MEDIATED IMAGINATIONS:
CHINESE-ARAB CONNECTIONS IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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MEDIATED IMAGINATIONS: CHINESE-ARAB CONNECTIONS IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uncovers some little-known stories that linked Britain, China, Egypt, France, Japan, and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. They include the ways in which Chinese and Arab intellectuals regarded each other in response to the common challenge of western imperialism, how soybeans and their cultivation circulated from China to Egypt, the encounters of Arab and Chinese laborers working for the American Expeditionary Forces in WWI France, and the western missionary efforts to proselytize in Egypt and China.

In narrating these stories, this project investigates the mediating role of western and Japanese powers in the intellectual, commercial, and interpersonal connections between Chinese and Arabic speaking societies during the high tide of global imperialism. Despite their great distance from each other, the Chinese and the Arabs occupied a similar position in the world order as colonized and semi-colonized peoples. As a result, in response to their comparable political and social situations, ideas, commodities, and people were transferred between them through transnational networks. Different modes of mediations—textual, material, and spatiotemporal—were involved in the processes of movements.

This phenomenon of mediated mobility shows that the connections in an increasingly globalized modern world were not all about robust reticulation and
accelerated interactions and exchanges. Rather, some of the linkages between non-western societies enmeshed in the scaffolding of global imperialism were attenuated and mediated by imperialism itself. For example, the trade of soybeans and the transfer of its cultivation know-how between China and Egypt were enabled by the British imperial interests. Furthermore, the mediation processes were dynamic and transformative with the mediator and the mediated being in constant state of flux. A person moving from Egypt to China can be both the product (the mediated) and the facilitator (the mediator) of western missionary efforts. Overall, these layers of mediations, as exemplified by each story, constitute the mechanisms of the entanglements of the world.

The project is based on sources in Arabic, Chinese, and English, from multi-sited research in China, Egypt, Syria, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The various primary sources include travel writing, newspaper reports, diplomatic and customs records, agricultural journals, the records of missionary societies and of the American Expeditionary Forces in WWI. By examining Chinese-Arab connections, I try to show that the modern histories of the Middle East and East Asia are best understood not as separate scholarly domains in isolation from one another, but as inter-related fields with overlapping lines of inquiry. Therefore, this project weaves together what have been conventionally considered disparate historiographies of different regions and contribute to the growing field of world history. I hope that the concept of "mediated imaginations" can transgress regional boundaries and be applied to analyze other cross-cultural interactions between non-western societies.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to my mom, who gives me life and strength to persevere while enduring my absence over these many years; and to the loving memory of Hend Abdel, who taught me how to live a meaningful life.

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
Conceptualization ........................................................................................................ 1  
Dissertation Structure .................................................................................................. 7  
Historical Framework: Chinese-Arab Interactions in History .................................. 11  
Literature Review: A Brief Sketch of the Fields ....................................................... 17  
Historiographical Contributions ................................................................................ 37  

Chapter One  
Lessons and Inspirations: Textual Mediation in Chinese-Arab Intellectual Connections. 41  
Burgeoning Modern Print Media as Vehicles for the Transmission of Ideas ............ 47  
Chinese Understanding of the Arab World ................................................................. 50  
Arab Understanding of China ..................................................................................... 71  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 78  

Chapter Two  
Invisible Bonds: Material Mediation in Chinese-Arab Commercial Connections ...... 80  
Soybeans’ Journey from Manchuria to Egypt ............................................................... 80  
Tobacco and Cigarette Trade between Egypt and China ............................................ 99  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 116  

Chapter Three  
Unexpected Encounters: Spatiotemporal Mediation in Chinese-Arab Interpersonal Connections ........................................................................................................... 120  
Chinese-Egyptian Muslim Encounter in Meiji Japan ............................................... 123  
Chinese and Arab Laborers in the American Expeditionary Forces in WWI France ... 139  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 161  

Chapter Four  
A Floating Life: Mediations on the Globe-Trotting Life of Ahmad Fahmi ............... 163  
Linguistic Mediation ..................................................................................................... 168  
Material Mediation ....................................................................................................... 178  
Spatiotemporal Mediation ............................................................................................ 187  
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 201  

Conclusions ................................................................................................................... 204  

Appendix: A Timeline of Chinese-Arab Interactions throughout History ............... 209  
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 212
Introduction

Conceptualization

The concept of “mediated imaginations” generated from investigating Chinese-Arab linkages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encompasses multiple meanings. It is analytically useful to grasp the complexity and nuances of the intanglements of the world. It can also be applied to understand the cross-cultural interactions between other peoples and societies.¹

The textual mediation in intellectual connections refers to a phenomenon that Chinese and Arab thinkers read a cluster of texts, including history books and newspaper reports, translated from European and Japanese languages, to acquire information about each other and formed imagined communities of fraternal equals. As a result of such intellectual encounters, ideas traveled from one periphery of the world to another periphery through networks of translations. Understandings of the “other” were formed along the way and appropriated for one’s own purposes. For example, in reading Chinese translations of Japanese books on the history of Egypt, Chinese intellectuals understood that one of the greatest difficulties of Egypt in the nineteenth century was the debts incurred while building the Suez Canal. Since China faced a similar challenge in building railways at the turn of the twentieth century, those who were in favor of foreign

¹ A Note on transliteration and dates: Transliteration of Chinese terms follows the hanyu pinyin system, except for well-known Chinese terms in English. In those cases, the names of people and places are first spelled in the Wade-Giles system and then the pinyin spelling is put in brackets, such as Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan). Arabic terms are transliterated according to the standard of International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES), except for well-known English spellings of Arabic personal names and places. In those cases, the common English spelling will be followed by an IJMES spelling in brackets, such as Adonis (Adūnīs). If an Arabic word appears in a standard English dictionary, then I use it as an accepted English word, rather than transliteration. Common Era dates are used throughout the texts. In citing archival documents, I give the Chinese lunar calendar, Chinese and Japanese emperor era years, and Islamic hijri calendar followed by the Common Era date in brackets. Personal names of Chinese and Japanese follow the Asian practice of placing the family name before the given name.
borrowing used Egypt as an example to argue that Egypt successfully built a canal with foreign debt and therefore China should follow suite. On the other hand, those who were against taking on foreign debt in China also used Egypt as an example to argue that borrowing funds led to Egypt’s loss of sovereignty in the end and therefore China should avoid making the same mistake.

The material mediation in commercial connections involves the exchange of goods between these two societies. China exported soybeans and tobacco to and imported cigarettes and cigars from Egypt. The transfer of these goods was made possible by transnational trading networks. It reveals not simply the economic currents of the time, but perhaps more importantly, the flows of agricultural know-how and material culture. For example, due to such exchanges, Egypt adopted the cultivation of soybeans. However, it was not the Chinese who directly introduced this new practice to Egypt. The British colonial officers in Egypt mediated the process. On the other side of the commercial connection, Chinese urban elites prided themselves in smoking exotic Egyptian brand cigarettes and cigars, rather than the traditional pipe or hand-rolled smoke, as a sign of being modern and anti-western. What distinguished the Egyptian cigarettes from the Anglo-American brands in the Chinese market was that the Chinese elites of the time thought purchasing them could show solidarity with their fellow colonized peoples. However, they were not aware that those “Egyptian” cigarettes were, after all, manufactured by the British American Tobacco Company in Egypt. As a result, a transnational western company became the mediator of Chinese-Egyptian cigarette and tobacco trade. These various manifestations of materials, be it commodities themselves, or the agricultural know-how, as well as cultural and political meanings associated with
the commodities, constitute the Chinese-Arab commercial connections. Economic activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not limited to the interdependence between the center and the peripheries, as conventional world-systems theory historiographies have construed it.\(^2\) The busy commercial traffic among the peripheries was also an indispensable part of the world economy, and more importantly, mediated by the needs of the centers.

The spatiotemporal mediation was crucial in inter-personal encounters. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese and Arab peoples had come across each other in disparate places of the world. While Chinese and Egyptian Muslims met in Japan, Chinese and Arab contracted laborers worked together in France. The locales of their encounters, from lettered elites to unlettered peasants, were not confined to the lands of China and the Arab world. Spaces of other powers also mediated their encounters. In addition, a series of events of the time, such as the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, and WWI set up the historical contexts and served as temporal mediations for their encounters in faraway lands, without which many of these rendezvous probably would not have been possible.

As these three modes of mediations—textual, material, and spatiotemporal—constitute distinct dimensions of human experience in the world, investigating each aspect of these Chinese-Arab linkages can illuminate larger issues in East Asia, Middle East, and world history, including translation, knowledge production and appropriation,

economy and agricultural development, material cultures and consumption, cross-cultural encounters, and the relationship between people, time, and space.

Furthermore, the mediator and the mediated were not rigidly fixed, but were moving and transformative with the mediator and the mediated being in constant state of afflux depending on the context of each particular linkage. Languages and modes of knowledge production, commodities, colonial officers, imperial spaces, and historical events can all serve as mediators, whereas mutual understandings, economic and agricultural development, cultural habits, human interactions, and their senses of space and time can be the results of various mediations. Additionally, the processes of cross-cultural encounters perhaps always involve some degrees of historical contingency, existency, and serendipity in life, which can also be interpreted as mediators. Ultimately, mediations are the linchpins of human experience in the world.

If mediation is a complex and multivalent concept with multiple meanings, the notion of imagination is equally intricate. Imaginations reflect people’s awareness and consciousness, perception and understanding, inspiration and appropriation, emotions and memories, as well as senses of time, space, and the “other.” It is a fundamental and integral part of how people get to know the world. It can be close or far away from reality. The imaginations could derive from texts and material objects. In the case of reception of texts, European and Japanese Orientalisms (i.e. the modes of knowledge production that they represent) mediated the Chinese and Arab imaginations of each other. A variety of imaginations could co-exist in the minds of Chinese and Arab peoples on the same issue and they could change over time. For example, Arab intellectuals analyzed the changing power dynamics of China and Japan in East Asia before, during,
and after the first Sino-Japanese War to seek inspiration and draw lessons from Japan’s victory and China’s defeat.

As for material objects, the cultural and political meanings of commodities in motion captivated the imaginations of Chinese and Arab peoples. As commodities move, their entangled relationships with producers and consumers in places of origin and far away new homes generated different imaginations. The plural form of the word implies its diversity in different contexts. Rather than a monolithic image in people’s mind, every Chinese and Arab probably have had different ideas about what China and the Arab world was like when they were in direct or indirect interactions with each other. Therefore, “imaginations” is used to describe the mental processes that people went through in their life experiences of cross-cultural encounters.

This project is particularly concerned with the inner mechanisms of human activities of various sorts—intellectual, commercial, and personal. It is an anatomy of human interactions that analyzes the causes and results, avenues, course of actions, players involved, and how all these were connected to one another. It is about the “nuts and bolts” and “cogs in wheels” of the complex past. Although elites from the upper class and peasants from the lower class were involved, this dissertation is neither a history from above nor from below. Rather, I hope, it is a history from the middle layers—the mechanisms of mediations—of the multi-faceted and interconnected world. The processes of mediations emphasize the complexity rather than the hierarchical structure of the world at the turn of the twentieth century. Just because the linkages between the two non-western societies were made possible by the mediations of global imperialism...
does not imply that the imperial actors are better than the commoners. They were simply more powerful, but not more noble.

Let me further clarify about the proposed concept of “mediated imaginations.” First, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese-Arab linkages include both direct and indirect interactions. The mediation process is obvious in the indirect textual mediation for knowledge acquisition and the material mediations in the transfers of commodities-in-between. The direct interactions, counter-intuitively however, involved complex mediations as well. For example, without WWI, Chinese and Arab laborers might never have had a chance to meet. Without Japan ascending as one of the intellectual centers of Asia after Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Chinese and Egyptian Muslims probably would never have met each other outside Al-Azhar University in Cairo or during their hajj journeys to Mecca.³

Direct interactions, however, do not necessarily mean deeper cross-cultural understanding of each other. For example, Chinese-Arab laborers in France lasted only one year and ended in mutual mistrust and forced separation of the two groups.

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For earlier Chinese Muslims who went on Hajj in the 19th century: Ma Dexin (1794-1874, Arabic name Yusif), Chaojin Tu Ji (Writing on the Journey of Hajj), Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1988, reprint. Ma, fluent in Arabic and Farsi, went on Hajj in 1841, after which he toured Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Cyprus, Istanbul, Rhodes Island, Aden, and Singapore, visiting scholars of Islamic learning and collection books. He returned to Yunnan, his place of origin in 1849 and wrote Chaojin Tu Ji in Arabic. Later it was translated into Chinese by his disciple Ma Anli (1820-1899) in 1861.

Furthermore, even for long-term, substantial, and positive Chinese-Arab direct interactions like the case of Ahmad Fahmi, very few Chinese knew that he was an Arab, including the writers of local gazetteer writers in Zhangzhou today. Local people all thought Fahmi was English because he worked for the London Missionary Society and he was a Christian. Fahmi did not affect local people's understanding of the Arab culture. Fahmi did, however, have a great impact on local people's understanding and appreciation of western medicine and services.

Lastly, I do not attempt to make Chinese-Arab connections a unique case of cross-cultural interactions by emphasizing their political, cultural, and linguistic importance. Rather, I am trying to analyze various linkages and the inner mechanisms involved in forming these direct or indirect linkages. I hope that the concept of "mediated imaginations" generated from the Chinese-Arab case can transgress and deconstruct cultural boundaries and be applied to analyze Chinese-Indian, Indian-Arab, Japan-Latin America interactions, or any other cross-cultural interactions.

**Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, with the substantive chapters thematically organized. After unraveling the meanings of the concept of “mediated imaginations,” as laid out above, the rest of the Introduction is devoted to explain my choice of research focus: Why Chinese-Arab linkages? And why the periodization from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries? A quick answer is that at the time Chinese and Arabs occupied in a similar position in the world order as colonized and semi-colonized peoples at the peripheries of the world. As a result, in response to their
comparable political and social situations, they had shared experiences and interacted with each other in multiple ways. Han Chinese were under the Manchu rule of the Qing Empire. The Arabs were under the Turkish rule of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, both empires experienced colonialism and imperialism. But in order to answer these questions in greater details, I will provide a succinct overview of the Chinese-Arab interactions throughout history, from the introduction and development of Islam in China since the 7th century, to trade along land and maritime silk roads in the early modern times, to contemporary Chinese-Arab international relations. Within the larger picture of Chinese-Arab interactions throughout history, my project focuses on an important but often overlooked moment. Due to predicaments from both within and without Chinese and Arab societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is often assumed that there was no connection between them during this time. My dissertation proves otherwise. However, the larger historical context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century dictates that the linkages between non-western societies enmeshed in the scaffolding of global imperialism were attenuated and mediated by imperialism itself. This is a distinct feature of Chinese-Arab interactions different from those during the early modern time or after 1955.

In this Introduction, I also survey three distinct historiographies in the Arabic, Chinese, and English language academies on Chinese-Arab interactions. By reviewing how scholars from different cultural backgrounds approach this topic, I outline a long overdue contour of the field in order to situate my particular project within it and how it can contribute to the historiographies of East Asia, Middle East, and world history respectively. I hope that this sketch of the field, and especially the gaps in it, will
stimulate further investigations by future researchers. At the end of the Introduction, the methodologies and sources upon which this project is built will be elaborated.

Chapters One to Four are the main body of this dissertation, which examine three different modes of mediations. Chapter One deals with the textual mode of mediation in intellectual connections. At the turn of the twentieth century, a cluster of translated texts emerged in both Chinese and Arabic print media. Whereas publishers in Beijing and Shanghai disseminated knowledge of the Arab world by translating from European and Japanese languages, Arab publishers in Cairo and Beirut translated from European languages. This chapter traces how ideas of a distant but comparable “other” moved from one periphery to another through networks of translations, how they were transformed along the way, and how they were appropriated to become local knowledge in a faraway place. Although various kinds of Orientalisms mediated their mutual understandings, Chinese and Arab peoples did not uncritically borrow without adding their own judgment and selective appropriations.

Chapter Two investigates the material mediations by focusing on certain commodities and their voyages between China and the Arab world. There were various actors, both human and non-human, involved in the complex process of demand, transportation, production, and consumption: boll weevils in the American South, British and Japanese companies and merchants, Egyptian and Chinese farmers, British colonial officers, to name just a few. In addition to the direct and indirect interactions of different actors, there were also interactions between commodities, such as the switch of cultivation from cotton to soybean in Egypt, and from tea to tobacco in China due to the economic demand of the British imperial interests in different parts of the world. This is
not to hearken back to the world-systems theory by pointing out that the economic processes was driven by the “core” and the ultimate profit of commercial transactions went to the “core” as well.

Chapter Three centers around the spatiotemporal meditations in personal encounters. Rather than attempting to be comprehensive, I use two case studies to make the argument. Muslim students and contracted laborers represent Chinese and Arab peoples from different socio-economic-religious backgrounds. Japan and France cover different locales of their direct interpersonal encounters outside China and the Arab world. The timing of their engagements with each other highlights the major world events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, their stories can shed light on the different experiences and emotions involved—sometimes pleasant, while other times painful—in their encounters. Whereas Chinese and Arab Muslim intellectuals instantly formed a close bond with each other, contracted laborers without much cultural awareness, unfortunately, did not get along. However, without the spatiotemporal mediation, these two groups of people probably would never have met each other.

Chapter Four will zoom in on one unique individual and analyze the different mediations crystalized in his life journeys. Ahmad Fahmi (1861-1933), an Egyptian Muslim convert to Christianity, lived for more than thirty years (1887-1919) in a small village town of Zhangzhou in Fujian Province working for the London Missionary Society of Britain as a medical doctor. Fahmi encountered a great deal of hostility at the beginning, but in the end was remembered as someone who introduced western medicine to people who had only known traditional Chinese medicine. He even taught medicine in the local dialect to students who later became well-known practitioners of western
medicine in southern China. Fahmi’s close interactions with local Chinese linked
Zhangzhou, a very small place in China, to the distant Arab world. Not only were his life
journeys made possible by institutional mediation (transnational missionary
organizations), he was also the mediator in spreading western medical knowledge from
England to China.

The conclusion reiterates the major arguments of the dissertation and their
contributions to historiography. Glossaries of Chinese and Arabic terms, as well a timeline of Chinese-Arab interactions throughout history will be provided as appendices for
readers’ reference at the end of the dissertation.

**Historical Framework: Chinese-Arab Interactions in History**

According to one Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad once said: “Seek knowledge,
even onto China.” Although in this famous saying China may be more of a symbol for
faraway and distant places than the actual understanding of China, it indicates the Arab
people’s awareness from early on. ʿUthmān bin ʿAfān (644-656), the third Caliph of
Islam, sent the first official Arab envoy to Chang’an (today’s Xi’an in Shaanxi Province)
in 651 during the Tang Dynasty (618-907).\(^4\) Another Arab embassy arrived in Chang’an
in order to pay tribute in 758.\(^5\)

Despite the initial friendly overture, the Tang Dynasty and the Abbasid Caliphate
(750-1258) fought at Talas (in today’s Kyrgyzstan) in 751 in a clash of territorial

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expansion. It was remembered as the first and last meeting of Arab and Chinese armies. One of the long-lasting consequences of this battle was that Chinese captives introduced large-scale paper manufacture. The use of paper thereafter spread throughout the Islamic world, replacing papyrus, parchment and other more costly and less convenient media.  

Du Huan, a Chinese young man from an important official family was captured as a hostage. He was brought to Baghdad and toured with the Arab army throughout the caliphate from 751 to 761, including today’s Iraq, Syria, Israel and Palestine, Egypt, and Tunisia. In 761, he was released from the Arab army and embarked on a ship, sailing through the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and eventually arrived in Guangzhou in southern China in 786. Upon his return, he wrote an account of his experience in Jing Xing Ji in 801, which included descriptions of customs and traditions, Islamic law and medicine in the Arab world. Du Huan was the first recorded Chinese who had travelled extensively in the Arab land.

During a time of constant warfare and shifting political alliances, the Abbasid caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur also sent over 4,000 Arab mercenaries to join the Chinese army defending against the An Lushan Rebellion in 756. After the war, as a reward, the

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7 Du Huan (exact years of birth and death not clear) was born in Chang’an to a prestigious family. He was the nephew of Du You (735-812), historian, scholar, and Chancellor to Emperor Dezong. He wrote Tong Dian, a historical encyclopedia with more than 200 volumes that cover laws, regulations, and general events from ancient times to his own.

8 The original writing of Jing Xing Ji was lost. Excerpts of it were recorded in Tong Dian, the historical encyclopedia compiled by his uncle Du You. Russian Sinologist Emil Bretschneider (1833-1901) mentioned it in his On the Knowledge Possessed by the Ancient Chinese of the Arabs and Arabian Colonies and Other Western Countries, London: Trübner & co. 1871, 7.

9 The An Lushan Rebellion was a devastating rebellion against the Tang Dynasty of China. The rebellion began in 755 and spanned the reigns of three Tang emperors, before it was quashed in 763. An Lushan
Chinese emperor gave beautiful concubines to Arab warriors who later settled in China.\textsuperscript{10} In contrast to groups of Arab soldiers, occasional individual travellers who had a curious mind and a brave heart, such as Ibn Battuta, also visited both northern and southern China in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition to diplomatic missions and warfare, Chinese and Arab merchants also engaged in trade.\textsuperscript{12} Southern Arabia was a major exporter of frankincense in ancient times, some of it traded to China. Early trade was carried out mainly overland by caravans along the “silk roads.”\textsuperscript{13} Later when the power center of China was moved from the north to the south, trade along the sea routes prospered as well.\textsuperscript{14} Early Arab and


\textsuperscript{12} For primary source of early Chinese-Arab trade, Sulaymān al-Tājir (9\textsuperscript{th} century) and Abū Zayd Ḥasan ibn Yazīd Sīrāfī (10\textsuperscript{th} century), \textit{Akbhār as-Ṣīn wa’l-Hind (Ancient Accounts of China and India)}. There are two versions of its translations: French theologian and Orientalist Eusèbe Renaudot (1646-1720) translated it into French \textit{Anciennes relations des Indes et de la Chine} (Paris, Chez Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1718), and then \textit{Ancient Accounts of India and China by Two Mohammedan Travellers Who Went to Those Parts in the 9th Century} (with illustrations and inquiries, London: printed for Sam. Harding at the Bible and Anchor on the Pavement in St. Martins-Lanc, 1733); Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad translated from original Arabic with commentaries, \textit{Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China}, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study in association with Rddhi-India Calcutta, 1989.

\textsuperscript{13} There are numerous writings about the “Silk Road,” but those routes are not real roads. The term was coined by German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) in 1877. Some recent scholarships debunk many of the myths about the “Silk Road.” For the academic audience, see Valerie Hansen, \textit{The Silk Road: A New History}, Oxford University Press, 2012; for the popular audience, see James Millward, \textit{The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction}, Oxford University Press, 2013; for a textbook, see Xinru Liu, \textit{The Silk Road in World History}, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Persian maritime merchants settled in China’s southern port cities of Quanzhou (in today’s Fujian Province)\(^\text{15}\) and Canton (Guangzhou). The Muslim cemetery in Quanzhou contains hundreds of gravestones with inscriptions in Arabic, Persian, and Chinese.\(^\text{16}\) Muslim migration from across Asia to China during the Mongol rule (1271-1368) significantly increased the number of Muslims in China, who served as local governors, magistrates, tax collectors, scientists, and physicians in the Mongol court.\(^\text{17}\) Chinese Muslim Admiral Zheng He (1371-1435, pronunciation guide: “He” is pronounced like “hurt” without the “t” at the end) during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) famously set out

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**Sources:**

Zhao Rukuo (1170-1231) was a customs inspector at the city of Quanzhou during the late Song dynasty who wrote a two-volume book called *Zhu Fan Zhi (Chu-fan-chi)*, German Sinologist Friedrich Hirth (1845-1927) and American Sinologist and diplomat William Woodville Rockhill (1854-1914) translated it into English, *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries Entitled Chu-fan-chi*, translated from Chinese with annotation, St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911.

For Arab trade with China during the Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties, the classical work is written by Japanese scholar Kuwabra Jitsuzo (1871-1931). His work on Pu Shougeng, a Chinese Muslim merchant in Quanzhou with prestigious Arab ancestry, was translated into Chinese by Feng You, *Pu Shougeng Kao (Documenting Pu Shougeng)*, Beijing: shangwu yinshuguan, 1930, later retranslated again into Chinese by Chen Yuqing and published by Zhonghua shuju in 2005; For Muslims in China during the Tang and Song periods, see Yang Huaizhong, “Tangdai de fanke” (Foreign Sojourners in Tang Dynasty), “Songdai de fanke” (Foreign Sojourners in Song Dynasty) in *Huizushi lungao (Essays on Hui History)*, Yinchuan: ningxia huizu chubanshe, 1991, 50-81 and 82-129.

Quanzhou is also known as Citong, which is a Chinese transliteration of Arabic word “zaitūn” (olive) to indicate its connection with the Arab world, though the city did not grow olives at all.


on seven naval expeditions (1405-1433) to the Middle East and Africa with his fleets.\textsuperscript{18} During these early contacts, technologies were transferred together with peoples on the road: paper-making, printing, the compass, silk weaving, and glass-making all moved between China to the Arab world.

Exchanges between China and the Arab world peaked in the early fifteenth century. By the time of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the two large and powerful empires, the Qing and the Ottoman, had become the “sick man of East Asia,” and the “sick man of Europe.” China was forced to accept trade concessions to Britain after the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60) and later to other imperial powers as well. A similar history was almost simultaneously unfolding in the Arab world. The Port of Aden was occupied by Britain in 1839 and henceforth forced open to western colonization. This is the period that previous historiography considers as a time when there was no connection between China and the Arab world because they were both busy wrestling with the west. This era, however, is the focus of my dissertation.

