursue practical uses of the language, while Japanese learners currently largely seek to enhance only their general knowledge of the Arab region and its culture.

This study has some limitations. It does not investigate current teaching methods and approaches in depth, nor clarify actual conditions for learners and teachers in either country. Further examination of these aspects of Arabic instruction may contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of instruction. Finally, our wish is that each country will encourage more people to learn Arabic, in order to strengthen mutual friendship and ties with Arab peoples in the future.

NOTES

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- 2 The university changed its name to Nanjing University (Nanjing Da-xue 南京大學) in 1949.
- 3 The author visited this institute to observe Arabic classes and interview teachers in March 2016.
- 4 At least five universities offered Arabic courses in 1960; at least 10 did so in 1980; and at least 17 universities offered them in 1990 [Kadoya 2006:26].
- 5 The authors translate the Japanese term “senkō 専攻” into English as “major.”
- 6 In Sumi M. A. and Sumi K. [2016a, (in print)], that number in 2014 was 48. However, 49 is taken from the data of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan [Monbu Kagakushō 2016].
- 7 Although one Arabic grammar book was published in 1942 and one text for reading Arabic appeared in 1943, both of these were reprints of Arabic textbooks for French speaking readers.
- 8 See Aoyama and ‘Ubayd [2013], Yagi, Aoyama, and ‘Ubayd [2013], Mohamed and Yoshida [2014], and Alaaeldin and Aoyama [2016].
- 9 The forum was established by the Japanese government, with assistance from the Japanese private sector and the League of Arab States, for the purpose of facilitating economic relationships between Japan and Arab countries in the areas of energy (including petroleum and natural gas), trade, and investment.

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