

THE HISTORY OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Kong dejun

PhD, Research Scholar, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan

Ma liangyue

PhD, Research Scholar, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

The Arabic language was introduced to China during the Han dynasty. Since then, except for some small periods of time in the history of China, the teaching of the Arabic language has been in continuous practice in China. The Arabic language has been a source of cultural, economic, scientific and technological exchange between China and the Arab and eastern world. Arabic is one the most important foreign language in China. The Chinese colleges, universities offer higher education in the Arabic language.

Keywords: THE HISTORY OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

According to the historical records of China, Arabic was first introduced, by Zhang Xian, who contacted Arabs in the era of the Han Dynasty, when he was sent on a diplomatic mission to the western regions. Later, During Tang Dynasty (A.D618-A.D907), Song Dynasty (A.D960-A.D1279), Yuan Dynasty (A.D1271-A.D1368), Ming Dynasty (A.D1368-A.D1644) and Qing Dynasty (A.D1644-A.D1911), the Chinese kept on learning and using Arabic for various reasons.

The sources tell us that the early use of Arabic was limited to business and political purposes. Because of the policy of isolation in the Mid-Qing Dynasty, Arabic in China was used only for religious purpose, namely, it was used only for teaching in the mosques, which resulted the situation that the Chinese Arabic learners could read Arabic but they were not able to speak it with fluency. Nevertheless, some scholars wrote books on Arabic grammar, morphology and rhetoric, which laid solid foundation for Arabic teaching in China.

After founding of the People's Republic of China, Arabic teaching began to develop dramatically due to the open-up policy of the Chinese government and friendly cooperative relationship with Arab Countries. Besides Arabic teaching in mosques, Arabic teaching is being taught and studied in colleges, universities and professional language training centers. Some Chinese universities offer MA and PhD degrees in Arabic. Major Arabic teaching in China has achieved numerous accomplishments, which have drawn worldwide attention.

This research paper attempts to draw a sketch of the historical development of Arabic language in China, which may provide a clear outline for further studies. It is a well known fact that the Arabic language is one of the oldest languages in the world. It contains one of the richest treasures of vocabulary. It has great capability to convey her expression in a very effective manner. This is the official language of 22 countries of the Arab League, one of the official languages of the United Nations and its committees. In addition, it is the language of the Quran; therefore, it attains the status of the religious language for all the Muslims in the world.

Historically, Arabic is the most important languages in the World in the wake of the advancement of the Arab countries since the eighth century AD. Till the sixteenth century European Renaissance, Arabic played an important role in linking up and exchange

between Eastern and Western cultures all over the world. Due to spread of Islamic- Arabic culture, Arabic language found fertile grounds for its spread and influence on a wide scale. It influenced many languages in varying degrees, such as Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Spanish, English, French and others. Learning of Arabic and its practice prevailed the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe.

The most reliable historical sources indicate that the Arabic language entered into China since very long. The Chinese started learning Arabic in early times. In other words learning of Arabic in China is as old as the relation of China and Arabs. These relations were economically and diplomatically rich in experiences. The Chinese not only did learn Arabic but also this learning of Arabic left more lasting and very important implications of the friendly relations between China and the Arabs. Since the last more than a thousand years, Arabic learning in China has been continuously progressing.

The Arab-Chinese relations are found in the old history. The first encounter of Arab and China was found two thousand years ago in the Western Han dynasty (206-28 BC). Zhang Xian sent diplomatic missions twice to the regions beyond the boundaries of western China, declaring guarantee of peace on the famous Silk Road, which links the Central Asia and the Western Asia. This route is now stretched to Iraq and Syria and other Arab countries. After Zhang Xian, in the era of Eastern Han [1] (220 AD - 325 AD) Ban Chao Gang Ying was sent twice to the region beyond the borders of Western China, and thus he collected a lot of information about the Arabs, including the information regarding Arabic language [2]. During the era of dynasties of Tang (618 AD -907 AD), and Song (960 m - 1279 m) contacts between China and the Arabs were multiplied. China received large groups of Arabs traders. A good number of them settled in China permanently. They formed their Arab or Islamic communities in the main cities like Canton and the Hang Zhou and Yang Zhou Quan Zhou and other coastal cities in the south of the Eastern China. They built their mosques, and this way, Islam entered into China. In the wake of exchange of relations between Arab and China and the advent of Islam, the Arabic language naturally entered into China [3]. On these accounts, we can say that China is one of the earliest countries which welcomed Arabic.