Fast forwarding to more recent relations, in 1955, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser met at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. The next year, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) established official diplomatic relations with Egypt. This is often considered as the beginning of contemporary Chinese-Arab international relations. In the 1950s, belonging to the Soviet camp during the Cold War, the PRC established relations with Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and

\textsuperscript{18} Zheng was a descendent from Persian origin and had an Arabic/Persian name Hajji Mahmud Shams. There are numerous books written about him and his expeditions, mostly for popular audience. The most important surviving primary source was written by one of his fellow sailors Ma Huan, trans from the Chinese text edited by Feng Ch’eng-Chün, with introduction, notes and appendices by J. V. G. Mills. \textit{Ying-yai sheng-lan. (The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores)}, 1433, Cambridge [Eng.] Published for the Hakluyt Society at the University Press, 1970.
North Yemen that were also under Soviet tutelage. In the 1960s, due to the radicalization of PRC domestic politics, especially during the Cultural Revolution, and split with the USSR, it supported revolutionary groups in the Arab world, such as the Algerian Independence Movement, Oman Dhofari Rebellion, and the establishment of South Yemen. In order to promote Maoist ideology, the PRC also supported Maoist factions in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon that split from Soviet Communism. The cost of this policy, however, was that the inter-governmental relations between PRC and the Arab states were undermined. In the 1970s when the PRC gradually shifted its alliance to the US, it started to build relations with pro-US Arab countries in the region, such as Kuwait and Jordan. Since the 1980s when the PRC began its economic reform and opening up, it has discarded ideological guidance and focused on developing the economy, especially 1993 when the PRC became a net oil importer to fuel its rapid economic takeoff, relations with United Arab Emirates and Qatar have become increasingly important. Saudi Arabia was the last Arab country to establish official relations with the PRC, in 1990.

In its first thirty years, many of the PRC’s foreign policies towards the Arab world originated from ideological considerations. Following rigid guidelines, some of the PRC’s policies were at the expense of its own interests. In recent years, nevertheless, the PRC has been concentrating more on economic development and takes a pragmatic attitude to the Arab world. When making decisions on regional issues, the PRC is less emotional and radical, and instead has become more rational and prudent. In the

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20 The PRC was once a major oil exporting country in Asia after Indonesia with major oil fields in northeast and northwest China. During the 1973 Oil Crisis, it even considered to join the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Choon-ho Park and Jerome Alan Cohen, “The Politics of China's Oil Weapon,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 20. (Autumn 1975), 28-49.
meantime, the PRC’s relations with the Arab world have also evolved from passive to active and from reactive to proactive. In the first thirty years, the PRC’s foreign policy was heavily influenced by its triangular relationship with the US and the USSR during the Cold War. Weak in domestic strength, the PRC depended on the then two superpowers of the world to set up relations with countries in the Arab world. However, in recent thirty years, with the rapid economic development, the PRC has become attractive to the Arab world by itself. The PRC has more to offer and their relations are focusing more on the two parties themselves, rather than being affected by outside factors. All these above-mentioned changes indicate an underlying development—an increasing maturity and sophistication of the PRC foreign policy to the Arab world.

**Literature Review: A Brief Sketch of the Fields**

Despite the long history of Chinese-Arab interactions, scholarship on their encounters only has a short story. It tends to focus on similar topics, such as Islam in China and contemporary Chinese-Arab international relations. The reasons why these topics received more attention is that they are the most salient and policy-related issues. However, due to the same reasons, these analyses are often lopsided depending on a particular author’s personal identifications and institutional affiliations. Another major reason that led to the unevenness of analyses is the inherent linguistic difficulty involved. In order to conduct research on Chinese-Arab interactions, a scholar needs to know both Chinese and Arabic. Chinese and Arab scholars have made great efforts to study each other’s languages. However, most of them write in their native languages. As a result,
their research findings are not widely known to scholars outside the Chinese and Arabic language academies.

*Chinese and China Studies in the Arabic-speaking Academia*

Republic of China (ROC) recognized Egypt immediately after it declared independence from Great Britain in 1922. After that it signed provincial tariff agreement with Egypt and established a consulate in Alexandria in 1930.\(^{21}\) In 1931, al-Azhar University agreed to accept five Chinese Muslim students to study there and cover their full expenses including tuition, accommodation and stipend. In November, the first group, including one Muslim English teacher who was appointed group leader, three students from the Mingde Middle School, and one student from the Shanghai Islamic teachers college arrived in Egypt.\(^{22}\) A year later, another group of five students from Chengda Teachers’ College in Beijing went to al-Azhar as well. Imam Ma Songting, Chengda’s headmaster, met with al-Azhar’s president Az-Zawahiri and King Fuad. Ma informed them about the living conditions of Muslims in China. King Fuad promised to do his best to aid the Chinese Moslems in their study in Egypt and hoped that ensuing efforts would add to the number of students who succeed.\(^{23}\) From 1931 to 1947, there were altogether thirty-five students who studied at al-Azhar University. During this

\(^{21}\) Dār al-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives Cairo), Wizārat al-Khārījiyyah, folder number 0078-023266, 1930.

\(^{22}\) Yufeng Mao, “Chinese Muslim Writings about the Islamic World in the Republican Period: The Case of Hui Students at al-Azhar University,” unpublished paper shared with the author.

period, they made concerted efforts to spread the knowledge of China and Islam in China to the Arab audience. In a sense, they were the pioneers of China studies in Egypt.

Among them, Ma Jian, Hai Weiliang, and Pang Shiqian were most prominent and published their work in Arabic. In 1934, al-Fath, an Islamic organization published *Nazrah jami‘ah ila ta‘rikh al-islam fi as-Sin wa-ahwal al-Muslimin fi ha* (Zhongguo huijiao gaiguan, A Comprehensive Overview of the History of Islam in China and of the Conditions of Muslims There). The author was Muhammad Makin (1906-1978, Chinese name Ma Jian), born in Yunnan and went to Mingde Middle School in Kunming before going to Egypt. This book was based on a series of lectures that he gave on China and Chinese Islam in Cairo in July 1934. The lectures drew a large audience of Egyptian intellectuals. Among them Islamic reformers and nationalists inaugurated the founding of the Association for Mutual Islamic Acquaintance (Jam‘iyyat al-ta’aruf al-Islami). The Association aimed at stimulating mutual understandings between Egypt and China. They also published Ma Jian’s translation of the Analects in Arabic *Kitab al-Hiwar li Kunfushiyus* (Confucius’ Book of Dialogue). The book was published by the Salafiyya Press (al-Matba’a a-al-Salafiyya), a publishing house which at that time gave voice to the movement that sought to revive the Arab-Islamic heritage.24

In the same year, Hai Wailiang (1912-2006), born in Hunan in central China who later became ROC’s consul general in Jeddah and lived in Saudi Arabia for twenty years, transferred from India to Al-Azhar to study. Hai was fluent in Urdu and Arabic and was one of the first Chinese who received a PhD in Arabic from al-Azhar University. In 1937,

he completed the manuscript *al-Alaqat bina al-Arab wal-Sin (The Arab-Chinese Relations)* in Cairo. But the book was not published until 1950 by al-maktabah an-nahdah al-masriyyah in Cairo.\(^{25}\)

In 1945, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Section of Outreach to the Islamic World (*qism al-ittsal bi al-‘alam al-Islam*) published *As-Sin wal-Islam (China and Islam)* written by Pang Shiqian (Arabic name Muhammad Tawadu, 1902-1958) in Arabic. Pang was born in Henan and studied at Chengda Teacher’s College before going to Egypt. Hassan al-Banna wrote a Preface and Introduction for the book and praised the kindness of its author.\(^{26}\) After Pang returned to China, he also published his memoire in Egypt, entitled *Aiji Jiu Nian (Nine Years in Egypt).*\(^{27}\) This group of Chinese Muslim scholars who studied at al-Azhar University later became the first generation of Arabic-teachers and diplomats in ROC and PRC.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) established diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1956 after the Bandung Conference when PRC and Egypt formed a temporary alliance during the Cold War. Two years later, the first Chinese language teaching department in the Arab world was established in 1958 at Ain Shams University in Egypt. The main purpose of the program was to train Egyptian personnel with Chinese language skills for diplomacy, not for academic research on China. Most recently, Cairo University

\(^{25}\) The book was translated into Chinese by Chen Keli (1923-1970), *Zhongguo he Alabo de guanxi (Relations between China and the Arabs)* and published in China in 1956. Chen was educated at Beiping Huijiao Jingxue yuan (Islamic Scripture Institute of Peking) and studied with Imam Wang Jingzhai who went to study in Turkey and Egypt before, Imam Ma Songting, Ma Jian, and Pang Shiqian. Although Chen had great command of the Arabic language, he had never studied abroad.


established its Chinese Language Department 2010 (the second one in Egypt) and the PRC government sponsored Chinese language teaching centers—the Confucian Institute—opened at Cairo University and the Suez Canal University. The faculty in the Chinese Language Departments of Ain Shams University and Cairo University are mainly Egyptians, whereas the teachers at the Confucius Institutes of Cairo University and Suez Canal University are mainly Chinese expatriates. How much these two types of Chinese language teaching institutions interact with each other is a topic that deserves further exploration. In addition, the Chinese Cultural Center of the PRC’s embassy in Cairo also offers Chinese language programs to non-university students.

In other Arab countries, at the elementary school level, Al Mushrif Chinese School officially opened in Abu Dhabi in 2010 with backing from Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. It is the first Chinese school established in the Gulf in order to introduce Chinese culture and language to younger generations. Meanwhile, the Confucius Institute, opened its first branch in the Gulf region in 2011 at the University of Dubai. The center offers five levels of term-long courses, and students can choose either English or Arabic as the language of instruction. In addition to language courses, students are able to study Chinese medicine or Kung-fu, and the center also organizes a summer camp in China. Zayed University has also established its own Confucius Institute for Chinese Language at its campus in Abu Dhabi. Although the institution was initiated in 2009 during the visit of the Emirati Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research to Beijing, it was officially inaugurated in 2012 under an educational partnership between Zayed University and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) as an effort to promote cultural understanding between China and the Emirates. Similar to its counterpart in
Dubai, the Confucius Institute at Zayed University offers students the opportunity to learn the Chinese language as well as courses related to Chinese culture. Other institutes such as Eton Institute have also begun to offer Chinese language courses in the UAE.

China also established the Confucius Institutes, Chinese language teaching schools, in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, and sent Chinese teachers to those countries so that Arab students can study the Chinese language in their own countries. An increasing number of Arab students also go to China to pursue degrees in a variety of disciplines such as engineering and medical science. Arab merchants marry Chinese wives and settle in Yiwu and Guangzhou in southern China where new mosques and halal restaurants are built to accommodate their religious customs. Arab food is becoming increasingly popular among Chinese diners. So is Chinese food in the Arab world with the growing Chinese population in the region.

China studies as an academic discipline in the Arab world, however, is a very new development. The Center for Asian Studies at Cairo University was established in 1994 as a policy-oriented research organization. This reflects the growing interest in Egypt about research on Asia. Although at the beginning, their publications mainly focused on Japan, with the rise of China in recent years, there has been more research on China as well. The Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies is another major institute for research on contemporary politics of China. Both Centers have published a series of books on Arab-China international relations, such as Aṣ-Ṣuʿud as-Ṣini (The Rise of China),28 al-ʿĀlqāt al-Masriyyah al-Āsiyawiyyah (Egyptian-Asian Relations),29 al-

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28 Huda Mītkīs and Ghadijah ʿArafāh Muhammad, eds., Aṣ-Ṣuʿud as-Ṣini (The Rise of China), al-Qāhirah: Marakaz ad-Dirāsāt Āsiyawiyyah, Gāmiʿaht al-Qāhirah (Cairo University Asian Studies Center), 2006.
'Ālāqāt al-ʿArabiyyah al-Āsiyawiyyah (Arab-Asian Relations), and Aṣ-Ṣin: Maʿajizah Nihāyyah al-Qarana al-ʿAshrīn (China: Miracle at the End of the Twentieth Century).

Zaqaziq University in the al-Sharqia Governorate of Egypt has a Higher Institute of Asian Studies and Researches. They have produced a history textbook on East Asia in general entitled Āsiyā fi at-Tārīkh al-Ḥadīth wa al-Muʿāṣr (Asia in Modern and Contemporary History). All the above-mentioned books, however, depend on Arabic sources or translations of western scholars’ work on China. None of them used Chinese language sources. As a result, understandably, their analyses tend to be one-sided, but they have laid the groundwork for future research. All these books are currently available at the Central Library of Cairo University.

The MA and PhD dissertations at universities in Egypt largely focus on Arab-China relations since 1956. They rarely use primary sources either. However, Zeinab

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29 Muhammad As-Saïd Salîm and Ibrâhîm ʿĀrafât, eds., al-ʿĀlāqāt al-Masriyyah al-Āsiyawiyyah (Egyptian-Asian Relations), al-Qâhirah: Marakaz ad-Dirâsât Āsiyawīyyah, Gâmiʿaht al-Qâhirah (Cairo University Asian Studies Center), 2006.


32 Râfat Ghânimî al-Shîgh (Institute of Asian Studies and Research at Zaqaziq University) and Muhammad Râfîʿ at abd al-ʿāzîz (History Department of Ain Shams University), Āsiyâ fi at-Târîkh al-Ḥadīth wa al-Muʿāṣr (Asia in Modern and Contemporary History), al-Qâhirah: ʿÂin ad-Dirâsât wa al-Bahuth al-Insâniyyah wa al-Ijtimaʿiyyah, 2001 second edition.

Essa is an exemplary exception who wrote a book based on her dissertation at University of Alexandria in History, which is entitled ʿĀlāqāt al-Masriyyah as-Ṣiniyyah 1956-1970 (Egyptian-Chinese Relations from 1956 to 1970). The book used Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affair’s archival documents extensively, and was published by General Egyptian Writers Association, an important publisher affiliated with the Egyptian National Archives. This is the best work on the history of Chinese-Egyptian relations written by an Egyptian scholar that I have ever come across. Outside academia, the Egyptian prolific writer Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad wrote a book in Arabic entitled Sun Yat-sin: Abū al-Ṣīn (Sun Yat-sun: Father of China) in the 1970s. It was mainly intended for public audience as a general introduction of an important Chinese historical figure. It is an enjoyable read.


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35 ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, Sun Yat-sin: Abū al-Ṣīn, Ṣaydā; Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 197-.
Chinese Relations History and Civilization) in 2012 with participants from Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Malaysia covering a wide variety of historical topics, such as trade and Islam in China. However, these conference papers tend to be more descriptive than analytical. This is understandable. With limited funding resources in the Egyptian academia, it is difficult to get scholars from different parts of the world together. Most of the scholars work on their own in the academic milieu of their home countries. They rarely have the chance to exchange ideas and engage each other’s work in an in-depth manner. Despite the limitations, these conference papers still provide valuable leads for future research.

However, these developments reveal two major gaps on China studies in Egypt. First, whereas a growing number of Egyptians have studied the Chinese language, most of them go to work in the business sector or as tour guides, rather than becoming a researcher. On the other hand, the scholars who research on China do not always have Chinese language skills. Although the Chinese language training in Egypt was originally mainly ideologically driven for the Cold War politics, it has become more and more economically driven. With the current political instability in Egypt, academic research is not well funded and university professors are paid poorly. As a result, students graduating from language training programs often choose to work as Chinese-speaking tour guides for the increasing number of Chinese tourists in Egypt or interpreters for the bustling business ties between China and the Arab world because those jobs can definitely receive better monetary rewards than working as an academic professor at a university. At

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37 Al-Mu‘atamir ad-Daula: alʿ Alāqāt al-ʿArabiyyah as-Siniyyah al-Tārīkh wa al- Ḥaḍārah (International Conference: Arab-Chinese Relations History and Civilization), Suez Canal University Faculty of Literature and Social Sciences, Department of History and Civilization, 2012.
present, United Arab Emirates attracts the largest number of Chinese-speaking Egyptians to work. The Chinese-speaking Egyptians being misplaced in the private sector, often outside of Egypt, is a very unfortunate situation for the development of China studies. It is my heartfelt hope that this valuable resource can be excavated and channeled to the academic research in the future.

Secondly, whereas the academic work produced by Egyptian professors on China are shelved mainly in university libraries, the books on China readily available in the bookstores or used book market, such as sur al-azbakiyyah, on the other hand, are still mostly translated works of western scholars. This is another unfortunate mismatched academic resource and public consumption for knowledge about China. Most of the Egyptian faculties in the Chinese Language Departments at Ain Shams University and Cairo University have systematic Chinese language training and have spent some time living in China. However, they often concentrate their research on Chinese linguistics and translating Chinese literature. They have produced practical textbooks for teaching Chinese as a foreign language to Arabic native speakers. They have also translated some of the masterpieces of Chinese literature, such as short stories of Lu Xun and the Four Great Classical Novels of China. These valuable research and translation results, nevertheless, are mainly geared towards Egyptian students who are studying the Chinese language, which is a very small percentage of the Egyptian population. The academic

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38 Lu Xun was the pen name of Zhou Shuren (1881–1936) was a leading figure of modern Chinese literature who exerted a substantial influence after the May Fourth Movement that began around 1916. Writing in Vernacular Chinese as well as Classical Chinese, Lu Xun was a novelist, editor, translator, literary critic, essayist, and poet. His major works include: Call to Arms (1922) and Wandering (1925). The Four Great Classical Novels of China include: Water Margin (14th century), Romance of the Three Kingdoms (14th century), Journey to the West (16th century), and Dream of the Red Mansion (18th century).

As a side note on Chinese literature in Egypt, major efforts by Egyptian academics are still put on translation, rather than in-depth analysis and literary critique.
works produced from years’ hard work, unfortunately, circulate only among a few interested specialists in the field. The commercial publishers in Egypt, on the other hand, employ translators with European language skills to translate westerner scholars’ work on China to elevate the Egyptian general public’s thirst on information and knowledge about China.

Therefore, at present China studies as an academic discipline is still a curiosity to most Egyptians, academics and the general readers alike. It is something that everyone is eager to know more, but few have in-depth knowledge. There is no academic journal or professional association in Egypt that are devoted to the research and publication of China, which are benchmarks of the coming of age of an academic field. Nor there is disciplinary division on the methodologies of research. Furthermore, the topics of existing research products tend to focus narrowly on Chinese-Arab relations and Islam in China. However, none of these problems are unique to Egypt when a new academic disciple just started to develop. The purpose of this brief survey is not to unjustly criticize, but to trace the history and point out existing issues so that China studies can be further developed in the future.

One piece of encouraging news is that the Chinese-language training programs in Egypt have gradually developed into maturity. This is the most important foundation for the future growth of China studies in Egypt. With the increasing cultural and economic exchanges between the two societies, it is hoped that more funding can be devoted to more rigorous academic research on China so that the image of China in the mind of Egyptian people is not just a romanticized curiosity, but a practical and concrete reality that can deepen mutual understanding.
As mentioned above, since the 1930s, Chinese Muslims have been going to Al-Azhar University in Cairo to study the Arabic language and Islam in order to go back to China to become imans (or ahongs in Chinese) in mosques in China. Ma Jian (1906-1978) and Na Zhong (1909-2008) were among the first group of Chinese Muslim students who were sent by the Chinese government in the 1930s and stayed in Egypt for as long as nine years. During those years, they were not simply students, but also cultural ambassadors and political representatives for the Republic of China during the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) to counter Japanese influence in the Arab world. When they returned to China, they became the first generation of Chinese scholars on the Arab world. In 1946, the first Arabic language teaching department was established in the Faculty of Oriental Languages in Peking University with Ma Jian as the department chair. In 1958, Na Zhong was assigned to establish another Arabic language teaching department, this time at Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (today’s Beijing Foreign Studies University, BFSU).  

Ma was known as the most authoritative translator of the Quran from Arabic into Chinese, as well as a dictionary compiler for *Hanyu Alaboyu cidian (A Chinese-Arabic Dictionary).* Na was known for his pioneering work on Arab

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40 Before the twentieth century, the Holy Quran was translated into Chinese many times, but only fragmented piece. Now there are at least 14 versions of Chinese translation of the Holy Quran in its entirety. Ma Jian’s translation is considered as the most authoritative one, published by the Chinese Academy of Social Science in Beijing in 1981.

history and the first Arabic language teaching textbook in the PRC. With the intensification of Chinese-Arab interactions today, more and more Chinese students are studying the Arabic language. It is important to note that Beijing University and Beijing Foreign Studies University have been offering four-year Arabic language teaching program for a Bachelor’s Degree for quite some time. At least forty institutions around the country now offer Arabic classes. In addition to universities, a number of schools linked to mosques also teach Arabic, many using a series of Arabic textbooks published by BFSU. The number of Chinese students taking Arabic as a foreign language has risen to fifty thousand. In 1994, the UAE became the first Arab country to establish an institution for Islamic studies in China when it founded the UAE Centre for the Study of Islamic Culture and the Teaching of Arabic Language at BFSU. Many graduates from these universities are hired as translators by Chinese companies operating in the Middle East or become career diplomats and Arabic-language instructors in China. Since the 1950s, the majority of Arabic learners in China have been non-Muslims.

Most scholars who study Islam in China, however, are Chinese Muslim scholars. They mainly rely on Chinese language sources and their own life experiences, which reveal intimate insider’s knowledge but, sometimes, also have their own limitations. They

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44 Li Zhenzhong (1937-), Niluohe pan de huiyi: Xin Zhongguo diyipi liu Ai xuesheng jishi (Memories along the Nile Banks: Documenting the First Group of Study Abroad Students in Egypt in the New China) Beijing: shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2010; An Huihou (1942-), et al., eds. Si lu xin yun: xin Zhongguo he Alabo guojia 50 nian waijiao licheng (The New Rhythm along the Silk Road: 50 Years of Diplomatic Interactions between the New China and the Arab Countries), memoirs of Chinese diplomats to Arab countries, Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2006.
are sometimes reluctant to accept interpretations of Islam and Muslims in China written by non-Muslim Chinese scholars, who took great efforts to study the Arabic language in various Arab countries and try to understand their culture and tradition. As a result, the dynamics between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in China have been precarious and not always conducive to academic debates. Consequently, some non-Muslim Chinese scholars who mastered the Arabic language choose to focus their research on Arabic linguistics and literature as well as translating Arabic novels and poetry into Chinese. Exemplary scholars include Ji Zhongkun (1938-) for his translation of Jibrān Khalil Jibrān’s poetry, Na Xun (1911-1989) and Li Weizhong (1940-) for their translations of *Alif lailah wa lailah (One Thousand and One Nights)*, Guo Shaohua (1946-) and Yu Zhangrong (1954-) for their new textbook for teaching Arabic, and Xue Qingguo (1964-) for his translation of Adonis (Adunīs) poetry.

In recent years, as China is becoming increasingly engaged with the Arab world, another group of Chinese scholars who research Middle East politics and Chinese-Arab

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45 This is not a sweeping criticism to Chinese Muslim scholars, but a neutral statement. There are, of course, exceptional Chinese Muslim scholars, such as Li Zhenzhong (1937-) and Ding Jun (1963-), who are Muslims but also made great efforts to study the Arabic language. They successfully maintain their Islamic identity and academic pursuit. There are also Chinese Muslims who are more open to interpretations of non-Muslim scholars, such as Yang Huaizhong (1934-), editor of *Journal of Hui Studies* in China.

46 Ji Zhongkun (1938-), *Lei Yu Xiao (A Tear and a Smile)*, translation from Arabic Dum’ah wa ibrisamah, Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984.


48 Guo Shaohua, et al., *Xinbian Alaboyu (A New Textbook for the Arabic Language)*, 6 volumes, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, first edition in the 1990s, later reprinted many times. *Xinbian Alaboyu* is an equivalent of *al-Kitab fi Ta’alum al-’Arabiyyah* as an Arabic teaching textbook in the US.

49 Xue Qingguo (1964-), *Wo de gudu shi yizuo huayuan (My Loneliness is a Garden)*, translated directly from selections of Adonis’ Arabic poetry anthology ʿuzlati Ḥadiqah: Mukhtārāt min Shiʿr Adunīs), Beijing: yilin chubanshe, 2009.
international relations have become commentators on Middle East affairs on TV. They work at research centers of major universities and think tanks to provide policy-oriented research for decision-making authorities. However, most of them do not have Arabic language training and heavily rely on Chinese and English sources, sometimes without awareness of the bias in the English sources.

Scholars in Taiwan mainly work on issues such as Muslims in Taiwan, especially the Muslim generals and soldiers in the Kuomintang Party, and contemporary China-Middle East international Relations. Although they are not Arab and Arabic studies per se, their scholarship is still important in the Chinese-speaking academia because the topics of their research are certainly understudied and related to Islamic studies at large. Taiwan National Chengchi University’s Arabic and Islamic Studies Department, which was established in 1957, is the only institution that offers Arabic language training in Taiwan. Professors at that institution all have systematic Arabic training and have lived in Arab countries (mainly in Saudi Arabia due to its close relations with Taiwan). Major scholars include career diplomat and Arabic-Chinese dictionary compiler Ting Chong-

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50 Major research centers and think tanks include: Chinese Academy of Social Science Department of West Asia and North Africa, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, China Institute of International Relations, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University.

51 Jia Fukang (1914-?), Taiwan Huijiao shi (A History of Islam in Taiwan), Taipei: Yisilan wenhua fuwushu, 2002; Ma Xigui, Ma Mingdao Ahong jinian wenji (An Anthology in Honor of Iman Ma Mingdao), Hong Kong: lanyue chubanshe, 2011; Huang Chia-Mu, Bai Chongxi jiangjun beifa shiliao (Documents on the Northern Expedition of General Bai Chung-Hsi), Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1994.

52 Su Liangbi, Zhong A guanxi shi lue (A Brief History of Chinese-Arab Relations), Taipei: Wu zhou chuban she, 1990; Li Dengke, Lengzhan hou zhonggong dui zhongdong diqu de waijiao zhengce (Chinese Communist Party’s Foreign Policy towards the Middle East after the Cold War), Taipei: Zhongzheng shuju, 1995.
ming (1913-2005),

Arabic literature specialist Jiang Shujin (1948-),

Arabic linguistic specialist Jeng Huey-Tsyr (1954-),

specialist in Islamic studies Lin Chang-kuan,

Chao Chiu-Ti who focuses on Chinese Muslims in Linxia, the little Mecca of Chinese Muslims in Linxia.

Chang Chung-fu (1961-) in the Department of Ethnology mainly works on issues of Chinese Muslims’ inter-ethnical relations with Han Chinese majorities.

So does Wu Zhe (Wu Qina) at the Institute of Modern History at Academia Sinica who works on Muslims in Yunan since the nineteenth century.

Since there are few scholars in Taiwan who work on issues related to the larger Islamic world, they mainly situate their works within the

53 Ding Zhongming (1913-2005), Lü Yangming, and Jiang Shujin, et al., A Zhong Cidian al-Qāmus al-ʿArabi as-Ṣīni (An Arabic-Chinese Dictionary), Taipei: Da jia chuban youxian gongsi, 1978. Ding studied together with Ma Jian and Na Zhong at Al-Azhar University in the 1930s. He was Taiwan’s ambassador to Lebanon and Libya and interpreter for Chiang Kai-Shek during his meeting with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia.

54 In addition to the book mentioned earlier that Hai wrote in Arabic on Chinese-Arab Relations, after he returned to Taiwan, he also wrote Musilin shouce (A Handbook for Muslims) in Chinese, published by Chinese Muslims Association in Taipei in 2000.


Chinese historiography of inter-ethnic relations and frontier politics. A younger generation of scholars who received their PhD trainings in universities in the US or UK write in English, in addition to Chinese.61 Perhaps more uniquely, due to geographical vicinity and the influence of Southeast Asian Muslim immigrants to Taiwan, a few scholars in Taiwan also research Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asia, which is a rarely studied topic within the Chinese language academia.62 For example, Dr. Yueh-li Cheng at Hsuan Chang University has done extensive research on Chinese Muslims in Malaysia.63

Chinese scholar Wang Ke (1956–), who received his PhD in Islamic studies from Tokyo University, recently completed a book on Eastern Turkistan Independent Movement from the 1930s to 1940s.64 In addition to Chinese sources, Wang mainly relies on Japanese primary and secondary sources to tackle the issue of nationalism. Although Wang is based at Kobe University and teaches in the Japanese language, he writes in Chinese (in addition to Japanese) and is well known within the Chinese language academia. Therefore, I include him in this survey of scholars who work on Arab and Islamic studies in the Chinese-speaking academia.


64 Wang Ke, Dong Tujuesitan duli yundong 1930 niandai zhi 1940 niandai (East Turkistan Independent Movement from the1930s to the1940s), Hong Kong: Xianggang zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2013.
Issues Related to Chinese-Arab Interactions in the English-Speaking Academia

In the English language academy, there are four truly exceptional scholars, two Japanese, one Hebrew, and one Chinese native speaker, who studied Chinese and Arabic and write in English. Their research is not Chinese-Arab interactions per se, but Islam in China or comparison of Islam in East Asia and the Arab world. Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) was the first scholar to translate the Quran directly from Arabic into Japanese. In addition to that, due to his early exposure to Chinese culture and language, in his seminal work *Sufism and Taoism*, he compared the metaphysical and mystical thought-systems of Sufism and Taoism and argued that, although historically unrelated, the two share similar features.\(^{65}\) Another Japanese scholar, Sachiko Murata (1943-), was the first woman and non-Muslim to be enrolled at Tehran University in Iran. She completed her PhD in Persian Literature and continued to study *fiqh* as well. Her major works include *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* and *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi*,\(^{66}\) in which she investigates the interrelationships between Islamic and Far Eastern thought, especially in the writings of the *Huiru* (Muslim Confucianists) such as Wang Daiyu (c.1570-c.1660) and Liu Zhi (c.1660-1739).\(^{67}\) After finishing his undergraduate degree in East Asian studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (1966-) went to University of California in Los Angeles for his PhD in Chinese history. His first book *The Dao of Muhammad* examines Muslim scholars in eastern China in the seventeenth and

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eighteenth centuries who created and circulated a large corpus of Chinese Islamic books—the Han Kitab. These books and the scholarly network that supported it arose from intense dialogues between Muslim scholars, their Confucian social context, and China's imperial rulers. Wen-chin Ouyang was born in Taiwan to Chinese parents but grew up in Libya and completed her undergraduate study at University of Tripoli. After finishing her PhD on literary criticism of the medieval Arab society at Columbia University in 1992, she moved to teach at Department of the Languages and Cultures of the Near and Middle East, School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London. Her research focuses on Arabic literature and literary criticism and her latest work is *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel*. Ouyang is the only scholar who focuses on the Arab world. Hence her work is more in dialogue with scholars of Middle East studies than of China studies.

Other scholars also have solid language trainings in Chinese and therefore more in dialogue with scholars of China studies in both English and Chinese-language academies, especially on topics of Islam and Muslims in China. Their work covers topics the general

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survey of Islam in China, Sino-Muslim identities, Chinese Muslim rebellions, and the ethnic policies of the PRC government toward Chinese Muslims. Political scientists mainly work on contemporary Chinese-Arab international relations, especially on issues of oil trade, Chinese arms sales to the Middle East, and US-China-Arab triangle relationship. Nele Lenze and Charlotte Schriwer at Middle East Institute of National University of Singapore edited a new volume Converging Regions: Global Perspectives on Asia and the Middle East, discussing the burning contemporary issues of finance, resources, and sovereignty related to these two major regions of the world. Middle East


Scholarship on this topic in Chinese include: Bai Shouyi, Huimin Qiyi (Uprising of the Hui People), 1953; Wang Shu-huai, Xiantong Yunnan Huimin Shibian (The Mohammedan Uprising in Yunnan, 1856-1873), 1967; Ma Xing-dong and Zhou Lu proposed that Hui-Han rivalry over mining was one of the most important reasons for the Hui uprising; Jing De-xin, Yunnan Huimin Qiyi Shiliao (Historical Records of the Hui Uprising in Yunnan), Du Wenxiao Qiyi (The Uprising of Du Wenxiu).


75 Nele Lenze and Charlotte Schriwer, eds., Converging Regions: Global Perspectives on Asia and the Middle East, Surrey and Brulington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014.
Institute of Washington DC has initiated a long-term “Middle East and Asia Project” since 2011, building networks of scholars who work on the various interactions from East Asia to the Middle East and publishing latest topics of research.76

Although Arabic, Chinese, and English-speaking academes are three distinctive academic milieus with different traditions and approaches, they clearly complement each other across disciplines such as linguistics and literature, Islamic studies, political science, anthropology, and history. They are also bounded in their common research interest in Chinese-Arab interactions, largely conceived from distant past to the present. Putting them together can give us a general sense of what has been done by previous scholars. There are, however, some major gaps in literature: 1) The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a period that has never been dealt with, in any of the languages; 2) The focus on Islam and Muslims in China has led to the neglect of the other religious connections between China and the Arab world, such as the Christian missionaries transnational linkages; 3) The mediating role of European and Japanese powers in Chinese-Arab interactions has never been dealt with; 4) The history of Chinese-Arab interactions have mainly been written as diplomatic and political history, but rarely explored from social and cultural perspectives. This is what I intend to contribute in this dissertation.

**Historiographical Contributions**

Since this dissertation is written in English, my contribution to historiography is limited to the English language literature. This project can bring together the hitherto

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76 http://www.mei.edu/map-project
separate scholarly domains of East Asian and Middle Eastern histories. By focusing on Chinese-Arab interactions, Chinese and Arab histories can no longer be understood in isolation from one another, but instead must be seen in interaction with each other and linked by their multifaceted encounters.

In the field of Chinese history, when studying China’s linkages with the outside world, most work remains within the confines of China’s interactions with the west and Japan. However, some pioneering scholars have started to move beyond this paradigm and examine China’s connections with other non-western societies. For example, Rebecca Karl argues in Staging the World that Chinese viewed other non-western peoples as global sharers of the traumatic experience of western hegemony. In China Marches West, Peter Perdue re-examines a Chinese modernity that no longer presumes the primacy of Europe, but encompasses global interaction via the Central Eurasian steppe. In China Upside Down, Man-hong Lin establishes an unexpected economic link—how the shortage of silver flows from Latin America caused by its independence movements led to the crisis of Qing economy. These three works deal with China’s intellectual and economic connections with other non-western societies, which inspired my research themes in this dissertation. However, China’s connections with the Arab world have never been explored.

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Similarly, in the field of Middle East history, some pioneering scholars have reconstructed historical linkages between the Ottoman Empire and Japan. Selçuk Esenbel explains the origins and mutual interests of the Ottoman-Japanese connection. Renée Worringer interprets the Ottoman preoccupation with Japan as a consequence of its self-preservationist desire to seek an alternative to western-dictated norms of modernization. Taking a comparative approach, in *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, Cemil Aydin examines the parallel anti-western ideologies of Ottoman pan-Islamism and Japanese pan-Asianism. However, the Arab world’s connections with China have never been explored.

Until very recently, scholars in humanities and social sciences have mainly studied the connections between geographically adjacent non-western regions, such as China and India, the Middle East and India, and Central Asia. When studying non-western regions that are not geographically connected with each other, scholarly mainly employ a comparative approach. China and Arab world are not directly connected with each other by land or sea. However, their societies were still connected with each other in myriad ways. This projects seek to shed light on the invisible connectivities rather than comparisons between Chinese and Arab societies. As a result of such goals, it can also make contribution to world history.

In the field of world history, pioneering scholars use a comparative approach in studying the parallels of different parts of the world to discern similarities and divergence in historical trajectories of different societies. Major works include Peter C. Perdue and Huri İslamoğlu’s edited volume *Shared Histories of Modernity*,

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Wilsonian Moment,\textsuperscript{81} and Victor Lieberman’s Strange Parallels.\textsuperscript{82} This project seeks to complement their work by opening new avenues of analyses, highlighting the fluidity and contingency of trans-Asian intellectual, commercial, and interpersonal interactions. It also provides an analytically nuanced and empirically rich understanding of world history.

In addition, cross-cultural interaction is a major theme in world history.\textsuperscript{83} It is a process that simultaneously influences the experiences of individual societies and shapes the development of the world at large. It is one of the major agents of change in human history. Can encountering the mental images of the "other" and appropriating those images for one's own purposes also count as an interaction? My project seeks to further problematize the concept of cross-cultural interactions by arguing that indirect intellectual encounter is an interaction and can also be an agent of change. I hope the concept of “mediated imaginations” generated from examining Chinese-Arab connections can be applied to studying other processes of cross-cultural interactions in world history.


Chapter One

Lessons and Inspirations:
Textual Mediation in Chinese-Arab Intellectual Connections

Egypt is at the intersection of Asia, Europe, and Africa, with abundant natural resources and easy transportation for commercial activities. There is no surprise that it is coveted by European powers...Egypt is in chaos and on the verge of bankruptcy. The reason for this is its foreign debts and the employment of more than 1200 foreign advisors in its government with a salary payment of more than 3.8 million. All internal affairs are in the hands of foreigners.84

---Qing Yi Bao, June 1900

The burning fire between China and Japan is still going on, but the victory flag is on the Japanese side. They entered China and progressed towards its capital. The war proved that Japanese soldiers had modern military training and education in liberal and outstanding schools, which are based on the system of European schools. They defeated Chinese soldiers who did not have similar trainings.85

---Al-Muqtaṭaf, 1895

The quotes above appeared in Chinese and Arabic newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At first sight, they may seem random within the respective fields of Chinese and Arab histories. Scholars of China and the Arab world have used Qing Yi Bao and Al-Muqtaṭaf before for other historical inquiries. They might even have sifted through the very same pages that carried these reports without pausing to consider their meaning and importance. Juxtaposing the two accounts, however, reveals a little-known intellectual connection, a linkage that has long been forgotten in the minds of contemporary Chinese and Arab peoples. Compared with the intellectual exchanges between China and the west, as well as the Arab world and the west at the time, this connection may seem marginal. Since I have argued in the Introduction that there was a


long tradition of cross-cultural interactions between China and the Arab world, these linkages, however tenuous, were a significant element in the intellectual impulses of these two major non-western societies as they *re-imagined* their relationship with a wider world in a different era. More importantly, perhaps, the discursive and mediated journeys of ideas between China and the Arab world demonstrate the processes of knowledge production and appropriation in a complex but interconnected world.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were particularly eventful: this was an age of political upheaval and social misery, as well as of high hopes and new dreams. It is commonly assumed that, despite their earlier contacts through trade along the silk roads and sea routes, Chinese and Arab peoples paid little attention to each other during these decades because they were busy grappling with their own domestic and international predicaments with the west. As a result, this period is often glossed over with a mere sentence or two in current scholarship: due to western imperialism, Chinese-Arab connections were cut off and it was not until after the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955 when Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai met with Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser that Chinese-Arab connections were revived.

However, the very existence of timely Chinese and Arabic newspaper reports on current affairs of each other exemplified by the quotes at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates that this assumption is unfounded. As a matter of fact, Chinese and Arabic print media of the time carried extensive coverage and commentaries about each other. During a time of tremendous transformation, Chinese and Arab intellectuals gazed at each other from a distance and were keenly interested in the problems and challenges of their counterparts in order to seek inspirations and draw lessons from one another. The
issues addressed in the Chinese and Arabic language press about their distant but comparable “other” reflected the Chinese and Arab people’s own worries and concerns at the time.

Indirect intellectual encounters as a particular type of cross-cultural interaction are the focus of this chapter. I situate this issue at the intersection of Chinese and Arab intellectual histories. Historians have long viewed the intellectual rejuvenation of these two non-western societies at the turn of the twentieth century within the context of their interactions with the west (and Japan). “Yangwu Yundong” (the Self-Strengthening Movement), “Wu Xu Bian Fa” (One Hundred Days Reforms), “Qingmo Xinzheng” (New Policies in the Late Qing Period), “Xin Wenhua Yundong” (the New Cultural Movement) in Chinese and “an-Nahdah” (Renaissance) in Arabic are the terms often used to describe the political reforms and cultural renaissance in Chinese and Arabic societies during this period.86 Essentially, they are about the circulation of “western” ideas on modernity and

86 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were a few institutional and cultural reform initiatives in China: they were Yangwu Yundong (1861-1895), Wu Xu Bian Fa (June 11 to Sept 21, 1898), and Qing Mo Xin Zheng (1901-1911), Wu Si Yundong (“May Fourth Movement,” 1919), and Xin Wenhua Yundong (1900s-1920s). They are not the exact equivalent of an-Nahdah. However, the content of these reform movements were quite similar, including debates about the compatibility of traditional culture with modernity, women’s liberation and improvement of their literacy, language simplification and vernacularization, sending students and government delegations to Europe and America, experiment with constitutionalism and democracy, tax reform to solve financial problems, education reform, and coming to terms with the concept of nation-state, and so on.


how “eastern” societies responded to them. However, in conventional narratives, the focus on the supremacy of western (and Japanese) influence on China and the Arab world has resulted in a lack of scholarly attention to their interactions with other non-western societies. In fact, the horizons of Chinese and Arab peoples in their attempt to understand and interact with the wider world at the turn of the twentieth century were much broader than what is commonly portrayed.

Some recent scholarship, however, is breaking the conventional China/west and Arab/west paradigm, and the new approach suggests that the source of ideas for reform and modernization in both China and the Arab world at the turn of the twentieth century were not exclusively limited to the West. In the Arab world, for example, in addition to learning from the West, reformist Arab intellectuals also looked up to Japan, especially after the Japanese army defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. The event was regarded by the Arabs as the first victory of a nation belonging to the “yellow race” over a major white and Christian Western power. A few pioneering scholars have been working on this topic and a small number of secondary works have been produced. For instance, Egyptian historian Raouf Abbas Hamed (1939-2008) wrote the first comparative history of Japan and Egypt, *The Japanese and Egyptian Enlightenment: A Comparative Study of Fukuzawa Yukichi and Rifa’ah al-Tahtawi*.87 Although Hamed’s book does not study the Egypt-Japan connection, but rather compares the intellectual

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87 Raouf Abbas Hamed, *The Japanese and Egyptian Enlightenment: A Comparative Study of Fukuzawa Yukichi and Rifa’ah al-Tahtawi*, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Press, Tokyo 1990. Raouf Abbas Hamed was a pioneering scholar in this topic. However, after his first work, there was no further study until in recent years.
journeys of two prominent translators who primarily interacted with the West, it is the beginning of academic study on Arab-Japan related topics. Drawing on extensive archival sources from both the Ottoman Empire Sublime Court (the Prime Ministry Archives, Yildiz Palace Papers and the Maritime Museum Archives) and newspapers from the Arab provinces in Damascus and Cairo, Renee Worringer’s *Ottomans Imagining Japan* not only compares the modernization processes between the Ottoman Empire and Japan, but also traces individual connections.  

Renee Worringer’s *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 


According to Aydin, until the 1880s, most Ottoman intellectuals did not see Japan and the Ottoman world as part of the same general Eastern identity. In fact Ottoman Muslims perceived themselves as closer to Europe than Asia. However, around the turn of the twentieth century, Ottoman intellectuals began to identify themselves with the destiny and situation of the colored peoples in Southeast and East Asia. In addition to Japan, my own research has also recently discovered some late nineteenth-century Arabic newspapers that have extensive reports and commentaries on the political events in China, such as the Sino-Japanese War in 1985, the Hundred Days
Reform in 1989, the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, and the Revolution in 1911, etc.⁹¹ This shows that Arab intellectuals at that time were quite aware of what was going on in China as well.

In the field of China studies, Rebecca Karl’s *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*⁹² is a trailblazing work. Without downplaying the importance of Western impact, Karl explores China’s identification with many parts of the non-Western world in the formation of Chinese nationalism. Anyone who has read the Chinese periodical literature of the 1890s and 1900s will have been struck by the amount of space devoted to places whose names are seldom mentioned today in relation to China’s history, such as Turkey, Poland, South Africa, the Philippines and Egypt. Karl reads these political writings and newspapers of late imperial China extensively to argue that Chinese intellectuals’ sense of space was not exclusively Western or Japan-oriented. Their sense of time is not synchronous but simultaneous with the West.⁹³ Other than Karl’s book, no work with a specific focus on China and the Arab world has been produced to date.

This emerging scholarship in both Middle East studies and East Asian studies shows that a new paradigm of history writing is gradually beginning to draw a non-western transregional history at the turn of the twentieth century. This will revise the

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received wisdom of China and the Arab world’s conception of spatial constructs, and help better understand their respective histories and as well as world history at large.

This chapter traces how ideas travelled from one periphery of the world to another periphery—how information was processed into knowledge, how new knowledge of a distant but comparable “other” was translated and appropriated for one’s own purposes and eventually became local knowledge in a new cultural milieu. This revisionist narrative seeks to further de-center the west, and break away from the convention that regards the intellectual histories of China and the Arab world as discrete domains with clear boundaries. It shows how seemingly disparate intellectual currents were intricately intertwined. In this context, modern Chinese and Arab intellectual histories can no longer be understood in isolation from one another. Instead they must be seen in interaction with each other and linked by their multi-directional and mediated connections.

**Burgeoning Modern Print Media as Vehicles for the Transmission of Ideas**

The dissemination of information was greatly facilitated by the appearance and popularization of modern newspapers in both China and the Arab world. 94 Newspapers

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94 *Xia Er Guan Zhen* (English name *China Serial*, 1853-56) was the first Chinese-language newspaper in Hong Kong, established in August 1853 by British missionary Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857). *Zhong Wai Xin Bao* (English name *Chinese and Foreign Gazette*, 1854-61) was the first Chinese-language newspaper in mainland China, established in Ningbo in 1854 by American missionary Daniel Jerome Macgowan (1814-1893). Although it was a short-lived newspaper, it had a great impact on Chinese newspaper industry. *China Mail* (1845-1974) was the first English-language newspaper in Hong Kong, established by British businessman Andrew Shortrede on Feb 20, 1845. It was the precursor of *South China Morning Post*, the most influential English-language newspaper in Hong Kong today. *North-China Herald* (later changed name into *North China Daily News* with Chinese name on June 1, 1864) was the first English-language newspaper in mainland China, established on August 3, 1850 in Shanghai, by British auctioneer Henry Shearman (?-1856).

The first newspapers in the Ottoman Empire were owned by foreigners as well. The earliest was printed in September 1795 by the Palais de France in Pera, during the embassy of Raymond de Verninac-Saint-Maur. Its main purpose was to convey information about the politics of Post-Revolutionary France to foreigners living in Istanbul. Therefore, it probably had little impact on the local population. In 1800,
and periodical magazines are important historical documents because they present information in an orderly chronological sequence and cover various aspects of daily life—political, economic, social, and cultural, to name just a few. In addition, they can often capture social and cultural problems and debates that are not recorded in the government archives. They are the matrix for various discourses and practices that take place within societies, presenting how new cultural meanings are negotiated and age-old political practices are transformed. Through newspapers Chinese and Arab intellectuals read and observed each other from a distance during a time when there were no official diplomatic relations between these two societies.

More importantly, these indirect encounters served as sources of ideas for debates in both China and the Arab world when intellectuals of both societies were trying to understand the wider world. Anyone who delves into Chinese and Arabic periodicals of this time will be struck by the amount of space devoted to covering current affairs of each other. Chinese intellectuals expressed their admirations about the achievements of Egypt after building the Suez Canal while lamented its loss of sovereignty due to the debts during the French occupation of Egypt, a newspaper in Arabic, *at-Tanbih* (*The Alert*), was planned to be issued to spread the ideals of the French Revolution. However, there is doubt the newspaper was actually ever printed. The first indigenous newspaper in the Arab world was *al-Waqa’i’ al-Masriyyah* (*Egyptian Events*), established in 1828 by Mehmet Ali.

incurred at the same time. Similarly, Arab intellectuals were alarmed by China’s loss to Japan during the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) while at the same time still believed in China’s remaining strength.

The process of producing comparable images inspired by news of one another’s societies is particularly interesting to analyze. Chinese and Arab intellectuals read and translated the information they had acquired from the west and Japan after which they actively circulated and spread the knowledge to a wider audience by writing and publishing their own analyses in newspapers and periodicals. They looked towards one another to seek inspirations and draw lessons in their common struggle against the west. Such images of a distant but comparable “other” absent from sight did not always last. They occurred only when political circumstances of the two societies were similar. For example, Chinese intellectuals were interested in the debt issue in Egypt while building the Suez Canal because they were debating whether China should borrow foreign fund to construct railways. Arab intellectuals were interested in the Sino-Japanese war because the Ottoman Empire had been defeated in the military front as well by the European powers.

Furthermore, the exchange of ideas was not limited to Chinese Muslims only. Chinese Muslims have been the most salient bridge in Chinese-Arab encounters. During this period, there were Chinese Muslim scholars who went on Hajj, studied in Egypt for an extended period of time, and brought back to China new teachings from the Islamic heartland. Scholar Zvi Ben-Dor Benite has written a few articles analyzing this

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95 Ma Dexin (Ma Fuchu, 1794-1874) in went on Hajj from 1841 to 1849. Ma Wanfu (Ma Guoyuan, 1859-1934) went on Hajj from 1888 to 1892. Wang Haoran (1848-1919) went on Hajj in the 1900s. Wang Jingzhai (1879-1949) in the 1920s, and Ma Songting (1895-1992) in the 1930s.
linkage.\textsuperscript{96} To complement his work, this chapter focuses on the coverage of China in the Arab world and vice versa in current affairs-oriented journals, established by more or less secular Chinese and Arab intellectuals. This shows that the intellectual connections between China and the Arab world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved a wide array of thinkers.\textsuperscript{97}

**Chinese Understanding of the Arab World**

This part of the chapter is grounded within the framework set up by Rebecca Karl. In *Staging the World*, Karl presents an alternative discourse analysis on Chinese intellectuals’ increasing *global* consciousness at the turn of the twentieth century. She introduces the concept of globality—global consciousness for local struggle, which means that there was an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world as a whole and a sense of solidarity with the world’s oppressed. Although the Chinese often considered their experience with a sense of exceptionalism, imperialism and colonization


\textsuperscript{97} In addition to Muslim and secular reformist publications, there were Christian publications as well, such as *Zhong Xi Jiaohui Bao (Chinese Christian Review)* about western missionary activities in the Arab world. Furthermore, there are also history and geography books. For example, *A History of Egypt* was translated four times from Japanese into Chinese by private publishers in both China and Japan for Chinese readers. In *Zhongwai Dili Daquan (A Comprehensive Geography Book of China and Foreign Countries)*, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Najed, Algeria, Tunis, Morocco, and Libya were all covered. *Alabo shi (A History of the Arab World)* was published by Ministry of Education (*Xuebu*) after the abolition of the Examination System in 1905. This was part of the Qing state's effort to nurture in young minds a better understanding of the wider world. In *The Gazette of Ministry of Education*, there were reports on how these books were approved in writing, promoted with advertisements for discounts at the official sales stand, and used in approved curricula of new-style schools. By contrast, private publishers in both China and Japan published *A History of Egypt*, but they were disapproved by *Xuebu* and banned in circulation. The rivalry between the state and private publishers in attracting readership and disseminating the kinds of knowledge that they believed in reveals their competing visions about the Arab world.
were not unique to China. Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), one of the leading figures of modern Chinese history,\textsuperscript{98} once reflected:

I went to investigate [the histories of] other countries, and guess what? China is not the only country in this world being bullied by foreign countries! Look at Poland, Egypt, the Jews, India, Burma, Vietnam, and so on: they have all already been destroyed and turned into dependencies.\textsuperscript{99}

As Chinese intellectuals discovered the sufferings of other peoples, they began to increasingly identify with them. The Arab world was one of the non-western societies that China looked most closely at the turn of the twentieth century. Chinese intellectuals’ encounter with the Arab world was largely indirect and textual. Most only had exposure to it by reading history and geography books or newspaper coverage. China’s modern understanding of the outside world started from reading about the history of other places. This was how Chinese intellectuals first opened their eyes to look at the world. Reading histories of the comparable “other” helped them better understand their own circumstances to solve pending problems. It reflected the desire of the Chinese people to survive and save their own nation from subjugation.\textsuperscript{100}

Among the history books that Chinese intellectuals read, many of them are translated works from Japanese into Chinese. For example, Karl’s analyses on Chinese intellectuals understanding of Egypt are mainly based on this type of work produced at that time. Although Karl identifies some of the major works, she does not question the filtered knowledge in them that is mediated by different languages. In order to understand


\textsuperscript{100} Yu Pei, “Jindai zaoqi zhongguo dui shijie lishi de renshi” (“Chinese Understanding of World History the Late Imperial Period”), \textit{The Northern Forum}, No.1207, 2008, 67.
Chinese intellectuals’ perception of Egypt, one needs first to know the sources of their knowledge. For example, Karl concludes that some of the Chinese intellectuals (the revolutionaries) primarily saw the modernization initiative of Muhammad Ali as a failed reform. They subsequently used it as an example to justify their argument that reform was not the way out for China, and that only revolutions could save China. However, the reason why these Chinese revolutionaries came to the conclusion that reforms in Egypt were unsuccessful was because the history books translated from Japanese that they read at that time drew such a picture. With hindsight, we know that the modernization initiative of Muhammad Ali is a subject of much heated academic debate in Middle East studies. Whereas some historians regard Ali as the founding father of the modern Egyptian nation who successfully modernized the country, others contend that Ali is rather an Ottoman Turkish military leader (hence they call him Mehmet Ali, the Ottoman Turkish spelling of his name, instead of Muhammad Ali, the Arabic spelling) who used Egypt as his base, creating a dynasty that spanned far beyond Egypt. Had earlier Chinese intellectuals read books on Egypt from a different perspective, they might have come to a very different conclusion.