If we look into the era of the royal Yuan Dynasty (1271 m -1368 m), we find that in this era the political arena underwent a great change, and so did the central Asia and the west Asia, which led to frequent visits of people between China and others countries, a great number of Muslims from Arab countries and Persia migrated into China and settled over there. These included soldiers, craftsmen, traders, scientists, etc., they were given a title for distinction, Hui Hui, (i.e. Muslims) later [4]. The children of these Hui Hui played important role in the establishment of the royal Yuan Dynasty in the areas of politics, military affairs, economy, cultural and technological spheres of the country. Also, they played their role in the establishment of foreign relations and in this way they were able to use and spread the Arabic language in China on a large scale. The Arabic language not only became the language of communication and religion of Muslims coming from the countries beyond the borders of western China , but also one of the major foreign languages in China to facilitate the international communication in the areas of politics, culture and technology.

Different arts and sciences like the art of printing, paper industry and the art of weaving and pot making transmitted from China to the country beyond its borders to the European countries. At that time a great deal of sciences and technology moved to China from Arab countries. On the other side, the products like silk, porcelain, gunpowder and the compass, in a large amount transported from China across the Arab countries to the countries of Europe. At the same time, science and modern technology concerning astronomy, calendar, medicine, mathematics, military construction, moved from the Arabs to China. Books from Arab and Islamic countries, which were collected by the Royal Library in the Yuan

Dynasty, reached more than 242 volumes, most of which were sources of important scientific valuable knowledge. Most of the books were related to the science of astronomy, calendar, pharmacy and Mathematics and other disciplines of science. [5].

The Yuan dynasty took care of the Arabic language with great consideration as a means of communication and interaction for its internal as well as foreign affairs. In 1289 AD, a state school was established, which was called the Royal Institute of Hui Hui (Muslims). It was established to prepare men for translation. They translated essays, letters, speeches etc. they translated for the various sectors of the state. There they taught a language, which was called ISTIFI. It was based on mixed Arabic and Persian. This language was used specifically by the institutions of the financial affairs. This school was really one of the oldest schools of foreign languages in China.

As the number of the children of those Muslims, who migrated to China from foreign countries since the era of the Tang and Song, increased, and the visits of the diplomatic delegation beyond the western borders of china became frequent in the era of the Yuan Dynasty, the Hui Hui formed their communities and spread across China. They set up mosques in the areas where they settled. They taught Arabic language and Islamic books in mosques. It is evident that the with continued prosperity coming through the silk road, the spread of Islam in the eastern countries through land and sea, and with the scientific and technological exchanges between China and Arab during the eras of royal families: Tang , Song , Yuan, until the emergence of Hui are the major historical events, which produced great fruits of cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and the Arabs. All this indicates that China's history have been enjoying a deep and fast relationship with the Arabic language throughout the centuries.

Through hundreds of years of the reign of the royal Ming Dynasty (1328 AD -1644 AD) and during the reign of the Qing Dynasty (1644 AD - 1911 AD) the need for Arabic language at the state level got weakened. The open policy towards the foreign countries which was in practice during the reign of Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties was shunned. The interaction between China and the Arabs was lost. But it was at the beginning of the era of the royal Ming Dynasty that we find some frequent exchange of communication between the two parties. One of the known fact is that the Chinese Muslim navigator Shang He (1371 m -1435 m) made seven trips to the countries of Asia and Africa with huge ships within the span of 28 years i.e., from 1405 BC to 1433 BC. He visited more than thirty countries. He visited the regions of Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the coast of East Africa [6], including some Arab countries of today such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Egypt and others. The delegation accompanying him consisted most of the Muslims. They were well versed in the Arabic language to serve as interpreter, for example, Hasan, Mahuan, Guo Zhong Lee and Shaba. So much so, that some of them wrote books and memories to record their observation what they observed of the social conditions and culture of those countries during their long trips. These books and memoir have become the chief sources of knowledge of the history of interaction between China and the Arabs.