Building upon Karl’s work, the following pages examine two different modes of knowledge acquisition Chinese intellectuals had about Egypt. First it expands the narrative of translated works, and then adds another source of knowledge—first-hand knowledge.


experience of Chinese intellectuals who had actually travelled to Egypt. Their travel accounts are used as the primary sources for my analysis. Travel memoirs are a useful source for writing history, as outsiders often provide unique information about foreign societies, noticing small ordinary details that native people tend to take for granted. Furthermore, travel accounts provide insights into a traveler’s own values and cultural identity since the travelers often reflect upon what they see in terms of how similar or different it is to their own culture.

Due to the different sources of knowledge about Egypt, the observations and comments Chinese intellectuals had on Egypt were often different. The paper does not mean to judge whether they were right or wrong, but rather to explain why they come to drastically different conclusions about Egypt. At the turn of the twentieth century, had these intellectuals combined the mediated knowledge from translated works with their first-hand experiences, they might have come to a better understanding of the situations in Egypt.

The best known work in Chinese on Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century was *A Recent History of Egypt*. The original Japanese title of the work was published in

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104 The travel account of Kang Youwei, *Ouzhou shiyi guo youji (Travel Account of Eleven European Countries)*, was published in 1904 in the Coal Island, Victoria in British Colombia of Canada where he lived for about a year after his travelling in Europe. Only two parts of his travel account (“Travel Account of Italy” and “Travel Account of France”) were published, in 1905 and 1907 respectively, by Shanghai Guangzhili publishing house. In this paper, I am citing the reprint of these two accounts, “Ouzhou shiyi guo youji er zhong” (“Travel Account of Eleven Countries in Europe, Two Accounts,” 《欧洲十一国游记二种》) in Zhong Shuhe and Yang Jian, eds., *Zouxiang shi jie congshu* (Book Series on Travelling towards the World《走向世界丛书》), Changsha: Yuelu shu she, 1985. The 1985 reprint is in simplified Chinese characters. Hence in this paper, I also use simplified characters for the names of people and places.

105 The original Chinese title of the book is *Aiji jinshi shi*. 
1889 with a Japanese title *Ejiputo kinseishi*, written by Tōkai Sanshi. It was translated into multiple versions in Chinese. The first translation was by a translator with the pseudonym of Master of Jade Zither Study and serialized in *Qingyi bao* from May 1900 in volume 45 to March 30th, 1901 in volume 74. In 1902, Shanghai Guangzhi publishing house published the translation by Mai Dinghua. Later, in 1902 and 1903, the Commercial Press, the oldest publisher in China, also published the translations of Zhang Qiwei and a group of overseas students, and published them in their “History Series” and “Imperial Series” respectively. Other translated works on Egypt also include, *A History of Egypt* written by Japanese scholar Saburō Kitamura, translated into Chinese by Zhao Bizhen and published in 1903 by Shanghai Guangzhi Publishing House. In 1903, Wenming Publishing House published *The Miserable Situation of Egypt*. The original book was written by then renowned Orientalist John Eliot Bowen in 1887 by Putnam publisher in London with the English title of *Conflict of East and West in Egypt*. It was first translated into Japanese by Keigo Harada by publisher Hakubundō Shoten in Tokyo in 1890 with a Japanese title *Naichi kanshō Ejiputo sanjō*.

Most of the translators expressed their purpose of translation as to learn lessons from Egypt so that China would not repeat history. For example, Mai Dinghua thought

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106 Tōkai Sanshi (1852-1922, biographical introduction)


109 Yu, “Jindai zaoqi zhongguo,” p. 69. a group of overseas students, 出洋学生编辑, and “History Series” 历史丛书系列 and “Imperial Series” 帝国丛书系列.

110 The original Chinese title of the book is *Aiji canzhuang*.

that China and Egypt were both ancient civilizations and had many things in common, such as experiencing European colonization. If Chinese intellectuals wanted to study the future of China, they had to read the history of Egypt. China’s development could learn from the lessons of Egypt. The translator stated that the point of translating this work was to keep it as a warning for China.\textsuperscript{112}

Some of the original Japanese works, such as \textit{A Recent History of Egypt}, went through many printings in a short period of time and were translated by four different translators, or group of translators. These works were also published by popular publishing houses, such as the Commercial Press—the oldest publisher in China, and Guangzhi. This shows that Chinese intellectuals and readers at that time were keenly interested in knowing about Egypt. Yu Pei concludes that these works “stimulated great response within the Chinese intellectual circle.”\textsuperscript{113} This assessment may not be proved with certainty, as there are not enough sources available so far to examine the general reception of these publications, such as how many people read them and how much people understood what they had read, etc. However, at least in one case readers were influenced by what they read from these works. One of the readers, Chen Huai,\textsuperscript{114} proposed that it is not enough to have just a few intellectuals worry about their nation: “All the people need to be patriotic. With patriotism in everyone’s mind, a languishing

\textsuperscript{112} X\textit{inmin congbao}, June 1902, citied in Yu, “Jindai zaoqi zhongguo,” 69.

\textsuperscript{113} Yu, “Jindai zaoqi zhongguo,” 69.

\textsuperscript{114} Chen Huai (1877-1922), one of the earliest Chinese historians working on the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).
nation could revive and a dying person could relive, just like the Egyptians who resisted foreign invaders.”

The problem with the translated works is that they were mediated by different languages. We do not know where the Japanese scholars received their information about Egypt when writing about it. We know in one case, *The Miserable Situation of Egypt*, that the book was translated twice. The Japanese translator Keigo Harada obtained his bachelor’s degree in law at Cornell University. With English language skills, he translated John Eliot Bowen’s *Conflict of East and West in Egypt* into Japanese. And then later it was translated into Chinese from Japanese. However, after being translated through an intermediate language, when the Chinese readers read *Aiji canzhang*, the content might be different from the original work *Conflict of East and West in Egypt*. Many nuanced meanings might have lost or added in the process of translations.

Furthermore, as Edward Said criticizes in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, the late 19th century European Orientalists’ study of the Middle East was often tainted by their bias and imperial political agendas. There is an asymmetric power relationship on knowledge production between the East and the West. The Orientalist works are based on the misrepresentation of the Orient (the Middle East) and the objectification of it. If the content of the original work is doubtfully subjective, the value of the translated work in

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providing objective information is probably even less. Therefore, it might be safe for us to speculate that the Chinese intellectuals’ understanding of Egypt at that time, based on these translated works, might include some misperceptions.

For example, the Egyptian debt problem became a symbol and common-sense point of reference whenever Chinese discussed their own financial problems, from the national level to the provincial level. In this way, knowledge of a distant but comparable “other” transcended the disparate linguistic and cultural distance between China and the Arab world. It went through the convoluted processes of knowledge production and reproduction in the west, Japan, and China. Eventually it became local knowledge appropriated by readers at the far end of the knowledge transmission chain.

During the Self-Strengthening Movement (洋務運動 1861-1895) in the late Qing period, the Chinese elites who had gone to study abroad in Europe came to realize the importance of railways in transporting goods and people. They began to regard having trains and railways as one of the prerequisites to the Qing empire’s modernization effort.\(^ {118}\) In 1879, Xue Fucheng (1838-1894, 薛福成), a career diplomat under prominent Qing officials Zeng Guofan (1811-1872, 曾國藩) and Li Hongzhang (1823-1901, 李鴻章), made an analogy of railways to the vessels of human body in order to elaborate the railway’s importance to a country: “Once the railways are built, it is as if the blood will be transported to different parts of the human body. As a result, all illness will be

removed.” 119 In a treatise Xue wrote on behalf of Li Hongzhang, he introduced the major advantages of trains and railways, such as rapid transportation of travellers, coal, and rice, strengthening military defense, protection of capital Peking, improving the speed of postal delivery for official documents, creating job opportunities along the railway lines, as well as improving the Qing empire’s international status. 120

The treatise caused a tremendous debate within the Qing bureaucracy in the next fifteen years or so. Not everyone welcomed a new foreign technology with open arms. In fact, the majority of the bureaucrats were suspicious about the benefits of railways. Many were afraid that digging wholes through mountains to build railways would offend the spirits of the nature. Land used for laying rails would take away the land used for food cultivation, thus threatening the livelihood of people. Most importantly, building the railways will incur a large amount of debts to the country’s finance.

In response to these oppositions, Ma Jianzhong (1845-1900, 馬建忠), a reformist diplomat under Li Hongzhang employed examples of other countries that had successfully built railways to make his case. Earlier in his life, Ma went to France to study and became the first Chinese who obtained a baccalaureate. While studying abroad, Ma experienced the benefits of railways first hand. Therefore, he proposed the bold idea of constructing railways in China with foreign debts. In a treatise entitled “To borrow

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120 Xue Fucheng 薛福成 on behalf of Li Hongzhang, (“Guangxu liu nian shi er yue chu yi zhili zongdu Li Hongzhang zou”), in Zhongguo jindaishi ziliao congkan yang wu yundong (《中國近代史資料叢刊 洋務運動》), vol. 6, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1961, 142-43.
debts in order to build railways.” Ma explained that borrowing foreign debt is a common practice among all nations. Without external fund, no country could have built the railways:

Britain, the US, Spain, France, Austria, and Italy all borrowed foreign debt to build railways. Even smaller countries such as Peru have borrowed thirty-two million gold pounds from Europe to build railways; poorer countries such as Tunisia borrowed one hundred thousand gold pounds; not to mention Turkey, Egypt and other countries….121

When Chinese officials embarked on the debate of a domestic issue, they referred to a foreign country—Egypt—as a point of reference. This is because as fellow semi-colonized societies, China and Egypt occupied a similar position in the world order of the time. European global imperialism had a direct impact on both societies at the turn of the twentieth century. Consequently, Chinese intellectuals often regarded Egypt as a comparable “other,” observing how Egypt responded to a similar challenge. In the quote above, Ma clearly regarded Egypt as an example of countries that used foreign money and successfully built railways. This implies that if China wanted to build railways, borrowing debts from abroad is inevitable.

Earlier, the Qing government had borrowed money from other countries to repay the debts accumulated by the unequal treaties signed after the Opium Wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860). Therefore, in addition to debating whether building railways was a beneficial enterprise, more discussions focused on foreign debt and whether China should use it to build railways. Ma pointed out that it was one thing to use foreign money to pay off previous debts as what the Qing government had done previously. It was quite another to use it to carry out infrastructure development, such as building railways.

Investing in infrastructure development could generate profits in the future, which made taking the risk of borrowing foreign money well worth it.

Taking Egypt’s Suez Canal project as a point of reference, Ma also noted that borrowing foreign fund itself was not necessarily dangerous. What might be dangerous is how to manage the relationships with the creditors. Borrowing foreign money is different from allowing foreign creditors to become shareholders of the railways. Shareholders can benefit from the yearly profit of the infrastructure project whereas creditors can only earn yearly interest:

If China builds railways, they are going to cover a vast geographical area. How can we allow foreign merchants to become shareholders and sleep by the side of our bed? When Turkey [the Ottoman Empire] constructed the railways, Britain, France and Austria became the rich shareholders. When Egypt built the Suez Canal, the French became the shareholders. After the completion of the Canal, the French enjoyed exclusive benefits. Just a few years earlier, the British also owned many shares of the Canal. An agreement was signed that the Canal is for all nations. As a result, when foreign countries exercised their military muscles on the water, Egypt could not do anything to stop it. Isn’t the Canal become beneficial to others and harmful to Egypt? After benefiting from the Suez Canal, the French also wanted to become shareholders of the Panama Canal between the Americas. The United States opposed this proposal based on the lessons learnt [from Egypt].

Here Ma viewed Egypt from a different perspective. Although he was one of the earliest persons who proposed the idea of borrowing foreign debt to construct railways and used Egypt as a successful example to support his argument, he was also keenly aware of the danger of Egypt’s case. Later in differentiating foreign creditors and foreign shareholders in the case of the Suez Canal, Ma used Egypt as a cautionary tale, analyzing the missteps taken by the Egyptian government and the lessons should be learnt from the case.

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122 Ma, 《借債以修鐵道說》, in 《適可齋記言卷一》, 23.
The first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 became a wake-up call for the Qing Empire. After the catastrophic defeat, the Qing officials realized the urgency of building railways in strengthening military defense. A year later, Liu Kunyi (1830-1902, 刘坤一) wrote a memorandum to emperor Guangxu, appealing for the government to build railways with foreign debt, but taking a lesson from Egypt:

When Egypt built the railways, it first sent staff to study in England and then started the construction. China’s situation is different. We should take building skilled personnel as a priority. Along the railway construction lines, schools should be set up so that bright students of the neighborhood could study. Lessons can be adopted from the westerners. After the students went through a designated years of training, they can be assigned to construction companies as in house talents. After a few years, China will no longer need foreigners. By then we can be in full control and the foreigners will no longer be useful.123

From this we can see that open-minded officials have studied the case of Egypt thoroughly. They could not only use the case of Egypt to make their own argument of supporting or opposing railway construction, but also taken a lesson learnt from Egypt to prevent China from re-making the same mistake. However, with the increase of railway building, China rapidly accumulated foreign debts. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Qing government has incurred forty-five million pounds of debts.124 Seeing the dangers of losing sovereignty, reformist Liang Qichao (1873-1929, 梁啟超) wrote a “Treatise on New Ways to Overthrow a Country” in 1901. Liang lamented the similarity of China’s situation to that of Egypt on the edge of bankruptcy:


Isn’t it the foreign debt that caused the bankruptcy of Egypt?...Today foreign countries became creditors of China. Day after day, they will control China’s finance. This is exactly the trap that Egypt was caught up. It is also a trap that China cannot escape...Just look at the shareholders of the Suez Canal. It is about the changing power relationship between England and Egypt. Alas, Egypt is asking for disaster. This is the reason when the Luhan Railway [from the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing to Hankow] needs to borrow money from the Russo-Chinese bank, the British fought hard to stop it. This is also the reason when Niuzhuang railway [in Manchuria] is to borrow money from the Hongkong Shanghai Bank of China [a British bank], the Russians fought to death to compete. If goes on like this, one more railway in China is like one more trigger to bankruptcy for China.125

Liang’s analyses of the great-power competition in the Chinese railway construction were well grounded in his understanding of a similar problem in Egypt. The Egyptian debt problem incurred with the building of the Suez Canal had become a common-sense point of reference whenever Chinese discussed their own financial problems. Although insightful reformists have foreseen the danger, the Qing government could not manage well the foreign debts. History was doomed to repeat itself. Russian and British banks rushed to lend money to China and competed among themselves in an attempt to control China’s finance and infrastructure development.

The discourse of using the Suez Canal project in Egypt to debate the railway projects in China not only existed at the national level among the Chinese ministers and bureaucrats, as reflected in the writings of treatises and memorandums. The discourse also existed at the provincial level, as reflected in newspapers where local elites debated whether they should raise fund locally to build railways in their province. In discussion of financial problems in building railways in different provinces in China, such as in Zhili,

125 Liang Qichao, “Mie guo xin fa lun” (“Treatise on New Ways to Overthrow a Country”《滅國新法論》), 1901. “埃及之所以亡，非由國債也。試觀蘇彝士河之股份，其關係於英國及埃及主權之嬗代者何如。嗚呼！此真所謂自來禍者也。故所以盧漢鐵路由華俄銀行經理借款，而英國出全力以抗之。牛莊鐵路之借款於匯豐銀行，而俄國以死命相爭也。誠如是也，則中國多開一鐵路，即多一亡國之引線也。”
Shanxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hunan, and Hubei, Egypt was constantly mentioned as a caution to those who wished to borrow foreign debts. For example, on October 31, 1907, the most influential newspaper in Shanghai, *Shen Bao*, published the following excerpt from Jiangsu Province:

> China borrowed fifteen million pounds from Britain which led to the British interference in our railway affairs. Haven’t we learned a lesson from Egypt? In order to prevent further British penetration, the business community in Suzhou and Hangzhou should raise our own money.\(^{126}\)

Subsequently, a fund raising campaign was launched. On September 1, 1908, a similar report appeared in *Shen Bao*, voicing opposition to borrowing foreign debt to build a railway in Hubei Province:

> Due to the lack of funds in building the railway between Sichuan and Hankou [of Hubei Province], the governor of Hubei planned to borrow money from the British for five million…this is a horrible mistake. Haven’t the people of Hubei learned the lesson from Egypt which lost its sovereignty by borrowing foreign debt? There is no good result for a weaker nation to borrow money from a stronger economy.\(^{127}\)

There are many more reports like the two cited above. They illustrate that Egypt and its debt problems, a seemingly unrelated issue to China and not of concern to people in remote provinces of China, had become a common sense point of reference in various parts of China in tackling their similar problems. In this way, knowledge of a distant but comparable Egypt transcended the vast geographical and cultural space and become a local knowledge in smaller provincial communities in China.

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\(^{126}\) “Waibu zou suhang yong jiekuan zhe bo yi” (Reports on the oppositions from Suzhou, Hangzhou and Ningbo on borrowing foreign money), *Shen Bao* 《申报》, October 31, 1907.

\(^{127}\) Mosheng from Zhangling of Hubei Province, “Wei Hubei Chuanhan tielu jie waizhai shi quangao Hubei tongxiang shu” (A Letter to my fellow countrymen of Hubei on the issue of borrowing foreign debt to build the Sichuan-Hankou Railway), *Shen Bao* 《申报》, September 1, 1908.
In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although China and Egypt did not have official diplomatic relations, they were in a similar position in the world order. As a result, Chinese intellectuals often took Egypt as a point of reference in debating their own domestic issues. This indirect interaction between China and Egypt was made possible by the global expansion of European imperialism. Facing common challenges at the turn of the twentieth century, China and Egypt were connected in invisible ways. This form of indirect connection between two non-western societies was looked by previous scholarship.

This part of the chapter has analyzed the zigzagging story of how information of the Arab world was processed into knowledge by a Japanese intellectual in the milieu of his western education and personal visits to Egypt; how this newly constructed knowledge was then translated and appropriated by Chinese intellectuals. How Chinese readers understood the translated texts seems to be largely dependent on their own concerns in mind. For readers in a faraway place, the symbolic meaning of lessons from Egypt was far more important than the original intention of the author and what was emphasized in the original text.

Besides learning about Egypt through reading translated works, there is another mode of knowledge acquisition. That is learning through first-hand experience. Among the few Chinese who had been to Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century, Kang Youwei was one of them.

There are some detailed studies on Kang’s extensive travel experience. For example, Lo Jung-pang, Kang’s grandson, edited an important volume *K’ang Yu-wei: A
In the volume, Lo translated many of Kang’s travel accounts from Chinese into English for the first time. A few years later, Robert L. Worden, a PhD student at Georgetown University, wrote a dissertation entitled “A Chinese Reformer in Exile: The North American Phase of the Travels of K’ang Yu-wei, 1899-1909.” Drawing on US, British and Canadian government archives, as well as numerous correspondence between Kang and his friends around the world, Worden portrays Kang’s life overseas in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Malaysia down to the nitty-gritty details. It is an excellent source of information on Kang and his myriad thoughts.

However, these existing works on Kang seldom mention his experience in the Arab world. This is probably because historians often focus on Kang’s experience in Europe and North America where he went in exile for many years. Indeed, Kang never lived in Arab countries for an extended period of time. So far as I know, only on three occasions did he pass by the region on his way to Europe or America. Nevertheless, he did leave some of his travel writings on Egypt.

After the failure of the One Hundred Days Reform in 1898, Kang went into exile in Japan, Canada and the United States. During these years, he travelled to many different places. Among his various trips, on March 22nd 1904, Kang set off on a journey to Europe. The main purpose of his trip was to study the politics of Europe. He hoped to use the political experience of Europe to prove that Constitutionalism, rather than revolution,

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130 The memoir dates the beginning of the travel from 光绪三十年二月六日.
is the solution for China.\textsuperscript{131} This time he travelled from Hong Kong to Malaysia in Southeast Asia, to Sri Lanka in South Asia, through the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea to Egypt. He then crossed the Mediterranean to Italy, his final destination. He took the British steamer \textit{Mamora} for his voyage and on the way he arrived in Aden, the Suez Canal, and Port Said.\textsuperscript{132} His travelling during these two weeks (around June 1\textsuperscript{st} to June 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1904) is only listed in the appendix of Worden’s meticulous study.\textsuperscript{133} However, careful reading into Kang’s travel account on Egypt illuminates many ideas that have so far eluded scholarly investigation. Even before Kang arrived in the Arab world, he wrote about his expectations: “Arab people are talented. Their civilization is the teacher of Europe. I wish to visit it.”\textsuperscript{134}

Kang’s commentary on Egypt mainly focuses on the Suez Canal, on which he wrote a detailed description about its construction:

“The Suez Canal is sixty-seven miles long, more than ten \textit{zhangs} [丈] wide, and three \textit{zhangs} deep. The Canal is flanked by deserts. It is built with sand bags, strengthened by horizontal boards, and consolidated by long poles. There are safeguards all along the Canal. Although the sand bags often go broke, the guards on duty can always repair them right away. There are many people on the guard. Precautious methods are taken. Therefore the banks of the Canal are without damage. It seems at the first sight that it is impossible, but with human labor and guard around the clock, there is actually no danger of busting of the canal. I’ve long heard about this great project. Today I finally see it in my own eyes. It is indeed a unique and marvelous technique. The Canal is made from easy-to-find construction materials. It is a world wonder.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{131} Zhong Shuhe, “preface,” 34.

\textsuperscript{132} Kang, “Ouzhou shiyi guo youji er zhong,” 60-4.


\textsuperscript{134} Kang, “Ouzhou shiyi guo youji er zhong,” 62.

\textsuperscript{135} Kang, “Ouzhou shiyi guo youji er zhong,” 63.
Kang was amazed at the simple design and the effectiveness of the Suez Canal. He then thought of the Yellow River in China which often suffered from river bank bankrupting:

“The Yellow River often goes bust and floods neighboring villages in tens of thousands of li [里]. The torrent of the Yellow River is strong which is different from the Mediterranean which seldom has flooding…Every year tens of thousands of gold is spent on reinforcing the busting Yellow River.”

Kang’s thinking was very active. He then immediately came up with an idea of solving the problems of the Yellow River:

“Modeling the Suez Canal, it is not impossible to build a canal across the desert. The Hun River and Tongji River in Beijing often overflow. It is because there is no money to reinforce them…There are many steamers and boats crossing the Suez Canal. The bank of the Canal is only about two hundred li. The tax for crossing the Canal is very heavy, eight shillings per person per ton. The income from the taxes is used to reinforce the Canal and therefore it is easy to keep it strong.”

In retrospect, we know that the construction of the Suez Canal was quite sophisticated. It is certainly not as simple as Kang had imagined. However, Kang’s conclusion about the Suez Canal is understandable, as he was only passing by and seeing the Canal for the first time. Kang also had great admiration of the French designer of the Suez Canal, Ferdinand de Lesseps (1805-1894):

“Ferdinand de Lesseps is skilled at design and meticulous calculation…Ferdinand de Lesseps made his name by this project. Despite his arrogance, we cannot but admire his creation. When my steamer passes by the Canal, I praise Lesseps and I am speechlessly amazed.”

Obviously, Kang had read about Ferdinand de Lesseps before this trip. That is probably why when he saw the Canal, he thought of its designer and commented on him. In the

136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
end, Kang concluded that “a canal is the most important project in mastering water resources and facilitating transportation…smoothing the water transportation is like smoothing the blood and pulse (血脉) in the body. When the waters are blocked, the country is not prosperous and the people are not well off. When the waters are properly channeled, the country and the people are prosperous and strong. The difference between being civil and barbarian, strong and weak, and poor and rich can be told from its infrastructures of transportation.”

In addition to the Suez Canal, Kang had extensive descriptions of Aden as well. He was amazed at the sense of awe that Aden’s geographic situation gives people: “the mountains are high and the cliffs are steep.” Kang was also keenly aware of Aden’s strategic importance in the maritime power balance: “Aden is like the gate of the Red Sea—from Hong Kong, to Singapore to Sri Lanka, Aden is an important port.” However, he lamented on the British control of it: “Although Aden has its geographic advantages, the British took control of it by cannons and fires. Britain dominates the entire maritime route that I have been to on this trip, the Penang Island, Singapore, Hong Kong…. It is not just China that is lagging behind in everything. So are others, including European countries. Aden has its natural advantageous situation, but it still could not escape the British dominance. If that is the fate for Aden, does it mean that other places are doomed?”

139 Kang, “Ouzhou shiyi guo youji er zhong,” 64.
140 Ibid., 61-62.
141 Ibid., 61.
Kang’s description of Cairo and Port Said is somewhat disappointing. It is mainly about the European merchants he saw, especially the British. However, he does not go beyond the street scene. One reason for this is probably because he did not stay in these two places for very long. The other reason might be because he did not know much about these two places from his prior readings. Kang knew what Chinese people could learn from the Arab world and wished that more Chinese could have visited it: “whereas in ancient time, Gan Ying\textsuperscript{142} could not pass to the countries far away, nowadays the transportation has become much more convenient. The world is connected. However, very few Chinese have been here.”\textsuperscript{143}

Kang’s writing is sometimes not very precise. He mixes the traditional Chinese units of measurement with western ones. For example, Kang uses both miles and \textit{zhangs} (three \textit{zhangs} are around to ten meters) in describing the features of the Suez Canal. He also seems to use kilometers with \textit{lis} (two \textit{lis} equal to one kilometer) interchangeably. In some occasions, the writing also reveals his incorrect knowledge of the world. For example, he writes, “this [the Suez Canal] is the transportation crossroad of Europe, Asia, Africa and Austria.”\textsuperscript{144} Obviously, as we know, the Suez Canal does not link to Austria. This is an incorrect knowledge in geography and he repeated this at least twice in his writing. Despite these drawbacks, the things he saw and the thoughts he had in mind reflect the intellectual \textit{impulses} of a great reformer of the time.

\textsuperscript{142} Gan Ying, was a Chinese military ambassador who was sent on a mission to Rome in AD 97 by the Chinese general Ban Chao. Although Gan Ying probably never reached Rome, he is, at least in the historical records, the Chinese who went the furthest west during antiquity and he gathered what information he could.

\textsuperscript{143} Kang, “Ouzhou shiyi guo youji er zhong,” 65.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 63.
On another occasion in March 1909, Kang visited Egypt for a second time to Cairo, Aswan, Luxor, and Port Said. He also visited Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. This is the brief description from Lo’s biography of Kang: “In the second month he set sail for Egypt, where he visited Cairo, Aswan, and Luxor. In the following month he went by train to Port Said and then by boat to Palestine, where he visited Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Here he wrote a poem on the greatness of Christ, who suffered to save the people of the world, and he speculated on the influence of Buddhism on Christianity.” However, Lo does not provide the sources for this description and I cannot find the poem either. Therefore, it is still unclear to us why Kang visited these places.

Kang also had been to Fez, the third largest city of Morocco on February 8-12th, 1907, on his way from Mexico to Europe. While there, he visited Sultan Abdel Aziz. “On the twenty-second day (February 4) he visited Cordova and two days later, Granada, where he toured the Moorish palace of the Alhambra. On the twenty-fifth day (February 7) he sailed from Cadiz, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to Tangier, and travelled inland to the Morocco capital of Fez, where he stayed three days. The king of Morocco granted him an interview, but Kang was aghast at the poverty and filth of the city.” This is an important lead for future research, which should delve into the Moroccan imperial court archive. Why did Sultan Abdel Aziz grant Kang an interview? How did the Sultan come to know Kang and his reputation? Did local newspapers report on this meeting? When

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Kang was in Mexico, he interviewed the Mexican president Profirio Diaz. Local newspapers reported on this event. When he was in Japan, Canada, the US and Britain, local newspapers all reported his visit. Therefore, we probably could speculate that the local Arabic newspapers did the same. This is an important lead for future research.

From the limited source materials available so far, it is possible to conclude that some of the Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century had some first-hand experience of the Arab world and gained direct knowledge from it. This mode of knowledge acquisition often enabled them to see more details. As noted in the above analysis of Kang’s travel writings, Chinese intellectuals’ amazement and admiration for Egypt is very noticeable. However, their understanding of Egypt is still a mixture of understanding and misunderstanding. It is part of their efforts to understand the world in general.

Arab Understanding of China

Moving on to the other side of the story, this part of the chapter examines the Arab understanding of China through the lens of an important historical event—the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95. This event fundamentally changed the power relations between China and Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. It marked the decline of the old Confucian order in China and Korea and the rise of a new order in Japan and Russia. The war and subsequent events set Japan on a trajectory toward hegemony in East Asia, whereas China entered a long period of domestic unrest and foreign intervention. The First Sino-Japanese War has been the subject of numerous studies, but mainly within the

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context of East Asian history. Its impact outside the region has been dealt with only rarely. What was the response from the Arab world to a seemingly faraway warfare in East Asia? What was the image of East Asia in the eyes of Arab intellectuals before and after the war? How did Arab intellectuals form their understandings of East Asia? These questions are at the heart of the following analyses.

At the beginning of the 1880s, an increasing number of private newspapers appeared in the Arab world. Bilad al-Sham and Egypt were the hubs of such journalistic activities. Arab intellectuals of the time were stimulated by the new knowledge they learned from the west and were anxious to utilize the new technology of printing. Among the burgeoning press, *al-Muqtataf (The Selections)* was one of the most progressive journals. It was a monthly magazine for current affairs as well as science and technology. It was the only monthly periodical of its kind. It became one of the leading Arabic-language publications and retained its prominence for seventy-five years. When the intellectual and political atmosphere in Beirut became too restrictive for this publication, it moved to Cairo. Contemporary readers of *al-Muqtataf* are bound to be impressed by the wide variety of topics it covered, from anatomy to astronomy, from agriculture to veterinary medicine, from Darwinism to biographies of world leaders and scientists. It popularized current affairs from around the world, as well as social and philosophical issues.

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The wide-ranging coverage of *al-Muqtaṭaf* shows that the Arab intellectuals’ understanding of the wider world was broader than is commonly assumed. The paper’s news reports about non-western societies were quite up to date even as events unfolded. For example, during a tumultuous period in the history of East Asia from 1890 to 1911, it ran frequent news reports related to the region in almost every issue. Accompanying these news reports, editors of *Al-Muqtaṭaf* also translated biographies of Chinese officials (such as Empress Cixi, Prince Yi Xin, and Viceroy Li Hongzhang) as well as commentaries and background knowledge about China, such as the Chinese education system, the Chinese language, and customs of daily life. It also covered Japan, including the Meiji Restoration and its military modernization efforts. This shows that writers of *al-Muqtaṭaf* were keenly aware of what was going on in East Asia at that time. This coverage, some extensive and some quite brief, provided much-needed information to the Arab readers about a place that they previously knew little about.

Among non-western societies, Arab intellectuals often regarded Japan as a model and source of inspiration for modernization. Earlier scholarship in Middle East studies usually traces the starting point of Arab admiration for Japan from its victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. However, news coverage in *al-Muqtaṭaf* shows that Arab intellectuals began to contemplate the miracle of Japan well before the Russo-Japanese War, starting from the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95, at least ten years earlier. To the

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Arabs, it was phenomenal that Japan, a much smaller nation, had defeated China, its gigantic neighbor and long-time cultural patron. During and after the war, *al-Muqtaṭaf* carried a series of news articles and commentaries, analyzing China’s problems and the secret of Japan’s success. For example, on January 1st, 1895, during the final stages of the war, it reported:

The burning fire between China and Japan is still going on, but the victory flag is on the Japanese side. They entered China and progressed towards its capital. The war proved that Japanese soldiers had modern military training and education in liberal and outstanding schools, which are based on the system of European schools. They defeated Chinese soldiers who did not have similar training.  

In February, it reported:

The war between China and Japan is still going on, but it has become clear that the victory in dispute is to Japan. Japan started this war. Some official Chinese newspaper reports that China had feared Japan and had been wary about this ultimate showdown with Japan since as early as 1882.

In March the same year, *Al-Muqtaṭaf* had another article analyzing the reasons for Japan’s victory over China:

According to Sir Edward Arnold, the reasons why Japan defeated China were: the arrogance of Chinese government and [its] looking down upon religion. As for Japan, its virtues are deeply rooted in its people’s spirit and perseverance. Whereas reading Chinese newspapers, the news is about bribery, treason, and cruelty, Japanese newspapers praise anonymous donations and giving to soldiers in the war. All the Japanese made their efforts towards their nation’s victory. They strengthened their nation. Japanese women volunteered to help the wounded soldiers. They worked with their hands. That is the spirit of the people.

In the eyes of the Arab people, the image of China was quite bleak: crumbling, corrupt, and demoralized. Whereas the Japanese people were united in one front during

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war time, the Chinese officials were only thinking of themselves. In this view, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Chinese empire was dying. Japan, on the other hand, was on an ascending course. Although the news reports were brief, they captured the essence of the Sino-Japanese geopolitical situation at the time: the perception of Chinese weakness led to more aggressive intrusions by the foreign powers into China. It shattered any basis for China’s sense of superiority and forced a Chinese reappraisal of their place in the world. Defeat by a member of the Confucian world was far more traumatic psychologically than a defeat at the hands of Great Britain in the Opium Wars (1839-1942, 1856-1860). On the other hand, perception of Japanese strength led to the inclusion of Japan in the ranks of the imperial powers. Japan used modern arms so professionally and defeated China on land and sea so decisively that quite suddenly the world perceived Japan as a modern power. A new balance of power had emerged and the Arab intellectuals perceptively understood it.

A major war often affects the interests and relations of neutral onlookers as profoundly as those of the belligerents themselves. News about a seemingly faraway war, traversed vast land and oceans, and became both a source of joy and worry among the Arab intellectuals, who were in a completely different cultural and linguistic world. The enthusiasm over Japan’s victory and the sense of urgency over China’s defeat exemplify the aspirations and anxieties co-existing within the Arab world at the time.

As few Arab intellectuals had direct contact with China and Japan at the time, where did their information come from? The newspaper article in March 1895 gives us a hint. It cited the analyses of Sir Edward Arnold (also known as Sir Edwin Arnold, 1832-1904). Arnold was a prominent English journalist and poet of the nineteenth century, who
wrote a famous poetry collection of *The Light of Asia* introducing Buddhism to the western audience. Throughout his life, he studied various eastern cultures, such as Egypt, India, and Japan. While the Sino-Japanese War was going on, he was living in Japan with his Japanese wife Tama Kurokawa. Therefore, it was likely that editors of *al-Muqtaṣaf* read Arnold’s writing in English, probably from the *Daily Telegraph*, with which he was associated as Editor-in-Chief for more than forty years.

Even a few years after the war, some Arab intellectuals still reflected on the war. For example, Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) wrote a series of commentaries between 1900 and 1901 on “The Future of China.”

It is well known that the Sino-Japanese War several years ago destroyed China’s defense, damaged its status, and revealed its flaws to western countries. Western powers since those days have wanted to take over China’s wide kingdom. This is new to the psychology of China. Since the Sino-Japanese War, European powers entered this country and interfered in the eastern kingdom’s affairs. China realized that it is lagging behind. Its authority yielded to Europe. It remains ignorant in science and lagging behind in progress... However, I have a different view. Although China was defeated, it still has sprawling government institutions and industries. These are the strength of China. Western powers cannot easily take over China.\(^{156}\)

Arslan then went on to explain the strength of industries in China, such as refinery, textile, and paper-making. He also listed the natural resources that China had in supporting its economic development, such as timber, coal, and iron.\(^{157}\) When Arslan analyzed China on its own terms, the image of China seemed somewhat less bleak. Arslan saw China’s remaining strength and long history. He came to the conclusion that China could not be easily conquered. This was true. Although China was divided into different spheres of influence by western powers and Japan, it was never fully colonized.

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Arslan’s sophisticated analyses about China are remarkable for his time. To the best of my knowledge, he had never been to China. What was his source of information? In the article, Arslan cited German traveler, geographer, and scientist Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833–1905), French Sinologist Stanislas Julien (1797-1873), and French chemist Paul Champion who spent time in China in order to compare the industries in China and that of Europe. Champion’s work *Ancient and Modern Industry in China* is remembered as producing practical and scientific knowledge for Europe.\(^{158}\)

Editors and contributors of *al-Muqtasaf* could reach such conclusions because their sources of information were largely from European Sinologists writing of East Asia. This is understandable. Very few Arabs at that time studied the Chinese or Japanese languages. Even fewer had set foot in East Asia itself.\(^{159}\) The Arab intellectuals’ understanding of East Asia, like the Chinese understanding of the Arab world, mostly came indirectly from reading books and newspapers. When the majority of the Arab intellectual elites were learning from the west, they also learned about East Asia as mediated by the west, via western languages. This reflected the hierarchy of knowledge production and transmission of the world. As El Shakry argues, knowledge production was globalized and interconnected between Europe and the Arab world under asymmetrical conditions of power, and knowledge flew from metropole to peripheries.\(^{160}\)

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159 There are exceptions to this statement. For the very few Arab travelers to Japan at the turn of the twentieth century, see Alain Roussillon, *Identité et modernité: Les voyageurs égyptiens au Japon (XIX*-XX* siècle)*, Actes Sud, Sinbad, 2005. Details will be discussed in Chapter Four on Chinese and Egyptian Muslims encounter in Japan.

How the Arabs understood East Asia was largely dependent on how the Orientalists understood East Asia. However, the Arab intellectuals’ interest in current affairs of a faraway region does show Arab intellectuals’ increasing global consciousness, a sense of inspiration and urgency, and the sentiment of the world at large.

**Conclusion**

In *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* James Hevia examines the diffusion and transformation of knowledge from the imperial metropole to the periphery.\(^{161}\) Hevia argues that imperialism was never just guns and goods. It was also a cultural process involving the construction of knowledge through imperial discipline and pedagogy to achieve hegemonic control over China. Advancing Hevia’s argument, Ulrike Hillemann notes in her book *Asian Empire and British Knowledge* that Britain-China encounters were not a purely bilateral issue. The transmission of knowledge about China back to the imperial metropole for domestic consumption was often mediated by other peripheries such as India and Southeast Asia.\(^{162}\) In a similar vein, the constant movement of ideas between two peripheries of the world at that time—China and the Arab world—was facilitated by translations and mediated by different modes of knowledge productions. This process created fluid spaces that diminished cultural and linguistic differences so that writers from different societies could grapple with one another’s challenges and reflect on their own problems.

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My concern in this chapter is not so much a comparison of translated texts with the original ones, but rather the process of how Orientalist writings on China and the Arab world were internalized by western-educated Japanese and Arab intellectuals and reflected in their own writings. However, surprisingly, after books and news reports were being translated, despite the filtered knowledge by western and Japanese orientalism inherent in the processes, Chinese and Arab readers did not borrow uncritically, but exercised their own judgment and selective appropriations. In addition, major newspapers, such as Shen Bao in Shanghai, reprinted discussions on Egypt from local provinces. This reflects the complex process of knowledge production, reproduction, diffusion, and appropriation from one periphery of the world to another periphery at the turn of the twentieth century.

Lastly, cross-cultural interaction is a major theme in world history. It is a process that simultaneously influences the experiences of individual societies and shapes the development of the world at large and one of the major agents of change in human history. Can encountering the "other" through reading and appropriating their interpretations for one's own purposes count as an interaction? As shown in this chapter, although Chinese and Arab intellectuals never actually met each other, their indirect intellectual encounters certainly had an impact on their thinking and understanding of the world at large. For that, this mode of indirect interaction may also be considered as an agent for change.
Chapter Two

Invisible Bonds: Material Mediation in Chinese-Arab Commercial Connections

Tea, silk, and porcelain were well known in Chinese-Arab trade over land and maritime silk roads in the early modern period. They remained on the shopping list until the late modern times. However, few people would imagine that soybeans and tobacco also helped build the invisible bonds between these two major non-western societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter zooms in on these two commodities to highlight the material mediations in Chinese-Arab commercial connections.

Soybeans’ Journey from Manchuria to Egypt


From far off Manchuria comes a factor which is proving a determining one in the unprecedented prosperity of the Suez Canal. It is the soybean extensively raised in the three eastern provinces and generally in the northernmost regions of the Chinese Empire. This new element in the west-bound freight has, during the first season of exportation, produced traffic for the canal to the extent of 412,000 tons. This is the chief feature of the economic year.

Why did these soybeans cross the Suez Canal from Manchuria? Where was their final destination? What happened on their long voyage across oceans? How does their journey illuminate the interconnectedness of the world economy, transfer and innovation of agricultural know-how, and food consumption in the early twentieth century? Digging
further into this piece of intriguing news, this chapter unveils the previously little-known commercial linkages between China, Egypt, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States.

During an era of large-scale western global expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is commonly assumed that the two major non-western societies—China and Egypt—had little interaction with each other because they were both busy wrestling with the west. However, the Chinese and Egyptian customs records show that China exported soybeans to Egypt while importing cigarettes and cigars from the port cities of Alexandria and Port Said. Although the figures from the Maritime Customs Annual Reports are heterogeneous in their ways of categorization and calculation and often too incomplete to allow quantitative analysis, they do reveal a little-known fact: China and Egypt had frequent mediated commercial contacts, importing, exporting, and re-exporting commodities with each other. The transfer of these commodities sheds light on a new layer of the world economy. Economic activities at this crucial historical moment were not limited to the interdependence between the center and the peripheries, as the world-systems theory historiographies have construed it. The busy commercial traffic among the peripheries was also an indispensable part. The economic currents were multi-directional. In addition, these transactions also led to the flow and improvement of agricultural know-how that was associated with those commodities. For example, due to such exchanges, Egypt adopted the cultivation of Chinese soybeans.

More importantly, it was not the Chinese who introduced this new practice to Egypt directly. It was the British colonial officers in Egypt who mediated this invisible

163 China Imperial Maritime Customs: Returns of Trade and Trade Reports, the years between 1903 and 1913; Le Commerce extérieur de l'Égypte pendant année, years between 1874 and 1903, Direction Général de la Statistique : Le Caire, Alexandrie; Annual Statement of Foreign Trade of Egypt, years between 1918-1937, Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Finance and Economic, Statistical Administration.
Chinese-Egyptian soybean linkage, expanded the usage of it, and then spread the new ways of utilizing soybeans back to China. The British agriculturist and the commercial interests of the British and Japanese empires shaped the indirect encounter of Chinese and Egyptian farmers as well as how the latter understood (or did not understand) the usage of a commodity from a distant but comparable “other.”

Therefore, this chapter seeks to establish a clearer picture of the mechanisms of the world economy at that time—who were the linchpins and mediators and how the transferring process of commodities and agricultural know how associated with them took place. As such, it deepens our understanding of the complexity and nuances of the interconnected world. Furthermore, as the soybean embarked on its long journey from Manchuria to Egypt, its entangled relationship with the producers and consumers in places of origin and faraway new homes also demonstrate the multiple roles that the same commodity can play in different economic and cultural milieus of the world.

The Mobility of Soybeans as Industrial Raw Materials

Among the recent flourishing works on the movement of commodities and their transnational lives, the humble and cheap soybean seldom catches scholars’ attention. Historian Ines Prodöhl, however, has recently explored the soybean’s global presence in the first half of the twentieth century, especially the question of how the US overtook China to become the biggest soybean producer by the end of World War II. Building on

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her work, this chapter tells the story of soybeans’ detour to Egypt prior to acquiring the label of “American.”  

This little-known episode in the soybean’s zigzagging global journeys illustrates how much the world economies as well as the transfer and improvement of agricultural technologies were intricately intertwined.

The cities of Hull and Liverpool in Britain were major oil crushing centers in Europe in the early twentieth century. Traditionally, factories there mainly used cottonseeds from the US and Egypt to produce oil. However, in the supply chain, poor harvests in the US and Egypt in the first decade of the twentieth century forced the price of the cottonseeds to rise. The American Consul in Huddersfield, Frederick I. Bright, wrote the following report on conditions of the British oil-seed crushing industry in 1910:

"The growing demand for the soybean was caused in part by the recent rise in the price of cottonseed products. London quotations place crude cotton oil at $136.26 per ton and still higher prices are predicted owing to reduced cotton crops in the United States and Egypt."

The culprit damaging cotton production was the deadly boll weevil, which entered the United States from Mexico in 1892. These tiny beetles gradually ate their way across the cotton fields in the US. By the turn of the twentieth century, the volume of American cotton production (especially in the south) had been significantly reduced.

Boll weevil also crossed the Atlantic Ocean and came to Africa causing similar devastating effects on

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167 For a detailed account of the threat of boll weevil, both real and perceived, see James C. Giesen, Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South, 1892-1930, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
cotton production in Egypt.\textsuperscript{168} As a result, in search of cheaper alternatives to keep the factories running for the growing market demand of vegetable oil in Europe, British merchants discovered the oil-rich soybeans from Manchuria. Again, American Consul Frederick Bright observed:

According to press reports, British seed crushers have 400,000 tons of last season’s crop of soybeans under contract. Of this amount about 20,000 tons are now en route from the Far East. With the great interest that is now being manifested in the Manchurian bean in all the principal European countries, the trade in this article is expected to assume large proportions with increased prices.\textsuperscript{169}

After winning the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and then the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Japan started to take advantage of Manchuria’s resources, including coal, timber, oil, and soybean. The Japanese government actively encouraged Japanese farmers to go to Manchuria to utilize the land.\textsuperscript{170} The soybean, called “big bean” (\textit{da dou}) or “yellow bean” (\textit{huang dou}) in Chinese, was the major commercial crop of Manchuria. During this period, soybean and its related products, such as bean cake (tofu; also used for fertilizer) and bean oil accounted for seventy to eighty percent of Manchuria’s export.\textsuperscript{171} At its peak in the 1930s, soybeans from Manchuria accounted for about sixty percent of the global soybean production and trade.\textsuperscript{172} Although Japan grew soybeans as


\textsuperscript{170} For details of this episode of the Japanese history, see Louise Young, \textit{Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism}, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

\textsuperscript{171} Bean cake is the residual left after the oil or soya milk crushing process. In China, Japan, and Korea it is made into delicacy dishes, or used as fertilizer to nurture the soil.

well, as arable land was limited, a significant amount of soybeans were imported from Manchuria to Japan. To facilitate business, Japanese companies established overseas offices in Manchuria. Modern soybean mills were established in southern Manchurian port cities of Newchuang (today’s Yingkou) by the British and in Dairen (today’s Dalian) by the Japanese. Slightly earlier, Japan had signed the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation in 1894 and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 to boost its trade with Britain, which had been Japan’s major foreign ally since the Meiji Restoration. Therefore, when the news of oilseed shortage in Britain reached the Japanese entrepreneurs in Manchuria, trading and shipping companies in Manchuria, Mitsui and Mitsubishi, immediately acted upon it.

Mitsubishi was established in 1870. Its branch in China and Russia was called Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company and was the first Japanese company to open an overseas steamship route. It enjoyed a monopoly on this business for a while. Later the political winds shifted against Mitsubishi in the early 1880s, when the Japanese government of the time sponsored the establishment of a competitor, Mitsui Bussan. First established in 1876, Mitsui Bussan wanted to break away from the foreign dominance over Japanese trading affairs that had been in place since the end of the Edo period. Mitsui’s mission was to return control over trade to Japanese hands. By the end of WWI, it had become a dominant trading giant; it also started various overseas investments, one of which was in Dairen in Manchuria. In addition, to facilitate

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transactions and transportation, the South Manchuria Railway Company, Takushoku Bank, and Dai-ichi insurance company all were active actors in the process.

Soybeans have been grown and consumed in China, Japan, and Korea for thousands of years. It is considered one of the favorite cooking ingredients in East Asia for its taste, texture, culinary versatility, and rich protein content. Harbin, Kirin, and Dairen were the major centers of soybean production in Manchuria. The British oil crushing industry chose soybeans as an alternative to cottonseeds, however, mainly for their high oil content, useful in industrial processes to make margarine, shortening, soap, and even cosmetics. In addition, soybeans were inexpensive and easy to transport. They could endure two to three months of maritime transportation without going rancid. Consequently, in an astonishingly short period of time, the previously almost unknown Manchurian soybean became an important commodity in Britain. A famous German chemist in London wrote an article in the academic journal, expressing his enthusiasm in the future of soybeans, but also voiced concerns about what toll the long voyage might take on soybeans:

It [soybean], almost unknown in Europe, caused a stir everywhere. In an amazingly short time—less than half a year—soybean conquered the world market. It brought transformations to the oil market. There is a surge of the essays in technical journals. Even daily newspapers are flooded with news of this new seed… [but] the long voyage through the tropics and particularly through the Red Sea made the beans suffered a loss of quality of about 10 per cent.\(^{174}\)

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In the age of colonialism, the British colonial officers decided to test whether the soybean could be produced in Egypt so that its shipping costs to Britain could be reduced. Soybean cultivation requires little water and short land occupation time during the summer. It well suited the agricultural environment of Egypt. Therefore, soybean cultivation was introduced in 1910. The Director General of the Department of Agriculture in Egypt, G. C. Dudgeon, wrote an article in the inaugural issue of The Agricultural Journal of Egypt in 1911:

The possibility of introduction of this plant [soybean] into the cultivation of Upper Egypt has rendered it advisable to give a few particulars with regard to the peculiarities of the species, the methods employed and the results obtained in the cultivation of it in other parts of the world… The species, which contains a very large number of varieties showing remarkable differences in the size and colour of their seeds, exhibits a tendency to adapt itself readily to different climatic conditions… Experiments with different varieties of the soybean are to be undertaken at the Department’s Experiment Farms.175

The British Royal Gardener, Thomas William Brown (1876-1950),176 was the first person to carry out this experiment. He was the head of the Horticultural Section of the Ministry of Agriculture under the British colonial administration in Egypt, directing irrigation improvements in the Nile Delta and introducing new crop varieties, one of which was the soybean. At the beginning, soybeans were cultivated on a small scale for experimental purposes at the Higher School of Agriculture and Agronomical Sections of the Ministry of Agriculture. Later, larger scale cultivation was carried out at the Experiment Farm in Giza. In 1912, The Agricultural Journal of Egypt published two reports written by Brown on growing soybeans for two consecutive years:


176 Before Brown’s posting to Egypt, he had been a gardener at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew and Head Gardener to the Moroccan Sultan, designing and laying out palace gardens in Fez. He was also a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London.
The soybeans were dried and threshed. They were sown on June 24\textsuperscript{th} [1911] and removed from the ground on September 30\textsuperscript{th}. They occupied the ground for 99 days. They were sown in pockets 30 cm apart on the sides of ridges. Three to four seeds were sown in each pocket about 3 cm deep...No attempt was made to test the utility of the plant as a forage crop. The actual area sown of each variety was 162 square meters. The actual quantity of seed produced was as follows: Medium Yellow 16 kilos, Morse 14.5 kilos, Eltum 13.5 kilos...The trial shows that this plant will succeed as a summer crop.\textsuperscript{177}

The trials in the cultivation of soybeans, which were commenced in the year 1911, have been continued during the present season. The crop was sown on May 13 and the method of sowing adopted was the same as that followed last year. The three American varieties, Eltum, Morse, and Medium Yellow, were again tried, in addition to the common yellow kind imported from Manchuria...Part of the crop was cut on August 1 and used as fodder...It was eaten greedily by bullocks, buffaloes, sheep, and goats, but not by donkeys and mules...The quantity of dry seed produced by each variety per feddan is Manchurian 592 kilogs, Medium Yellow 752 kilogs, Eltum 500 kilogs, Morse 700 kilogs...It will be seen that the results are much more satisfactory than those of last year.\textsuperscript{178}

Juxtaposing these two reports reveals two interesting but often overlooked details of the British soybean experiment in Egypt. The first report never mentioned that the Medium Yellow, Morse, and Eltum soybeans were American varieties, but the second report says that they were “again tried.” This means that the soybean varieties tested in Egypt was imported not only from Manchuria, but also from the US. This makes sense because starting around 1910, the US Bureau of Plant Industry also increased its effort to investigate soybeans.\textsuperscript{179} In addition to learning from Chinese farmers in Manchuria, British and American agriculturalists had borrowed from each other as well. Second, the British agriculturalist also started to test the soybean as animal folder in the second year of their experimentation on soybean cultivation. This was an innovative way of using the


crop because before that soybeans were mainly used as fertilizers in China to improve the quality of the soil due to its nitrogen-fixing capability. The British agriculturalist’s discovery of its new usage was one of the reasons that led to the later global interest, including in the United States and China, in using soybeans as fodder for animal husbandry. In a sense, the British agriculturalist borrowed soybean varieties from China and the US, experimented their usage in Egypt, and eventually re-exported it back to the rest of the world. This showed that despite the competing economic interests of Britain, the United States, China, and Egypt, the transfer and improvement of agricultural know-how was without borders. Egypt is a good example of global soybean development and dissemination.