From the mid and late era of the royal Ming Dynasty to the era of the royal Qing Dynasty, the feudal governments banned maritime routes, disregarded the foreign affairs and isolated themselves from the outside. The interaction between China and the Arabs started shrinking day by day. It was in the mid- sixteenth century AD that we hardly find any traces of maritime merchant ships in the west of the Strait of Malacca. The friendly exchanges between China and Arab were almost completely lost at that time. However, the activities of Arabic language teaching in China were never interrupted by the disruption of relations between China and the Arabs and due to the isolation of China from the outside. The need of the Arabic language was still required for religious purposes, because for

hundreds of years, right from the reign of the royal Qing Dynasty and Ming Dynasty, Arabic had been taught in all the mosques in China as a part of mosque education, regardless of the fact that that Arabic was not the mother tongue of the Hui Muslims of China, who have adopted Islam as their religion. Some of them mastered Arabic language until there set in a weakness in the religious sciences and the number of the scholars and the students decreased.

Then, some eminent Muslims started discussing and finding out the ways to preserving the real Islamic culture. Sheikh Khoo Deng Zhou (1522 m -1598 m) designed a special way of religious education in mosques in China. This kind of religious educational method was followed by others, later in years. This method had well defined parameters, yet its material for its syllabus was limited. In this method, to teach the rules of language, rhetoric and jurisprudence, translation method was adopted. The people kept on following this method generation after generation till the present day. This has played an active role in the areas of teaching of Arabic language, translation and study of the Islamic sciences in China, [7]. This method of teaching produced many batches of prominent scholars and intellectuals, who caused the study of Islamic and Arabic sciences to continue and evolve in China.

In the twentieth century, there occurred a significant change in China in the areas of politics, culture and education. This change also brought about profound change in the teaching Arabic language. The contents of education, methodology, objectives and quality evolved and were elevated. In the sphere of education two great changes occurred: the first was the transition of traditional mosque education into the new school education, and the second was the transition from education to the government colleges and universities [9]. On these grounds, we can say that these one hundred years are one of the most important historical stages in the history of teaching of Arabic language in China.

This significant change in the political system, structures of the Chinese society and the educational system of China revolutionized everything. In politics, the revolution of Shin Khai toppled the royal Qing Dynasty and removed authoritarian feudal regime permanently, which had lasted for thousands of years. He substituted this old political system with the Republic of China. He ran the country according to the model of the republican democratic. He sought to achieve the Republic of China comprising five Chinese nationalities: Han, Manshor, Mongols, Tibet and Hui, on the basis of equality for all the national communities.

Under the influence of the modern cultural movement, which started in May 1919 the large groups of people with great enthusiasm came out waving flags of democracy and science, calling for change in the areas of culture, education, and demanding to replace the classical Chinese language with modern Chinese language. They also demanded to regulate the modern school education. Under the influence of these conditions and trends the Muslims, too, called for reforms in the traditional education of mosque schools. They demanded to readjust the teaching of this education system. They realized the need to train and prepare qualified men on modern trends. Under this new demand some schools came into being which started teaching modern Arabic. Here the old fashioned methods of teaching of Arabic were desolated and the education of Arabic was, now, able to get rid of the forms which were in practice for hundreds of years. It adopted new and modern form which was distinguished in its syllabus, the educational targets and simplified methods. It was quite different from the tradition mosque education. Its distinguishing feature was that it paid proper attention to the use of Arabic language, which they teach along with the teaching of Chinese language, sciences, and contemporary cultures, as they give proper attention to building up thoughts and national ideology of the students regardless of the difficulties they have to face in this way. We find that a number of students, well versed in Arabic language were produced by these modern schools, which confirms that this transition was of great

importance. The revolution removed the educational system of Quran schools or mosque schools and remodeled them under the current of the change, the revolution, the modern thoughts and the ideological trends.

China opened its doors to the outside, a lot of people travelled out of China to seek knowledge. The young enthusiasts of China felt that, that way they could awake their countrymen and take their people to the road of prosperity. Among them is the school of Chanda for teachers in Beijing (1925) and the Islamic school for teachers Shanghai , the school of Mingde secondary (1929) and others [10]. They achieved tangible results in the teaching of Arabic language. They developed contacts with Egypt, Turkey and other Muslim and Arabs countries. They sent about thirty students to Al-Azhar and University of Cairo. These institutes of China have attracted the attention of the Arab countries. The Arab countries donated some books and sent teachers to them, for example, at the order of the government of Egypt, Al-Azhar, in 1933, sent two professors from its faculty to the school Chanda for the teaching of Arabic [11]. This was the first example of sending teachers, formally and officially, from Arab to China. This was an effective step of great importance in the history of Arabic language teaching in China. It further promoted cultural exchange between the Chinese and the Arab world.

THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN CHINESE SOCIETY

It is in the late forties of the twentieth century that there occurred another significant change in the political, cultural and educational spheres in the Chinese society. During this period the scholars from Egypt likes Professor late Mohammed McCain (1906 m -1978 m) and Abdul Rahman Nachun (1910 -2008) made great efforts to promote the teaching of Arabic in china.

With the establishment of the people's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Arabic language was introduced in the curricula of colleges and universities of China, in this way another great historical achievement was made in the history of teaching of Arabic language in China, after the establishment of New China, all things were in dire need to be promoted and adjusted. With the urgent need in the Foreign affairs of the state, many universities adopted Arabic language in their curricula. They established separate departments for teaching of Arabic following the policy of the University of Beijing. Thus the teaching of Arabic became one of the higher educations in China. For many years the Beijing University, the University of Foreign Languages in Beijing, Shanghai University of International Studies and other universities have made great contributed in the area of teaching Arabic language. These universities have produced a large number of students who are excellently qualified in Arabic. They have produced a lot of textbooks, dictionaries and scientific books in Arabic. They have disseminated and published valuable unrivaled research and curricula in introducing advanced methods of teaching Arabic language. So, we can say that since the mid of the twentieth century, after the establishment of New state of China, teaching of Arabic has made continuous progress with the progress of the teaching of the religion of Islam and Islamic sciences.

It should be noted by the Arab states that China has paid much and commendable attention to the teaching of Arabic language. Due to the teaching of Arabic, some effective multilateral activities have been held between China and the Arab countries. China very cordially welcomed the assistance provided by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Palestine, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, universities and centers of scientific studies, the embassies of Arab countries and the Arab League mission in China for the promotion and development of the teaching Arabic language in China. These countries and the institutions have provided assistance by sending dedicated experts and valuable books and precious sources. They have offered to provide

educational facilities and scholarships for the educational achievements of teachers and students.

So, we can say that the evolution of the issue of the teaching of Arabic in the new era of China is a testament to the friendly relations between China and Arab for last fifty year.

Conclusion:

China received the Arabic language very early in the history when it made first contacts with the Arab world during the era of the Han dynasty in. Since then the Arabic has been in practice in China for religious purposes as well as foreign affairs and cultural activities. Although, there were small intervals of time when China was isolated from the foreign world, and use and teaching of Arabic diminished yet the teaching of Arabic restored soon. The teaching of the Arabic language started in china with the mosque schools after the foreigner Muslims chose to settle in china and their generations formed sizeable communities. But now, after its evolution through revolution of china the Arabic has become one of the major foreign languages in china. The universities of china offered higher education in it. The Arabic language also serves as a bridge between China and the Arab world and the other eastern Muslim countries. It is the source of cultural, economic, scientific and technological exchange between them.

References:

- [1]. The Rare articles on the History of Islam in China, the people of Ningxia House, 1983, my Shuo Yi , p 2 . In Chinese and Turk old Tang era, the great China House, 1975, p. 199. Written in Chinese.
- [2]. The Rare articles about the History of Islam in China, the people of Ningxia House, 1983, my Shuo Yi , pp. 3 , written in Chinese.
- [3]. The Rare articles on the History of Islam in China , the people of Ningxia House , 1983, my Shuo Yi , PO Box 8 , written in Chinese.
- [4]. Hui, the people of Ningxia House, 1981, my Shuo Yi, PO Box 34, written in Chinese.
- [5]. Rounds of the China Islamic civilization, the religion of John, the people of Gansu House: 2006, pp. 114, written in Chinese.
- [6]. "The History of Islam in China," Li Yong, Dar Tang Hong Kong, 2005, pp. 146, written in Chinese.
- [7]. A New study of a National Hui Civilization, Yang خواه, the People of Ningxia House, 1998. Chinese and Islamic encyclopedia, Daralamaajm Bsachnwang, p. 223, 1994.
- [8]. The Study of the Persian Language Teaching Materials and Assets in the Ming Dynasty, Liu Ying Zheng, 3rd issue of the Journal of Jamg Nang Jing , 1991 , was written in Chinese.
- [9]. The History of Mosques Teaching Materials in China , Bang Shi Chea , the magazine " Gu lieu " fourth edition , written in Chinese.
- [10]. The Profiles of Islamic civilization of China, Ma Cheng ou, an article in the seventh issue of the journal " al Hilal " in 1923.
- [11]. See Encyclopedia of Islamic history, a group of scientists, Darragh Institutionalization Read in Cairo , p 175 . Part II, 1981.