After the initial experiments, the same journal published an “Editorial Note” in 1913, concluding that certain varieties of soybeans were most suitable to be grown in Egypt and exploring further possibilities to make the best use of limited arable land in Egypt with soybeans.

In the summer of 1912 four varieties of soybeans were grown at the Department’s garden at Giza…. A sample of each variety was dispatched on Oct 10 to the Hull Oil Manufacturing Company, with the request that they might report as to the commercial value of each sample…taking the composition of the beans in connection with the yield per feddan, it appears that it will be most advantageous to cultivate the varieties Medium Yellow and Morse in Egypt. The percentage of oil and albuminoids are low in the first named, but this is compensated by the high yield. The report is eminently satisfactory. The Department is now studying how the crop may be most profitably used in this country, whether as a catch crop on good land or as a pure crop on cheap land.\textsuperscript{180}

With official promotion and support from the government and the experimentation by the British colonial officers, soybean cultivation took off in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. “\textit{Ful suya}” is the Arabic term for it. By the time

of the interwar period, Egyptian farmers and merchants had started to provide *ful suya* to Britain directly. The notable merchants in Cairo involved in this trade include: Ismail Barakat Bey, Yosef El-Hadidi Effendi, Mohamed Gafar Bey, Cheik Abd Allah Abd El Kader, Cheik Ali Barnas, S. G. Tadrosse, Sahel Asar El Nabi, Cheik Abdel Rahman Osman, and Cheik Hamed Ali. The merchant in Alexandria was Muhammad Bey Hassan al-Shami.\(^{181}\) These individuals were the pioneers of soybean trade in Egypt. The photo of a farmer standing in a large field of the soybeans entitled “Soybeans Grown at Giza” was published in 1912.\(^{182}\) (Figure 1)

In 1931, the Egyptian Agricultural Department entrusted British milling company J. Bibby & Sons to conduct research comparing the qualities of Egyptian *ful suya* and the *da dou* imported from Manchuria to further improve the cultivation technique and maximize production.\(^{183}\) For example, on January 16, the Egyptian Consul in Liverpool Said Bari’ai wrote the following report to the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Egypt:

> We can establish that the Egyptian soybeans have been improved that they are no less acceptable than the ones from Manchuria, especially in terms of the percentage of oil that they contain.\(^{184}\)

> The introduction of soybeans to Egypt also coincided with the agricultural transformation after the invasion of boll weevils that ravaged the cotton field—the pillar

\(^{181}\) Dār al-Wathā’īq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives Cairo), Wizārat al-Khārijiyyah, folder number 0078-023565, 1932.


\(^{184}\) Dār al-Wathā’īq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives Cairo), Wizārat al-Khārijiyyah, folder number 0078-023565, January 16, 1931.
The cash crop of Egypt’s economy. The Ministry of Agriculture invited foreign agriculturalists to do research and test new grains in an effort to diversify Egypt’s cash crops and reduce its dependency on cotton. On October 9, 1939, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote a letter to the Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry in Egypt on the cultivation of soybeans.

His Highness Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry:

I have the honor to send you the memorandum that the Department of Commerce gave to our ministry concerning soybean cultivation in Egypt as it may matter to the Joint Cooperation Committee between the Ministries of Commerce and Agriculture to read its content.

File No. 2 \ 30 \ 130

Memorandum to the Commercial Section

Soya is a type of legume that grows in the tropics, especially in Asia such as China. Therefore, people call them the Chinese beans. This plant is very rich in oil and nitrogen. Furthermore, on the one hand, it can be used to extract vegetable oils for food and industry, whereas on the other hand, it can also be added to drugs used in the cure of some diseases, especially diabetes.

…

China is considered as the most important producer of this product because of its low production costs. However, the long distance and high transportation expense forced many European countries to become interested in encouraging cultivation elsewhere… The Ministry of Agriculture has already conducted tests in Egypt in the years from 1911 to 1930. The experiment succeeded. It is proven that Egyptian homegrown soybeans exported to England is no less good than those from Manchuria, especially in terms oil percentage… the only drawback that was noticed is the color of the beans which led to lower price than the same kind of beans from China. The price per ton of Egyptian soybeans is between five and ten shillings less than Manchurian soybeans due to the different color.

Isn’t it the right time to spread the cultivation of this product in this country? This will overcome the challenges of agricultural diversification in Egypt and explore the possibility of winter crops after the soybean cultivation in the summer [because soybean can improve nitrogen quality of the soil].

Although in terms of the quantity of soybean production in Egypt, it was still on the margins of Egypt’s overall economy compared with cotton and sugarcane, they synchronized Egypt with the economic impulse of the world. Due to its remarkable versatility for industrial usages in Europe, the soybean was quickly accepted as a cash crop in Egypt in order to provide raw materials to Britain. However, despite its numerous nutritional values and inexpensive cost, ful suya was an alien food item in Egypt for human consumption, even if Egyptians ate many other kinds of beans from the legume family. In other words, soybean’s commercial value for the Egyptian economy did not help it attain cultural acceptance. By contrasting the mobility of soybean as an industrial raw material and its immobility as human food, the next part of the chapter investigates the reasons behind this indifference and the limitations of scientific explanation as to why certain food that would appear to be a rational choice did not increase the appetite of people from a different culture.

The Immobility of Soybeans as Human Food

Historian Ines Prodöhl attributes the reasons for the rejection of soybeans as human food in the United States largely to the industrial interests: Making soybeans into tofu (Chinese: doufu) would mean separating the oil and protein content in the soybeans

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186 Dār al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives Cairo), Wizārat al-Khārijiyyah, folder number 0078-023565, October 9, 1939.
which would lead to the loss of profit in the oil processing industry. This is a reasonable explanation in the case of the United States. However, in the case of Egypt, the industrial interest in soybean was not deep enough. The Egyptian ful suya were mainly exported to Britain as raw materials without being processed. Therefore, there may be other reasons for the immobility of soybeans as human food.

Exploring the reasons behind this cultural indifference is challenging because a lack of interest is often reflected in silence. It is difficult to document what was left unsaid. To overcome this dilemma, I particularly focus on the relationship between food consumption and human emotions to surmise the reasons. The image of things does not emanate solely from objects themselves, but is also constructed within distinct social settings and particular historical contexts. The mental images that ful suya evoked in the minds of Egyptians were closely related to this point.

For social settings, popular urban legends about the harm of soybeans had left a deep superstitious imprint in the mind of Egyptians. Although medical records from as early as 1500 BCE in Egypt and Mesopotamia mentioned that moldy and fermented soybeans were commonly used as primitive antibiotics to treat wounds and reduce swelling, later stories damaged their reputation. A famous tale was that Pythagoras believed that beans were produced from the same matter as man. Another folklore belief

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189 http://www.ilsoy.org/data/files/Classroom%20PDFs/6th%20Grade/History_at_a_Glance.pdf (last access: June 21, 2013) The University of California, Los Angeles holds many volumes of Arabic medical manuscripts. Further research will be done to further explore Arab medical understanding and usage of soybeans.
was that Pliny thought that beans should be shunned because they caused sleeplessness and dulled the human senses.\textsuperscript{190} Modern science has long debunked these myths, but the long-lasting impact of popular assumptions cannot be easily dismissed, especially when it comes to food that people are unfamiliar with.

For particular historical contexts, the introduction of soybean cultivation in Egypt was led by the British industrial interests, rather than as a cultural promotion. The ways in which soybeans are made into human food, such as tofu, soy sauce, and soymilk in China were never properly introduced to the Egyptian consumers. This also links to the first point of social settings explained earlier. To the Egyptians, ful suya was an ingredient alien to their culinary culture and eating habits. They did not know how to cook it to make it tasty. For example, agronomist Doctor of Science Simantov Mihaélloff once wrote in an Egyptian journal:

Those who have traveled in both the Celestial Empire [China] and the Rising Sun [Japan] are familiar with the pleasure that the natives consume in large quantities, the famous liqueur "shoyu" which is the product of fermentation of soybean. From the economic policy point of view, we can say that this humble legume, scorned in some countries, unknown to the others, is certainly one of the reasons why people in the most populous countries in the world have, for centuries, live on the same soil without disappearing, without the need to spread and conquer new territories in order to draw the necessary food materials. Soy is an excellent plant, perhaps one of the most perfect foods…. But there are many who consider it as a curious plant, exotic but irrelevant to the diet. It is, they say, a bland vegetable, neutral, and tasteless. In short, the poor soya has, quite wrongly, an unjustified bad reputation.\textsuperscript{191}

Soya-based food, such as tofu, had been available in Chinese and Japanese restaurants in Egypt, such as in the locally well-known Chinese restaurant “Peking”


established by Kuomintang Muslim General Ma Fufang in Cairo in the 1930s. However, they were high-end places where only foreign colonial officers could afford to go. Egyptian commoners rarely visited them and therefore were seldom exposed to the culinary culture associated with soybeans.192

As a result of this cultural unfamiliarity, soybean and soybean cakes were mainly used as forage for animals in rural Egypt to produce more expensive animal protein. For example, due to different ecological environment, the *ful suya* grown in Egypt were slightly different from the *da dou* imported from Manchuria. But the Egyptian farmers adapted them well for other usages.

The drawback of the Egyptian soybean is its bleak color…. But it is with confidence to emphasize that the benefits in Egyptian soybeans in terms of nutritious values is no less than that in Manchurian soybeans. It is completely usable to make forage mix for cattle.193

However, the association of soybeans with animal fodder ruined the Egyptians’ appetite for them as human food.194 In order to dispel misperceptions and promote the awareness of health benefits that soybeans can bring, *al-Muqtaṭaf*, a leading Arabic journal of the time on agriculture, science and technology, published a few introductory articles on soybeans during the interwar period, in the column of “Scientific News.” For example, in June 1938, it carried the following report:

In the section of Horticulture in the Modern Agricultural Production Exhibition in Gezira, I saw one kind of soya (a plant grown in Japan and China), bags of soy

192 Oral interview with an Egyptian chef at the oldest Chinese restaurant in Egypt named “Peking,” Maadi, Cairo, July 7, 2013.

193 Dār al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives Cairo), Wizārat al-Khārijiyah, folder number 0078-023565, January 16, 1931.

194 Oral interview with an Egyptian chef, July 7, 2013. The chef provided valuable oral history account on the personal experience of his family with soybeans. Although he admits that his experience with soybeans can only be traced to the 1970s, he believes that similar reasons can be used to explain an earlier time.
flour, and the bread made from it for patients of diabetes. I am told that soya is recently grown in Egypt.... I asked about its price and it is quite cheap.... The taste of the bread made of soy flour is good. Soya flour has abundant protein and amino necessary for human body. In addition, putting some amount of soya flour into white wheat flour can increase the content of protein in regular bread by 60%.195

Furthermore, in *Egypte Contemporaine*, again agronomist Simantov Mihaëloff strongly recommended the use of soybean flour for the diet of Egyptian farmers because it could improve the health of Egyptian rural population:

In a study entitled "Role of Greenery in the Spread of Plant and Animal Pathogens," I had the honor to present in 1934 at the Society for Public Health, Industrial and Social in Paris. I reported that the flour with which are made breads eaten by peasants in Egypt contained about 18.7 percent of indigestible cellulose and that was one of the major causes of the spread of helminthiasis and amebiasis in the Nile Valley.... Without wanting to degrade the bread consumed by the fellahin [peasants], it is undeniable that the huge amount of cellulose in the bread as well as in vegetables and fruits consumed as such, is neither hygienic nor advisable. A cure is required. This remedy is provided by the use of soy flour, either as such or mixed, in suitable proportions with other flours.196

Given the large population who suffered from various diseases in Egypt and the benefits that soybeans can bring to them, the inexpensive and healthy soybean seem to be a logical choice.197 However, despite the efforts of a few scientists, *ful suya* did not become part of the Egyptian diet, at least not in a visible way.

During times of dire need, however, such as the great famine caused by the locust invasion in 1915 during WWI, Egyptians had eaten soybeans for survival. The locust

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invasion severely damaged the agricultural production of Egyptian local beans (*vicia faba*). During this painful period, cooks ground the soybeans into flour to make *makaruna*. Soybeans were also used as meat extender in *koftas* and made into edible oil. However, when Egyptians consumed soybeans, they did not eat it in the form of *tofu* that is commonly known as human food in China. As a result, the particular cultural marker of Chinese soybeans was invisible. Most Egyptians were not even aware that they had eaten soybeans. At a time when the Egyptian agriculture was going through a crisis, soybean played an important role in sustaining lives, but did not receive recognition.

The relationship between human emotions and food involves many factors. The natural emotional reaction of people to a certain type of food—its smell, taste, texture, even the images that it generates—is directly related to the acceptance of this food. *Ful suya* evoked repulsive and puzzled images in the mind of the Egyptian people due to urban myths, its association with animal fodder and unawareness of its consumption. This, as a consequence, led to the reject of soybean’s cultural acceptance.

Taking soybeans as an example for economic connections, this chapter explores the process and the diverse actors involved in the invisible commercial connections between China and Egypt in the early twentieth century. It elucidates the chain effects of world economy of the time: without the shortage of American cottonseeds ravaged by boll weevil from Mexico in the 1900s, which led to the demand of Chinese soybeans for the oil crushing industry in Britain starting from 1910, transported by Japanese shipping.

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199 Although Japanese and Koreans also eat *tofu*, in the eyes of Egyptians, *tofu* has mainly been perceived as a Chinese product.
conglomerates, and supervised by British royal gardeners in Cairo, Egyptian farmers probably would never have learned how to grow soybeans. The confluence of a number of particularly favorable contingent events also led to the introduction and consumption of soybeans in Egypt, such as the worldwide cotton production reduction, the Anglo-Japanese alliance, the Japanese penetration into Manchuria, the WWI, and even the great famine in Egypt. Maritime trade along the global shipping lane—starting from port cities in southern Manchuria, through the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, across the Suez Canal, and finally the Mediterranean—were the vast geographical space that facilitated the journeys of soybeans. Therefore, the transfer of soybean and its cultivation technology was a highly contingent, complex, and mediated process. As a result of this process, China and Egypt were bounded by invisible transnational trading networks, as well as mediating powers, timings and spaces. Soybeans served as a source of revenue for China, Egypt, Japan, Britain and the United States. The livelihood of peoples from different places in the socioeconomic spectrum—from colonial officers to merchants to farmers—were all hitched to the same interconnected world.

Egyptian homegrown ful suya then were used as raw industrial materials for Britain, as animal fodder in rural Egypt, and as human food during times of distress. Consequently, the landscape of economic and agricultural development in Egypt was re-shaped and expanded. Soybeans diversified the cash crop variety. Soybeans improved animal husbandry and the production of animal protein. Soybeans were the unsung heroes during difficult times. But they could not surmount their unappealing images in Egypt. The story of how a healthy da dou in Manchuria was turned into a strange ful suya
for the palate of the Egyptians illuminates the different roles that food can play in fostering desire, fueling economy, and feeding stomachs (of both human and animals) in different cultural milieus during an age of great transformations.

**Tobacco and Cigarette Trade between Egypt and China**

If the voyage of soybeans from Manchuria to Egypt is an example of a commercial connection between China and Egypt, the development of the cigarette industries in Egypt and China is more of a comparison, though the tobacco and cigarette trade between them is a case of linkage as well. Whether employing a comparative approach or establishing connections, the stories of soybeans and tobacco/cigarettes both attest the interconnectedness of the world at the turn of the twentieth century.

Smoking is a wide-spread phenomenon in both Egypt and China today. Their smoking cultures can be traced back to the sixteenth century when tobacco, a New World crop cultivated in North and South America, first came to these two societies via maritime merchants. However, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the modern cigarette industries in Egypt and China had developed their own distinct features. What happened when they intersected with each other? This part of the chapter explores the tobacco and cigarette trade, as well as the political and cultural meanings associated with the transfer of these commodities.

Historians of the Middle East Roger Owen and Zackary Lockman have touched upon the cigarette industry in their seminal studies of Egyptian economic and labor
histories. More recently, James Grehan delves into the smoking culture of the Middle East in the early modern times in his study of consumer culture in Damascus, and Relli Shechter weaves a history of the Egyptian cigarette industry with a wide array of sources. An interesting parallel set of literature exists in the field of Chinese history. Sherman Cochran, Timothy Book, and Carol Benedict have all written on the smoking culture and cigarette industry in China. Building on the work of these scholars, I further investigate the invisible linkage between China and Egypt in tobacco and cigarette trade at the turn of the twentieth century.

In a nutshell, Egypt developed a cigarette industry in the late nineteenth century without tobacco cultivation, whereas China had a vibrant tobacco cultivation and consumption culture but without a cigarette industry until the entrance of the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) in the early twentieth century. Different political and economic circumstances in Egypt and China led to the different timings of the mechanization process in their respective cigarette industries. This was the major reason that the two industries produced two different kinds of cigarettes: one a high-quality handmade luxury product mainly for elite consumption worldwide, and the other machine-made cheaper smoke for the consumption of the domestic urban masses.

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Paradoxically, China, a semi-colonized society, together with other western or non-western societies, provided raw material, tobacco, to Egypt, a colonized society. The Egyptian cigarette industry, in return, exported their manufactured cigarettes and cigars to China and around the world. On the other hand, BAT, a global multinational company, mixed Turkish tobacco with Chinese tobacco to make cigarettes in their factories in China to sell to local customers. Chinese smokers not only followed the global trend of the smoking fashion shaped by the Egyptian cigarette industry, but also gave it additional political meanings in their wrestling with the western powers. What this story tells us most is a rare case of multi-directional supply and demand flow as well as multi-faceted production and consumption diffusion between the centers and the peripheries, and among the peripheries of the world economy. It challenges many of our previous understandings about the world economic processes at the turn of the twentieth century.

_Tobacco Cultivation and the Cigarette Industry in Egypt_

Tobacco first found its way to the Ottoman Empire through British merchants plying the trade routes of the Indian Ocean in the late sixteenth century. The Turks then introduced tobacco to Egypt a bit later. Before the mid-nineteenth century, Egypt’s tobacco mainly came from the western Ottoman provinces of Macedonia, Latakia, and Thessaly. Smoking was initially rejected in the Islamic culture due to economic, social, and religious concerns. For example, it was argued that cultivating tobacco as a cash

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204 Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, _An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914_, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 359.

crop diverted land and resources from much needed foodstuffs. Since smoking requires fire, it constituted a constant threat to the urban and rural dwellers. Furthermore, the public vehemently debated whether the use of tobacco was compatible with the Islamic law.206

The convergence of tobacco monopoly in the Ottoman Empire and the cultivation prohibition in Egypt in 1883, however, led to the early development of the cigarette industry in Egypt and the importation of tobacco from China as one of its sources of raw materials. In an attempt to increase Ottoman government revenue to pay off its international debts, the Ottoman Empire imposed a state monopoly in 1860, bringing tobacco cultivation, processing, and sales all under official control. In 1883, a tobacco administration—the Regie—was established. The bureaucracy started its own manufacturing and selling companies, forcing out many of the already established individual manufacturers and sellers. This resulted in the movement of tobacco merchants, especially those from Greece, to Egypt, which already had a large Greek community. More importantly, Egypt was outside the Ottoman tobacco monopoly due to its de facto colonization by Great Britain. The hot and dry climate in Egypt was also essential in processing the tobacco leaves for the cigarette industry.

When Mehmet Ali, the son of a tobacco trader in Kavalla, assumed power in Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he attempted to introduce tobacco cultivation to Egypt. However, production fell short in terms of quality. In 1883, one year after the British occupation of Egypt, the colonial government decided to ban tobacco

cultivation and convert the land used in cultivating tobacco into cotton plantations. This prohibition, inadvertently, favored the tobacco trade carried out by the newly arrived Greek merchants. In 1884, Greece and the colonial Egyptian government signed a commercial agreement, giving Greek cigarette manufacturers favorable policies. Furthermore, the Egyptian colonial government imposed customs duties on imported tobacco in order to increase state revenue. Among the imported tobacco, Chinese tobacco from Fujian and Guangdong (Canton) was one of their sources of raw materials. As a result of the above-mentioned processes, although there was no tobacco cultivation in Egypt, the cigarette industry became a major source of revenue (with tobacco import duties and cigarette export earnings) and the largest export-oriented industry in the history of modern Egypt, which accounted for roughly half of the country’s total exports.

In addition to Greek tobacco merchants, many Greek immigrants to Egypt were skilled technicians and cigarette rollers. They created flavorful blends by mixing different kinds of tobaccos together—Turkish, Russian, American Virginian, Greek, Indian, and Chinese. Kharman, the person in charge of the mixing process usually inherited the secrets of blending from their family members in a long apprenticeship. Numerous small cigarette factories and workshops congregated in Alexandria, Cairo, Zaqaziq,

207 China Imperial Maritime Customs: Returns of Trade and Trade Reports, the years between 1903 and 1913.

208 Yang Guo’an, Zhongguo yan ye shi hui dian (A Compilation of Historical Records on Chinese Tobacco), Beijing: Guang ming ri bao chu ban she, 2002, 15.


209 Shechter, 40.
Fayyum, and Aswan to produce hand-made cigarettes and cigars. Nestor Gianaclis was one of the earliest Greek entrepreneurs. He established a factory in downtown Cairo in the old palace of former Egyptian Minister of Education Khairy Pasha. When the company later moved to a larger premises, the building was first taken over by Egyptian University (today’s Cairo University) and then the American University in Cairo (AUC). Few students who had attended classes there know that the building where they received knowledge was once a Greek cigarette factory.  

It is due to this early start and development of the cigarette industry in Egypt that BAT, the global giant of the cigarette industry at the time, initially had great difficulty entering the Egyptian market. As a result, the mechanization of the Egyptian cigarette industry did not come until after WWI. Introducing new technology to an already established industry would raise serious financial and labor issues. For example, mechanization would mean the uncertainty of consumer preference and costly initial investment by local manufacturers to import machines and train operators. The maintenance of machinery was also expensive because skilled laborers were scarce and the spare parts would have to come from abroad. Another major consideration was that introducing machines would make the cigarette rollers obsolete. When BAT introduced the first cigarette-making machine in 1907 to Maspero Freres, its subsidiary factory in Egypt, rollers went on strike against it. By 1910, the Egyptian cigarette workers had established a union to resist the mechanization of the industry. Due to the

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212 Shechter, 88.
underdevelopment of modern industries in Egypt, the cigarette workers were among the first to engage in labor activism in Egypt.\textsuperscript{213} Egyptian cigarettes and cigars, therefore, were known as a high quality, hand-rolled luxury commodity. The BAT, mainly producing cheaper machine-made cigarettes, was only able to take hold in Egypt as a result of the diminishing purchasing power worldwide after WWI. Facing the hardship of daily life and later the Great Depression, the majority of the consumers opted to smoke cheaper machine-made cigarettes.

Those Egyptian hand-made cigarettes were called “Egyptian” because of the locale of its production. This name was especially well known in Great Britain due to its large amount of importation. In the United States, however, the Egyptian branded cigarettes were often called “Turkish cigarettes” because of the acclaimed tobacco leaves from the Turkish controlled provinces of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{214} Even in the customs records of China, the distinction between “Egyptian” and “Turkish” was not clear, with reference sometimes as “Egyptian” and sometimes as “Turkish.” This was largely due to the lack of in-depth knowledge in China about a faraway region. No matter what the label was at the time, those cigarettes and cigars were, in fact, international: the mixed blended tobacco came from different places, including China; Greek skilled technicians and Egyptian local workers hand-rolled them; Greek entrepreneurs packaged them with appealing images and advertised them around the world; last but not least, without the backing of the British colonial government in Egypt, the cigarette industry probably would not have prospered.

\textsuperscript{213} Beinin and Lockman, 52.

\textsuperscript{214} Sometimes Turkish tobacco is also referred as Oriental tobacco.
Travelers to Egypt (colonial officers, soldiers, businessmen, journalists, and tourists) soon developed a taste for the Egyptian cigarette and spread its reputation all over the world when they returned home.\textsuperscript{215} For over half a century, the Egyptian cigarettes travelled to different corners of the globe, charming smokers with their supreme quality of tobacco blends and the splendor of their packaging. This is a counter-argument to that of the conventional world-systems theory that peripheral societies export raw materials while importing manufactured products from the western center. Rather, Egypt, a periphery of the world economy of the time, imported raw materials from both the center (for the American Virginian tobacco, and arguably for Russian tobacco) and other peripheries (for Turkish and Chinese tobaccos), and exported the value-added products to the center \textit{and} the peripheries of the world. Since most of the consumers of Egyptian cigarettes were westerners, the Egyptian cigarette industry was also a notable exception, in that a peripheral society was setting the consumption trend in the metropolis when the predominant direction of cultural influence was the reverse. This point is most vividly illustrated by the example of US companies copying Egyptian brands in packaging. American cigarettes, such as “Fatima” made by Liggett & Myers since the late nineteenth century and “Camel” made by R.J. Reynolds since 1913, attempted to associate their brands with the more renowned Egyptian brands and borrowed their aura of exclusiveness by printing the Pyramids, palm trees, and Islamic architecture on the packets.\textsuperscript{216} As a result, when the American cigarette brands “Camel” and “Fatima” came to China via the BAT, Chinese smokers thought they were “Egyptian.” This is a reminder

\textsuperscript{215} Cox, 47.

\textsuperscript{216} Cox, 260-61.
of the influence of Egyptian cigarette industry on international production and consumption at the turn of the twentieth century. The Egyptian cigarettes were one of the earliest manufactured goods produced by a non-western society that enjoyed a worldwide reputation and circulation.

The contribution of Chinese tobacco to the Egyptian cigarette industry and importation of Egyptian cigarettes also further complicate the picture of production and consumption flows of the world economy. An interesting supply and demand circle arose between two non-western peripheral societies. China, a peripheral society of the time, provided raw materials to another peripheral society, Egypt which in turn, exported manufactured products to China. For example, from 1903 to 1914, Egypt exported around 220,000 kilograms of cigarettes to China and Far East. In 1913, the category of “China and the Far East” was divided into two categories of China and the other Far East states in the Egyptian customs records, symbolizing the increasing importance of the Chinese market to the Egyptian cigarette industry. This figure did not include the Egyptian cigarettes exported to Hong Kong, which were included in the category of “British possessions in the Far East” in the Egyptian customs records. Among the Egyptian cigarettes and cigars sold in China, “Sambul,” (manufactured by the Oriental Cigarette Company in Cairo), “Aristocratic,” “Sultan,” and “Pera” (manufactured by C. Colombos Ltd in Cairo) were the major brands. As the Egyptian cigarettes became fashionable globally, it also left an imprint on the consumer culture in China. This is an

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217* Le commerce extérieur de l’Égypte pendant année*, Direction Général de la Statistique Le Caire, Alexandrie, various years, calculation by the author.

218 The owner of this company was Rechid Saadi Bey, an Ottoman subject, in cooperation with the British authorities in Egypt. FO 383/100; Sheng Huaixuan, “Zhi Zaize, Shaoying, Chen bangrui han” (“A Letter to Zaize, Shaoying, and Chen Bangrui”), 1909. Sheng was promoting a tobacco state monopoly in China similar to that in the Ottoman Empire, but the idea was not realized in the end.
example of one periphery of the world setting the trend in another periphery of the world. To Chinese smokers, however, Egyptian cigarettes and cigars were not simply a hand-made luxury commodity that marked their modern identity and socioeconomic status, but also a symbol of the capability of a non-western society in shaping cultural trends in the western world. Therefore, by smoking Egyptian cigarettes and cigars, they also expressed their political solidarity with their fellow colonized people in Egypt, even though they were not aware that those “Egyptian” cigarettes were really international ones. This would not have been possible without the mediation of British colonial interests in Egypt and China. Whereas the British colonial authority in Egypt directly prohibited tobacco cultivation in favor of cotton in Egypt, the competition with Indian and Ceylon tea ushered in by British colonial interest in the international market, inadvertently, forced many of the farmers in China to abandon tea planting for tobacco by the end of the nineteenth century.

**Tobacco Cultivation and Cigarette Industry in China**

As in the case of Egypt, when tobacco first entered in China cannot be documented with precision, but roughly around the sixteenth century. In contrast to Egypt, however, smoking in Chinese religious, philosophical, and medical thought generally carried positive connotations. For example, smoke served to protect the community from harm. Its prophylactic qualities have both practical and symbolic

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219 For British introduction of tea to India, see Andrew Liu, "The Birth of a Noble Tea Country: On the Geography of Colonial Capital and the Origins of Indian Tea," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 23 (March 2010): 73-100.

220 Benedict, 7.
meanings. It warded off pesky insects and protected against offensive odors. Furthermore, smoke transmitted messages from the mortal to the spirit world, honored the dead, and purified the living.

Tobacco came to be widely planted in multiple localities in China by the 1750s or so. Fujian was one of the centers of tobacco cultivation and knowledge diffusion of its cultivating technique to other parts of China. A few reasons combined to make Fujian a unique place for tobacco plantation and dissemination. Fujian’s geographical location as a coastal region with multiple port cities such as Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, Fuzhou, and Xiamen (Amoy) made it easily accessible by maritime merchants from afar. Fujian also receives ample sunshine and rain throughout the year, which are essential to the growth of tobacco. The mountains in western Fujian and central Fujian are natural protective screen against the typhoons coming from the Taiwan Strait and cold waves in winter. Four rivers run through Fujian, providing convenient irrigation. Furthermore, the soil in Fujian has high nitrogen content, which is generally conducive to the growth of tobacco.\footnote{Fujiansheng difangzhi bianzhuan weiyuanhui, Fujiansheng zhi, Yancao zhi (Gazetteer of Fujian Province: Tobacco), Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1995, 11-12.} But planters sought a soil that was rich but not too rich for they fear that otherwise the tobacco growth would be coarse and the leaves of bad texture. Since tobacco is a nitrogen depletion crop, in order to strike a balance, in areas of intensive tobacco cultivation, such as in Zhangzhou, tobacco was planted only every other year or every third year in order to maintain the fertility of the soil.\footnote{Fujiansheng difangzhi bianzhuan weiyuanhui, 23.} Tobacco was also often rotated with the cultivation of soybeans in order to keep the nitrogen level of the soil.\footnote{John Buck, Chinese Farm Economy, New York: Garland, 1982, 167-76.}
because, as mentioned earlier, the soybean’s nitrogen-fixing quality. As a result of different soil condition, Fujian produced a variety of tobaccos. For example, N. rustica was mainly cultivated in western Fujian, processed in Yongding, was identified as “fine shred tobacco” (tiaosi yan) and sold at an expensive price. The coarser and darker N. tabacum (the most commonly grown variety of tobacco in China) from Shima village in Longhai town of Zhangzhou city was called “black crow thick tobacco” (wuhou yan) and was relatively cheaper. Additionally, the tea exports from Fujian (especially from the Wuyi Mountain region in northwestern Fujian) were hit hard by the competition of tea from India and Ceylon in the European market in the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, many local tea planters deserted tea and started to grow the more lucrative cash crop of tobacco. Lastly, tobacco plantations are labor-intensive enterprises. Fujian and the nearby Guangdong province are regions with higher population density that can easily provide cheap labor. All these above-mentioned factors led to a vibrant tobacco cultivation culture in Fujian.

Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, the tiaosi yan from Yongding became widely known as a premium tobacco that could be sold for more than one thousand strings of cash. Merchants in Fujian carried tiaosi yan far and wide, both for domestic and international consumption. After the first Opium War (1839-1842), the Qing court signed the Treaty of Nanjing with Great Britain, opening Fuzhou, Xiamen, and Canton as treaty ports for international trade. Tobaccos from Fujian and Guangdong provinces were shipped out from those port cities to Southeast Asia (for the consumption of local

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225 Fujiansheng difangzhi bianzhuan weiyuanhui, 185.
people), Great Britain (to be mixed with Turkish/Oriental tobacco in the British Imperial Tobacco Company), and the United States (to be mixed with Virginian and Burley tobaccos by the American Tobacco Company). According to the maritime customs reports, some notable amounts were also exported to Egypt in the early twentieth century. For example, from 1913 to 1928, China exported around 20,000 tons. Between 1918 and 1926, China was the second largest tobacco supplier to Egypt after Greece, implicating the importance of China as a raw material supplier to Egypt. As historian Carol Benedict argues, the spatial diffusion of tobacco from southeast coastal region of China, especially Fujian, to other regions both within and without Qing China was the consequence of collective agency of a myriad of Chinese local actors (peasants, laborers, and merchants) who saw tobacco as a source of financial support beyond mere subsistence. This is a stark contrast to the case of Egypt, where the British colonial government played an important role in the prohibition of tobacco cultivation, imposition of tobacco import duty, and forming an alliance with Greek tobacco merchants in Egypt. The absence of state control over tobacco cultivation in China allowed local actors to take advantage of the nature endowment of their land with hard work and responded to international market demand with business acumen.

226 Yang Guo’an, 15.

227 Annuaire statistique de l’Egypte (Statistical Yearbook of Egypt) 1909-, Ministry of Finance, Statistical Department, le Caire: Imprimeire nationale (National Printing), various years; Annual Statement of Foreign Trade of Egypt: 1919-1961, Cairo: Statistical Department, various years; Le commerce extérieur de l'Egypte pendant l'année 1910-1913, 1915-1917, Egyptian Customs Administration, various years, calculation by the author.

228 Benedict, 60.

Although China had a vibrant tobacco cultivation and consumption culture in the late nineteenth century, it was the BAT, however, that piloted the development of the modern Chinese cigarette industry. In 1858, the Treaty of Tianjin allowed cigarettes to be imported into China duty-free. By the end of the nineteenth century, cigarettes had become a central prop for Chinese urbanites seeking to express their new sophistication, progressive political stance, and enlightened way of thinking. Choosing to smoke a cigarette or cigar, rather than with a water-pipe shuiyan dai, signaled not only a personal sense of style, their progressiveness in embracing new practices of greater convenience with wider choices, but also where one stood on the pressing issues of the day.230 Therefore, even before BAT entering China, there had already developed a local demand for cigarettes. When James Duke (1865-1925) who later became the Chairman of the BAT, first heard about the invention of cigarette-rolling machine in 1881, he reportedly said “China is where we are going to sell cigarettes” due to its large population.231

American Tobacco Company led by James Duke first came to China through its local agent, Mustard and Company (Lao Jin Long) to sell its popular brand “Pin Head.” Mustard and Company also introduced the first cigarette-rolling machine in 1890 and the next year a small factory operated by Mustard and Company began to produce cigarettes in Shanghai.232 British firm W. D. and H. O. Wills were also active in Shanghai in the 1890s, promoting brands such as “Pirate” and “Ruby Queen” through its local agent Rex and Company. American and British mercantile houses based in Shanghai established

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230 Benedict, 11.
231 Cited in Benedict, 1.
232 Benedict, 135.
more factories between 1890 and 1902, a mere decade after James Bonsack invented mechanized cigarette rolling machine. When the American Tobacco Company and British Imperial Tobacco Company merged into BAT in 1902, BAT immediately monopolized the cigarette industry in China. Its cigarette factories were supplied with the most up-to-date machinery and the engineering department attached to the factories soon developed into an important center of technical expertise within the BAT organization world-wide. In fact, by the time of the 1920s, cigarette-making machines assembled in Shanghai would be used in BAT’s factories in India.\footnote{Cox, 234.} BAT also published the first specialized Chinese newspaper on tobacco, the \textit{Bei Qing Yan Bao (Newspaper of North Qing Tobacco, Figure 2)}, in 1906 in order to promote their cigarettes (picture attached at the end of this chapter). As for the tobaccos used by the BAT’s factories in China paradoxically, in addition to the Chinese tobacco, it also blended in the Turkish tobacco imported from the Ottoman Empire.\footnote{Yang Guo’an, 231.} Therefore, an interesting circulation of raw material and manufactured products arose at the turn of the twentieth century: whereas the Egyptian cigarette industry imported Chinese tobacco to make “Egyptian” cigarettes, the BAT’s factories in China imported Turkish tobacco from the Ottoman Empire to sell to Chinese customers. Contrary to the case of Egypt where BAT could not enter the market due to the early development and resistance of local manufacturers, it was only after WWI that Chinese indigenous cigarette companies, such as Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company based in Shanghai and Hong Kong, was able to enter the cigarette
market and became a major competitor of BAT.\textsuperscript{235} Furthermore, whereas the production of cigarettes and cigars in Egypt were primarily for sales in the global markets, the cigarette production in China was mainly for the consumption of domestic smokers, both the affluent elites and the hard-working urban poor. The divergent political and economic contexts in China and Egypt shaped their different development trajectories of tobacco cultivation and cigarette industry.

By the 1930s, cigarettes had become ubiquitous in China among all social classes in some coastal cities and had made significant inroads among the economic elites in many inland communities as well.\textsuperscript{236} When Chinese nationalism arose in the early twentieth century, however, imported western cigarettes came to be regarded as not authentically Chinese. In 1902, the United States refused to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act after its original ten-year limitation and even made it permanent. This triggered the wide-spread boycotts of western commodities in China. Boycotts as such repeatedly took place until the 1930s. During this period, who smoked what kind of cigarette was not just a matter of economic affordability and personal preference, but also carried meanings for the smoker’s identity and political stance. It was during this time that Egyptian cigarettes and cigars entered the Chinese market. Egypt was listed as a separate category of country of origin for imported cigarettes and cigars in the customs reports in 1920, symbolizing the growing importance of Egypt as a cigarette supplier to China.\textsuperscript{237} Although the

\textsuperscript{235} However, this is not to imply that there were no Chinese manufacturers before WWI. There were. But their share of the market was significantly smaller than that of the BAT.

\textsuperscript{236} Benedict, 132.

\textsuperscript{237} “Yancao jinkou zhi yange yu li nian maoyi qingxing” (“The Evolution of Tobacco and Cigarette Importation and Statistics over the Years”), re-printed news reports from \textit{Zhongwai jingji zhoushan (Economic Weekly of China and Abroad)} in \textit{Yinhang yuekan (Monthly of the Banking Industry)}, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1924.
colonial experiences of China and Egypt had many differences, in the eyes of Chinese people, both China and Egypt were victims of western imperialism. Therefore smoking Egyptian cigarettes and cigars symbolized their solidarity with a fellow colonized people against western imperialism.

Elite Chinese intellectuals preferred to smoke Egyptian cigarettes and cigars, especially on diplomatic occasions. Historians writing on the history of cigarette have noted its function as a means to socialize.\textsuperscript{238} Their analyses, however, are limited to the socialization among Chinese with Chinese and Egyptians with Egyptians. The following example is a case of socialization between Chinese thinker GU Hongming (1857-1928) and European diplomats in China with the smoking of Egyptian cigars. Gu’s family was originally from Fujian, but he was born in Penang and went to study in England at the age of ten. Later Gu also studied civil engineering at Leipzig University in Germany. He was fluent in many European languages and worked as an adviser to the Grand Council member Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) for twenty years and served in the Qing Foreign Ministry from 1908 to 1910, before taking a professorship at Beijing University (Peking University) and lecturing in Japan towards the end of his life.\textsuperscript{239} Gu was well known for his penchant for Egyptian cigarettes and cigars when he was in the public sphere dealing with western expatriates in China such as journalists, diplomats, merchants, bankers and missionaries. One day, he met the Eight-National Allied Supreme Commander in China, Alfred Waldersee (1832-1904), after the Boxers Rebellion (1900-1902) to discuss the

\textsuperscript{238} Shechter, 134; Benedict, 246-47; Grehan, 1369-77.

\textsuperscript{239} For more on Gu Hongming, see Chunwei Du, “Gu Hongming as a Cultural Amphibian: A Confucian Universalist Critique of Modern Western Civilization,” \textit{Journal of World History} 22 (December 2011): 715-46.
issue of the western military coalition in Beijing. Waldersee knew that Gu liked Egyptian cigars and gave one to him. Gu happily accepted it and appropriated it for his own purpose saying: The Egyptian cigar is better than the western ones…but unfortunately their country is colonized by a western power and their people are suffering.240 The fact that Waldersee offered Gu Hongming an Egyptian cigar showed the power dynamic at that particular moment. Waldersee was using the Egyptian cigar as an icebreaker while Gu’s comment suggests his desire to further consolidate his political stance against the western coalition forces in China. Egyptian cigarettes and cigars were milder in flavor. Most of the Chinese preferred the harsher smoke, such as the coarser and darker N. tabacum from Shima of Fujian. However, at particular moments, the political meaning of smoking “Egyptian” cigarettes outweighed the actual enjoyment of the taste of the smoke, especially in diplomatic occasions. In his leisure time at home, Gu still from time to time smoked water-pipe shuiyan dai with coarser tobacco.241

Conclusion

At the turn of the twentieth century, neither the Egyptian nor the Chinese cigarettes and cigars were a purely foreign nor totally indigenous commodity. They embodied the complexities and paradoxes of the multi-directional global circulation of raw materials and manufactured products, as well as consumption trends and political meanings associated with it. They were the products of dynamic interactions between


global and local processes. Despite their similarities, the timing of mechanization in the Chinese and Egyptian cigarette industries, however, was very different. The Egyptian cigarette industry was pioneered by the Greek manufacturers. They resisted mechanization and the BAT with their high quality hand-rolled cigarettes. The Egyptian cigarette industry delayed following the global transition to mechanization by some three decades.\textsuperscript{242} In a sense, the Egyptian cigarette industry became a victim of its early success because later when it did switch to producing machine-rolled cigarettes, the massive global markets had already been taken by China and India. The Chinese cigarette industry, on the other hand, jumped into mechanization right away because there was no such industry before, even though the tobacco cultivation and consumption culture had been established in China for a long time.

China exported tobacco leaves to Egypt, with which Greek and Egyptian workers made packaged cigarettes and cigars. When the “Egyptian” branded cigarettes entered the Chinese market, Chinese urban elites prided themselves for smoking them because they thought purchasing the commodities from a fellow colonized people could show solidarity in their common struggle against western imperialism. In reverse, BAT owned cigarette factories in China blended Turkish tobacco imported from the Ottoman Empire to make cigarettes for local Chinese consumption. However, very few smokers were aware that no matter what was the label, those cigarettes were in fact all international. The cigarette industry provided livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people in Egypt and China. Workers handled the tangible Chinese or Turkish tobacco leaves without

\textsuperscript{242} Shechter, 87.
knowing their place of origin, whereas elite smokers attached intangible meanings to the puff of smoke that they exhaled.

Soybean and tobacco products played a unique role in bridging the commercial gulf between China and Egypt at the turn of the century. There are some surprising similarities between these two distinct commodities. Soybean is a cash crop; so is tobacco. Although soybean is food and soybean generated products are for necessity and nutrition whereas tobacco generated products are for leisure and enjoyment, it was the versatility and profit-generating capability of both of commodities that led to their spread, diffusion, improvement, and commercialization. Soybeans are famous for their versatility. Tobacco is not often perceived as such. However, as Carol Benedict points out, tobacco can be sold either as an exotic indulgence to the rich or as an everyday luxury to the hardworking poor. Tobacco can readily find buyers at all levels of the socioeconomic hierarchy.\textsuperscript{243} Relli Shechter further argues that the cigarette is both a global and local commodity in a way it was produced, sold, and consumed. It is a versatile commodity that well indexed a variety of transformations undergone at the production and consumption end.\textsuperscript{244}

When goods are exported, they can act as a means of communication or markers of cultural distinction. There is no guarantee that the meanings and usage vested in goods by their producers will be recognized by the consumers from a different culture. Soybean and tobacco are material substances infused with various social, cultural, and political meanings. Their cross-cultural consumption shows the increasing \textit{globalization} in production as well as consumption of versatile commodities. The invisible bonds

\textsuperscript{243} Benedict, 5.

\textsuperscript{244} Shechter, 7
between China and Egypt were made possible by the material mediations in the new global factories and consumer societies.

Figure 1: “Soybean grown in Giza.” It showed no signs whatever of suffering from lack of water. *The Agricultural Journal of Egypt*, Volume 2, Issue 2, 1912, 92.

Figure 2: Bei Qing Yan Bao (*Newspaper of North Qing Tobacco*), dated September 1906 (Guangxu 32), no. 3, published by BAT in China.
Chapter Three

Unexpected Encounters:
Spatiotemporal Mediation in Chinese-Arab Connections

Chapters Two and Three discussed the mediated intellectual and commercial connections between China and the Arab world. Most of the intellectuals, merchants, workers, and consumers involved in these connections probably never had a chance to interact with each other directly. This chapter, however, focuses on the direct interactions between Chinese and Arab peoples. Counter-intuitively, these meetings did not take place in China or the Arab world. Rather, they occurred in Japan and France. By narrating the stories of Chinese-Arab unexpected encounters, from lettered elites to unlettered laborers, in seemingly disparate places and times, this chapter seeks to establish the importance of spatiotemporal mediations in weaving together the life trajectories of ordinary peoples.

The following pages center around two times and locales: turn-of-the-twentieth-century Japan and WWI France. At first glance, neither of these times nor locales seem to be related to China and the Arab world. The turn of the twentieth century was not a prime time for Chinese and Arabs, as they were under tremendous internal and external pressure. Nor did the First World War, a major European conflict, seem to be of concern to the laborers in remote regions of China and the Arab world. Yet, somehow the paths of Chinese and Arab peoples from different socioeconomic backgrounds crossed each other in places outside their familiar milieux. Admittedly, there may be elements of contingency in these unusual encounters. Nevertheless, they were not mere accidents. Underlying the seemingly random incidents is the larger historical contexts that set the
stage for the meetings to take place. I define the larger historical contexts, i.e. the sets of circumstances and conditions that gave birth to a particular convergence of life trajectories, as the spatiotemporal mediations.

In analyzing time, German historian Reinhart Koselleck made an important distinction: historical time and course of event. Historical time is a temporal period constructed immanently over time that does not need to justify itself by referring to certain events and persons. For a time period to become a historical time, it has to gain historical meaning and significance. The difference between historical time and course of event is probably similar to that of structure and an individual point within the structure. Every event is more and at the same time less than what is indicated in the conditions and circumstances. Hence there is always a surprising novelty in each event. In terms of scale, historical time is the general framework, whereas course of event is a particularity within it. Following this distinction made by Koselleck, I argue that the turn of the twentieth century and WWI are historical times, whereas the particular episodes of encounters were courses of events.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, “locale” means a place or site, especially with reference to events and circumstances connected with it. “Locality,” on the other hand, is a place or spot not necessarily with reference to things and persons in it or occurrences there. Therefore, “locale” is a more precise term in describing Japan and France in this chapter. It was not merely the geographical location of Japan and

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France that made the encounters between Chinese and Arab peoples possible. Much more importantly, it was the sets of circumstances and conditions in Japan and France that set the stages for the meetings. Japan at the turn of the twentieth century was an ascending power that attracted intellectuals from all over the world. It was a place of unification where common goals can transcend linguistic and cultural differences. France in WWI, however, embodies another set of conditions that made it a site of differentiation. It was an empire where laborers were not only brought together, but also carefully separated and segregated.

“Spatiotemporal mediation” compresses the temporal and spatial dimensions of circumstances into one. In his recent article, historian Nile Green proposes a concept of “Muslim spacetime” which is the space-time order created by industrial communications that dramatically changed the experiences of Muslims around the world in their life journeys. Building on the useful insight of this concept, I further argue that this “Muslim spacetime” is the spatiotemporal mediator that facilitated the Chinese and Egyptian Muslims’ encounters in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. Chinese Muslims re-discovered Islam under the influence of foreign Muslim activists in Japan. In return, the intellectual sparks ignited in Japan travelled back to China and as far away as to the Islamic heartland of Egypt. As for the case of Chinese-Arab laborers’ encounters in WWI France, the interests of Chinese, French, and American governments are the spatiotemporal mediations. It was the underlying structural context of the world order that made their meetings possible. Once they met, however, the French and American military officers’ behavior towards laborers of color shaped their wartime experiences.

My goal is not simply to bring to light these little-known stories, but also to suggest a different way of understanding these seemingly fortuitous or inauspicious encounters. Human agency is certainly important in making life-changing decisions. The spatiotemporal mediation, however, is equally important in moving people’s lives. It is the combination of spatiotemporal mediation and the agency of human actors that created rich and complex histories.

**Chinese-Egyptian Muslim Encounter in Meiji Japan**

In discussing “Muslim spacetime,” Green sets the locale in England. The Liverpool mosque of William ‘Abdullah Quilliam displaced the familiar order of who and where of Islam. Facilitated by the mechanization of global communications, mobile Muslims rediscovered Islam in England, recreated a new Islamic space there, and then exported it back to the Islamic heartland.\(^{248}\) I borrow this useful insight to examine the experiences of Chinese and Egyptian Muslims in Japan. In addition to England, mobile Muslims also travelled as far away as Japan, which had industrialized rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century, but within a much shorter period of time than Britain. What kind of circumstances and conditions did Japan encapsulate at the turn of the twentieth century to make it a meeting place for ideas of Islamic revival and the pan-Islamic movement to circulate on national, transregional, and global scales?

After victories in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Japan established itself as an ascending power in Asia. It attracted aspiring intellectuals from different countries. Few, however, would imagine it as a meeting place

for Muslims. After all, Cairo, Istanbul, and Mecca were (and still are) the centers of the Islamic heartland. Nevertheless, stunned by the amazing progress of Japan since the Meiji reforms and fed up with the exploitation inherent in British colonialism, Muslim intellectuals were eager and enthusiastic about learning how Japan had achieved such success before Japan became a colonial power itself. Meiji-era Japan was thus a site of key encounters between Muslims from China, South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Drawn together by their common interests in Islamic revival and the pan-Islamic movement that transcended linguistic and cultural differences, these activists established various Muslim organizations in Japan, seeing Islam as a way to unify Asian peoples against the threat of western powers. Japan served both as a site for Muslim intellectual activities and as a temporal symbol of historical progress that those activists wanted to emulate in the Islamic world. In other words, Japan was both the stage and the play. Muslim activists in Japan were bound together by their Islamic roots and their antipathy to incursions from the west.

As a result, Japan became a new Islamic space, with Muslim publications, activities, and mosques. Foreign Muslim intellectuals also brought awareness and consciousness about Islam to the local Japanese population. For example, Ajia Gikai (the Asian Congress) established Tokyo as an important hub of pan-Asian Muslim activism in 1909. Founded by Ohara Takeyoshi, one of the leading activists of the Great Asian Movement in Japan, and a Russian Tatar Muslim Abdurreisid Ibrahim (1853-1944),249 Ajia Gikai promoted Muslim-Asian solidarity as part of a political program to

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liberate eastern people (from North Africa to East Asia) from western colonial powers. Chinese Imam Wang Haoran, founder of Chinese Muslim Mutual Progress Association in 1912 in Beijing, was one of the three Chinese Muslims who signed the oath. The organization published a journal named *Daito* (the Great East), publicizing pan-Asian and pan-Islamic ideas. Abdurresid Ibrahim’s son Munir Ibrahim studied at Waseda University and also wrote some articles for both *Daito* and *Sirat-i Müstakim* (an Islamic journal published by Abdürreşid İbrahim in Istanbul). In this way, an Islamic journal published in Japan was connected to the print world of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, members of Ajia Gikai also sought funds from the Ottoman Empire to construct a mosque in Tokyo, as well as invited ‘ulama to serve Muslims living in Japan. The construction of a mosque in Tokyo speaks silently but explicitly of the changes of a place that the architecture shapes. The Association in Tokyo for Islamic Call was another Islamic organization in Tokyo. It was jointly established by a group of likeminded foreign Muslim activists in Japan, such as Egyptian imam at the Grand Mosque of Calcutta Shaykh Ahmad Musa, Indian Muslim of Arab origin Sayyid Husayn Abd al-Mun’im, Indian scholar Abdul Hafiz Muhammad Barakatullah, Russian Muslim Hajji

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251 *Sirat-i Müstakim* (in the later period its name was changed to Sebiüreşad) was one of the most important magazines of the Islamic movement in the Ottoman Empire of those days. This magazine published 641 issues (November 3, 1908–March 5, 1925. Some of the articles mentioned the possibility of converting Japan into a Muslim country, and utilizing its power to resist the oppression of Muslims in Russia.

Mukhlis Mahmud, an unnamed Tunisian Muslim, and Chinese Muslim Sayyid Sulayman. They all advocated for the spread of Islam in Japan.253

After the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Qing officials realized how much China needed to learn from Japan and began sponsoring students to study there.254 The numbers of Chinese students increased dramatically after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, when a portion of the war reparations owed to Japan by the Qing government were paid via university tuition.255 The abolition of the traditional civil service exam in China in 1905 also precipitated a major shift in the Chinese education system, pushing more students to pursue education abroad. By 1906, over 10,000 Chinese were studying in Japan. Among them, there was a group of thirty-six Chinese Muslims.

A change of spatial orientation in seeking knowledge signifies a shift of priorities among Chinese Muslims in the early twentieth century. Rather than going to al-Azhar University in Egypt or to Mecca on a Hajj pilgrimage to seek Islamic knowledge and experience, they valued secular knowledge as more urgent for China’s modernization. Therefore, they went eastwards to Japan, rather than westwards to the Islamic heartland. Furthermore, going to Japan was the first collective effort by Chinese Muslims to study abroad. Earlier, occasional Chinese Muslim individuals, such as Ma Dexin (1794-253 Michael F. Laffan, “The Making of Meiji Muslims: The Travelogue of Ali Ahmad Al-Jarjawi,” *East Asian History* 22 (2001): 145-70.


Ma Wanfu (1853-1934), and Wang Kuan (also named Wang Haoran, 1848-1919), had gone to Mecca, Cairo, and Istanbul to pursue Islamic learning. However, the first group of Chinese Muslims made Japan its destination. This was not a random choice, but a pioneering act. Many educated Chinese Muslims at the time believed that an Islamic revival in China should also be part of the nation-building process. Therefore, they chose to study in Japan for politics, law, science and technology, as well as military skills. Their choice of Tokyo indicates that the main purpose of their study was not traditional Islamic learning anymore, but modern secular knowledge that is crucial in the nation-building process. Their collaborative effort also demonstrates a much stronger desire within the Chinese Muslim communities to seek knowledge. Therefore, their impact after going back home would be much larger and longer lasting. Lastly, these students were the first international Muslim student group to study in Japan, denoting the importance of Japan for aspiring Muslim intellectuals at the time. Later, more Malay and Indonesian Muslim student groups also went to Japan.

In addition to the aspirations of these Chinese Muslim students, there were also favorable external conditions that made their initiative a reality. This group of thirty-six

256 Upon returning to China, Ma wrote *Writing on the Journey of Hajj* in Arabic. Later his disciple Ma Anli (1820-1899) translated it into Chinese *Chaojin Tu Ji* in 1861, edited by NA Guochang and reprinted by Ningxia People's Publishing House, 1988. Ma Dexin was also the first scholar who translated the Quran into Chinese.


Chinese Muslim students was largely from eastern and central China, a region less disturbed by the waves of nineteenth-century Muslim rebellions in northwest and southwest China.\(^{260}\) Being from urban centers, they had some previous exposure to new ideas. Therefore, when they arrived in Tokyo they could quickly embrace new learning. There was one female student named Yang Qidong from Fengtian, who attended Jissen Women's College and advocated modern education for Chinese Muslim women. Fengtian (later known as Mukden, modern day Shenyang) was an open urban center in southern Manchuria. Had Yang been originally from the interior in northwest China, her family probably would not have allowed her to go. As a result, Yang became the very first Chinese Muslim woman to study abroad.\(^{261}\) Secondly, this group of students also received official support from the Chinese Ambassador to Japan Yang Shu (1844-1917, 1903-07 in Japan). The ambassador himself was also a Muslim, which may account for his active support of the Chinese Muslim students despite the fact that in 1905 he took a tough stance in handling the overseas Chinese movement in Japan against the Qing Empire.\(^{262}\) One of the Muslim students in the group, Yang Dianbiao, was his nephew. The ambassador not only donated money to the organization, but also attended the


\(^{262}\) Chen Hongmei, “Qingmo huizu waijiaoguan Yang Shu yu 1905 nian liu ri xuesheng yundong” (Late Qing Mulim Diplomat Yang Shu and the Overseas Student Movement in Japan in 1905), *Xibei di'er minzu xueyuan xuebao (Journal of the Second Northwest University for Nationalities)*, No. 6, 2008, 27-30.
opening ceremony and took photos together with the Chinese Muslim students. Based on their own initiative and the external support of government officials such as Yang Shu, this group of Chinese Muslim students arrived in Japan in 1905. The next year they established *Dongjing liuxue qingzhen jiaoyuhui* (The Education Association of Muslims Studying Abroad in Tokyo).

As Japan was an intellectual center with a vibrant and booming print culture at the turn of the twentieth century, the Chinese Muslims of the Education Association published their own journal *Xing Hui Pian* (*Muslims Awake*) in 1908 in Tokyo (figure 3). Since the early twentieth century, Chinese Muslim intellectuals were also influenced by the print culture in China and had actively engaged in the cultural revival of Islam in China by publishing numerous Muslim journals and books in Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, and Shanghai. Notable publications include *Zhengzong Aiguo Bao* (*A Newspaper of Authentic Patriotism*) in Beijing in 1906 and *Zhu Yuan Baihua Bao* (*A Vernacular Newspaper of Bamboo Garden*) in Tianjin in 1907. These periodicals covered issues of interest to Chinese Muslims such as new-style education and political activism. Scholars such as Matumoto Masumi have termed this as the Islamic New Cultural

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265 Historian Zvi Ben-Dor Benite has examined *Xing Hui Pian* before in his article “From 'Literati' to ‘Ulama.’” However, his analyses mainly focus on the ambiguities of Chinese Muslims within the Chinese nation and the larger Islamic world. Building on his work, I further examine this source to extrapolate Chinese Muslims’ connections with Muslims from other countries in Japan.

266 For more on this topic, Ben-Dor Benite, “From 'Literati' to ‘Ulama.’”
Movement in China at the beginning of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{267} Therefore, *Muslims Awake* came into existence under the intertwined influences from the Chinese and Japanese printing cultures as well as the Islamic New Cultural Movement in China. In terms of content, *Muslims Awake* promoted Islamic modernism and modern education for Chinese Muslims. In addition, it also advocated patriotism to the Chinese nation and anti-imperial struggles against both the western powers and Qing government. Some of the Chinese Muslim students later (after Ambassador Yang had left Japan) even joined Sun Yat-sen’s underground resistance organization in Japan, the “Tong Meng Hui” (the United Allegiance Society), to oppose the Manchu Qing Empire. This shows that this group of Chinese Muslim students did not see their Muslim identity in conflict with their Chinese identity. Rather, they believed that an Islamic revival in China should go hand in hand with Chinese nation-building process and anti-imperial struggles.

Furthermore, *Muslims Awake* was key to mediating encounters—both real and imagined—among diverse audience around the world and for sustaining the intellectual sparks ignited in Japan. Chinese Muslim students in Japan used this journal as a platform to seek connections and build relationships with Muslims from other countries. For example, Huang Zhenpan, chairman of the Association who studied at Waseda University, mentioned in his article “About Hui Muslims” that in Japan there were

Muslims from Persia, Egypt, Turkey, even Russia and Germany. Islam was an essential element of Muslim activists’ anti-colonial and pan-Asian politics in Japan.

Other scholars have elaborated on the Muslims’ admiration for Japan after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. The late historian Alain Roussillon, in particular, carefully narrated the experiences of Egyptians who went to Japan. Ahmad Faḍalī (1874-?) was one of them. He was a military officer who moved to Japan in a self-imposed exile after witnessing the unfair British treatment of Sudanese during the Anglo-Sudan war. Impressed by Japan’s resounding victory during the Russo-Japanese War, Faḍalī published *The Secret of Japan’s Progress* in Arabic in 1911. He also translated from Japanese into Arabic a book entitled *The Spirit of Japan*. He married a Japanese woman and became involved with other foreign Muslims to promote Islam in Japan. Faḍalī often lectured on Islam with Abdürreşid İbrahim at Waseda University, where they met the Chinese Muslim students group. Upon learning that they were preparing to publish *Muslims Awake*, Faḍalī wrote in Arabic “Istiqāẓ al-Islām” for the cover of the journal (picture attached at the end of this chapter). The journal included the following account of the meeting with Faḍalī:

> Although our Association is small, the members have very similar goals and are enthusiastic about this cause. At the beginning we did not know each other, but once we met we felt quite close with each other. Muslims scattered in different

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parts of China, but spiritually we are bonded together with great solidarity. Without our religion, how could we achieve this?... An Egyptian military officer Ahmad Faḍalī is a Muslim from a foreign country. He was introduced to us. When he heard about our project during the meeting, he was very surprised. He therefore wrote in Arabic for the cover as an encouragement to us.\footnote{271 “Liudong qingzhen jiaoyu hui jishi” (“Stories of the Education Association of Muslims Studying Abroad in Tokyo”), in Xing Hui Pian (Muslims Awake), edited by Wang Xilong, Lanzhou: Lanzhou University Press, 1988, reprint, 69.}

This shows that for Chinese Muslims students, who were originally from different parts of China, the common bond of Islamic belief was not only important for uniting themselves but also for forming close ties with Muslims from other countries. \emph{Muslims Awake} also described their happiness when Chinese Muslim students gathered together with Indian Muslim Abdul Hafiz Muhammad Barakatullah (1854-1927) and Faḍalī in Japan:

The world is really big. People are really diverse. The customs and traditions from the north to the south are very different. Among the crowd, every one has his or her own individuality. Who is my alliance? If following Islam, then there is no need for such worries. No matter where you are from and whether you knew each other before or not, as soon as identifying as the followers of Islam, we will love each other…. Since I came to Japan, I have met Barakatullah from India and Faḍalī from Egypt…. Although we speak different languages and are from different ethnic backgrounds, we follow the same religion. An unexpected encounter could form bonds closer than old friends.\footnote{272 Wang Tingzhi, “Huijiao yu wushidao” (“Islam and Shinto”) in Xing Hui Pian (Muslims Awake), edited by Wang Xilong, Lanzhou: Lanzhou University Press, 1988, reprint, 38.}

Whereas there is an Arabic proverb of “one coincidence is better than a thousand appointments,” the Chinese Muslims students’ saying of “an unexpected encounter could form closer bonds than old friends” expressed a similar pleasant surprise for the serendipitous union. Barakatullah was an anti-British Indian Muslim advocating for the pan-Islamic movement. He was a professor of Urdu at Tokyo University. British Muslim Abdullah Quilliam invited Barakatullah to work at the Liverpool Muslim
Chinese Muslim students rediscovered Islam in Japan under the influence of the foreign Muslim activists in Japan Faḍalī, Barakatullah, and Ibrahim. As mentioned before, they originally went to Japan in search of secular modern knowledge. However, their encounter with learned Muslim intellectuals from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds in Japan immediately rejuvenated their own faith. Even though *Muslims Awake* was published in Tokyo, many copies were sent back to China for wider distribution.

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circulation. Therefore, it generated great interests among the Chinese Muslim communities within China as well. For example, Ding Baochen, founder of the first Chinese Muslim newspaper Zhengzong Aiguo Bao, wrote an enthusiastic endorsement of *Muslims Awake* and reprinted the entire Prologue of the journal:

> I saw a journal *Muslims Awake* published by Dongjing liuxue qingzhen jiaoyuhui (Education Association of Muslims Studying in Tokyo)… The Journal aims at reform and revival of Islam in preparation for establishing the Constitution in our country…. What a noble objective and a well-conceived endeavor!

Ding Baochen was excited about Faḍāli’s participation as well:

While studying in Japan, an Egyptian Muslim Ahmad Faḍāli was introduced to Chinese Muslims there [in Tokyo]. When he heard that Chinese Muslims are going to publish a journal, he was very surprised and happy. He wrote on the cover of the Journal “Istiqāzu al-Islām.” This is an Arabic sentence. Istiqāzu means awake in Chinese. Arabic words are based on roots. New letter added to the root will add new meaning to the word. “Istiqāzu” has seven letters, which means to wake [someone] up, not awake by oneself. Therefore “Istiqāzu al-Islām” means “to wake up Islam”… When I first read the book, I was amazed by the beautiful Arabic writing and knew it must have been written by a non-Chinese Muslim. After finishing reading the journal, I came to know that it was written by an Egyptian Muslim. I am translating it here [in Zhengzong Aiguo Bao] to express my admiration for the Egyptian gentleman and hope to broaden the horizons of Muslims in China.

Ding’s admiration of Faḍāli is a vivid reflection of the ramificating impact of a seemingly fleeting interaction between Chinese and Egyptian Muslims in Japan. On the surface, it seemed nothing more than a short meeting. However, the fact that Chinese Muslims in Japan and China both made a point of mentioning Faḍāli’s encouragement to their cause shows how novel it was for Chinese Muslims to encounter a learned person

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274 Ding Baochen, “*Xing Hui Pian* fakan xu” (“Prologue of *Xing Hui Pian’s First Issue*”), Zhengzong Aiguo Bao, No. 800, Feb. 26, 1909.

from the Islamic heartland and much they looked up to him. *Istiqaz al-Islam* awakened the dormant desire of many Chinese Muslims for Islamic revival in China.

Furthermore, the impact of *Muslims Awake* reached far beyond the Muslim communities in China and Japan. It attracted the attention of Christian missionaries in the Middle East and the United States as well. For example, *Blessed Be Egypt* a Christian missionary journal in Egypt reported on the news. The reported was based on the account of the missionary organization’s preachers in Chefoo (which is today’s Yantai in Shandong province) of northern China. *The Moslem World*, a journal established by the Hartford Seminary in the United States, then recapped the account of *Blessed in Egypt*:

*Blessed Be Egypt*, for October last, publishes an interesting note from Mr. Herbert Rhoses of Chefoo, which endorses what one has from more than one quarter learned that a present there is no special activity visible among Moslems in China. But there are many evidences of effort from outside, directed towards the awakening of Islam in the Celestial Empire…Add to this the fact that the students of the new learning have amongst their numbers some young Moslems, who are certain to work later on for the revival of their faith in China. Of such efforts we have already a first sign in the publication of a Chinese Moslem quarterly, edited by some young Chinese studying in Tokio, with the significant title, *Moslems Awake!*

From the above quote we can see the diffusion of information: *Muslim Awake* was originally published in Japan, after which copies of it were sent back to China where it circulated among Chinese Muslim communities. Christian missionaries in China picked up the news and sent it to their missionary organizations in Egypt, and it was later reprinted in an Islamic journal run by a Christian seminary in the United States. The activities of Chinese Muslims students in Japan and the publication of *Muslims Awake* not only ignited excitement and captured the common aspirations among Muslims within

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and outside of China, but also crossed religious boundaries and attracted great attention among Christian missionaries from the Far East, to the Middle East and the United States.

In addition, British missionary Marshall Broomhall also discussed *Muslims Awake* in the first book in the English language on Islam in China published by China Inland Mission:

One correspondent [of missionaries in Japan] had obtained a copy of the first number of a new magazine published by Mohammedan students in Tokio. It is called *Hsing Hui Pien*, “Moslems Awake,” and is issued quarterly by thirty students resident in Japan. This magazine is not for sale, but is intended for distribution among the Moslems of China… [This is] further indication that the Pan-Islam Movement has China within its purview.  

The interest of Christian missionaries on the Islamic activities in East Asia arose out of their desire to evangelize. They believe it would be easier to spread the message of Christianity among Muslims—their fellow believers of God—than to the pagan Chinese and Japanese who did not believe in one God. In turn, Chinese Muslim students in Japan also noticed the Christian missionary activities in Japan. They took a tolerant attitude and wrote in *Muslims Awake*:

Islam and Christianity share many similarities, as they are both monotheistic religion and both aimed at spreading the message of God around the world. The message of love and generosity is without borders.

The interplay of Christian missionary activities and Muslim Islamic revival in China at the turn of the twentieth century will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The key point here is that the new and accessible print technologies made the fast and wide dissemination of ideas possible. The intellectual spark ignited in Tokyo quickly

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spread from Japan to China and further to other parts of the world beyond linguistic, national, and religious boundaries. The vernacular press became the vehicle to sustain the intellectual sparks, imaginations, and sentiment for a much longer time. Furthermore, although Ding Baochen and Ahmad Faḍalī had never met each other, neither had Christian missionaries Herbert Rhoses and Marshall Broomhall talked to the Chinese Muslims students in person. Nonetheless, within the larger context of the globalizing print culture of the early twentieth century, they encountered each other across space and time. This, I argue, also constitutes a cross-cultural interaction, as discussed in Chapter One.

The timing for these direct and indirect intellectual encounters was crucially important. Before Muslim intellectuals from all over the world went to Japan, they were very much aware of the historical time of Japan as an emerging world power at the turn of the twentieth century. During this time, as argued earlier, Japan served both as the stage and the play for Muslims around the world. Japan’s rapid modernization progress was often invoked as a point of temporal reference when Muslims Awake discussed China’s modernization. Japan’s welcoming and tolerating enviroment also gave Muslim activists the freedom to express their diverse views. In addition, the turn of the twentieth century was the high time of Christian missionary activities around the world, from the Middle East to the Far East. However, these circumstances were soon to change. Later, when Muslim activists became more and more critical of the British policy toward the Islamic world, the Japanese government was under pressure from Britain to shut down many of their journals. For example, British intelligence report referred to Ajia Gikai as an Oriental Association in Tokyo attended by Japanese, Filipinos, Siamese, Indians, Koreans, and Chinese, where Okuma Shigenobu (1838–1922) once delivered an anti-
British lecture. In the meantime, Japan also gradually showed its own imperialist ambitions. By the 1930s, Japan had co-opted some of the Muslim activists for its own political agenda in the Islamic world.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Japan was an ascending power and one of the intellectual centers of Asia. Amazed by Japan’s rapid progress and fed up with British colonialism, Muslims around the world regarded Japan as a new haven for the pan-Islamic and pan-Asian movement. They created an Islamic space in a non-Muslim country, building mosques, founding organizations, and publishing journals to spread their ideas on national, transregional, and global scales. This enabling environment and Japan’s modeling effect for aspiring Muslim intellectuals to emulate historical progress in their own country is the historical context that helped solidify the bonds of Muslims in Japan. Without these circumstances and conditions, Chinese and Egyptian Muslims probably would never have met each other outside al-Azhar University in Cairo or on their Hajj journeys to Mecca. In this way, Japan at the turn of the twentieth century served as a spatiotemporal mediator of Chinese-Egyptian Muslims encounters. As a result, Chinese Muslims who went to Japan in search of modern secular knowledge connected with Muslims from other parts of the world, rediscovered and reinforced their Islamic identity. Although it was in the Far East that Chinese and Egyptian Muslims met each other physically, this rendezvous brought their intellectual orientation closer to the Near East. In other words, they experienced Islam in Japan.

279 April 30, 1921, 77B Foreign Office Documents pertaining to Japan, FO 371/6678, British National Archives, Kew Gardens, Richmond, UK.
Green remarks that the mobile intellectuals were uprooted from their previously familiar cultural zones. As a result, their encounters in a distant new place were disorienting and unsettling. This insight is very useful, but probably suits more the experience of unlettered contracted Chinese and Arab laborers, as they were more in the situations of being uprooted. Whereas Chinese and Egyptian Muslim intellectuals went to Japan on their own initiative, Chinese and Arab laborers were brought to France without much awareness of what was waiting for them in the battlefields. Their experience in wartime France was much more challenging and baffling. The next part of the chapter turns to this topic.

**Chinese and Arab Laborers in the American Expeditionary Forces in WWI France**

So far my discussion of Chinese-Arab interactions has focused on the elite and middle classes. However, the vast majority of the Chinese and Arab peoples were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, this part of the chapter casts a spotlight on the ordinary laborers in China and the Arab world. The stories of their unexpected encounters in WWI France add another layer to the complexity of Chinese-Arab connections in the early twentieth century. The term “unexpected” draws the attention away from the intent of the Chinese, French, and American states when they sent and worked the laborers. It recognizes the multi-causal, chaotic, and sometimes elusive forces at play behind the encounters. The unexpected encounters surprised everyone, not just the states caught up in the encounters. In this sense, the story can draw a multi-layered portrait of the ordinary lives during the Great War.

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The labor issue during WWI has become a newly discovered territory within the large corpus of literature on the first major war of the twentieth century. Within the fields of French, Arab, and Chinese histories, some pioneering scholars have laid the groundwork. However, the intersection of Chinese and Arab laborers in France is still an unplowed topic. According to French sources, at least 78,556 Algerians, 36,941 Chinese, 35,506 Moroccans, and 18,249 Tunisians worked in France alone. British military magazine War Monthly states that there were 92,129 Chinese working with the British Expeditionary Forces in France and a further 5,805 in Mesopotamia. Although counting numbers is a tricky business, one thing is for sure: WWI brought a large number of Chinese and Arabs into Europe for the first time in its modern history. In addition, according to the contracts of Chinese laborers, they were also employed by the French government to work in industry and agriculture in Algeria and Morocco and by the

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British government to work in England, Egypt, and Palestine. Here, I will investigate the encounters between Chinese and Arab laborers in France.

Despite their contributions, Chinese and Arab laborers were largely invisible in the histories of WWI. This, perhaps, reflects the liminal state of multiple marginality that they lived under the wartime circumstances. Chinese and Arab laborers originally worked for the French military forces. In 1917 when the United States joined in the war, however, the American Expeditionary Forces re-contracted about ten thousand Chinese and three thousand Arab laborers into its own military camps to make up for shortfalls in US laborers and soldiers. As a result, a peculiar situation emerged: Chinese and Arab laborers from far corners of the world worked side by side for the US military forces in France during WWI. This episode of unexpected encounters between ordinary laborers of China and the Arab world probably would never have been possible without the complex particularities of circumstance—a spatiotemporal mediation. Rafting on the historical currents, Chinese and Arab laborers ended up in the American military camps in France.

At work they discovered each other and encountered many difficulties and problems. Their interactions are an alternative mode of cross-cultural interactions from those this chapter has discussed so far. Although both groups were known as sturdy and valuable workers, they were unfamiliar with each other’s customs and languages as most were unlettered peasants. Consequently, they often got into fights. To ensure a successful interaction, the interested parties have to find a common ground. For example, Chinese

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and Egyptian Muslim intellectuals in Japan shared Islamic belief and found a joint
objective in Islamic revival that transcended their linguistic and cultural differences. They
easily formed a close bond. Chinese and Arab laborers in WWI France, on the other
hand, lacked such a mutual interest. They were arbitrarily thrown together by the French
and American military authorities, which highlighted their racial difference in order to
keep order and control of the labor camps. Therefore, these neglected incidents of the
Chinese-Arab interactions can also shed light on cross-racial interactions among laborers,
as well as the French and American attitudes towards peoples of color in the throes of the
Great War.

Space, Time, and the Scaffolding World Order of WWI

The peculiar circumstances of Chinese-Arab laborers’ encounter could not have
been more bizarre. The scaffolding interests of Chinese, French, and American
governments set up the stage (the underlying structural context of the world order) for the
encounters of ordinary laborers. After all, WWI was a conflict fought by states to
determine the fate of those states. As Guoqi Xu has aptly analyzed, the young
government of the Republic of China felt a sense of internal and external weiji (crisis) at
the beginning of WWI in 1914. The Chinese word weiji is composed of two characters:
wei, which means danger, and ji, which means opportunity. The government decided to
turn the crisis into an opportunity. Making contribution to the war by sending laborers to
Europe can help China establish itself as a player in the world political arena. 285 It was a
strategic move to gain international recognition in the postwar world order. For France,

285 Guoqi Xu, 13.
WWI inflicted tremendous casualties on its population. The exigencies of war created a shortage of laborers for the French war industries and farms, forcing France to import large numbers of laborers from its colonies in North and West Africa, Indochina, and Madagascar as well as from such other countries as Portugal, Spain, and China. The United States joined in the war for the American national interests. It took opportunities presented by the war to flex its muscles.\textsuperscript{286} Although the US sent African American and native American laborers together with female entertainers, its military forces still severely lacked labor.\textsuperscript{287} Therefore, the American Expeditionary Forces in France re-contracted Chinese and Arab laborers from the French authority. As a result, WWI, a major world historical event, brought different world powers into alliance, building scaffolding spatiotemporal structure that transformed the life trajectories of ordinary peoples from far corners of the world.

Furthermore, during an all-encompassing total war like WWI, the space of conflict and peace was very much intertwined. Ordinary Chinese laborers were uprooted from their familial settings, experienced the war in France, and continued to live with its aftermath even when they returned home. This journey was certainly disorienting and


unsettling. Most of the Chinese laborers did not know anything about the war before they signed the contract. Their decision to go was largely based on the promised financial reward. Five francs a day may not seem much at all, but they were very appealing to dispossessed peasants in impoverished rural villages. They were mostly recruited from northeastern province of Shandong because people from there were thought physically strong enough to be able to adapt to adverse weather conditions in France. Their original occupational backgrounds were diverse, including farmers, carpenters, brick-makers and brick-layers. Ships carrying Chinese laborers travelled via the Suez Canal to England, and then transferred them to France. By the end of the war, many of the Chinese laborers were seriously ill. For example, among the laborers who boarded HMHS Assaye at Marseilles on September 20, 1918 for repatriation to China via the Suez Canal, forty percent had tubercular conditions.\textsuperscript{288} To make things worse, Japan, a member of the Entente Powers in WWI, declared war on Germany in Shandong.\textsuperscript{289} As a result, ironically, China, a non-belligerent country, not only sent laborers as far away as to the military front in France, but also saw combats between Japan and Germany on its own soil. After the war, when the laborers returned to Shandong, their homeland had already been taken by Japan (confirmed by the Paris Peace Conference), an ally of France and the United States that they worked for. This tragic irony reveals how much the spatial boundaries of belligerent and non-belligerent countries during WWI were blurred. It also demonstrates how much the impact of a total war affected ordinary people’s lives long

\textsuperscript{288} Gregory James, \textit{The Chinese Labour Corps (1916-1920)}, Hong Kong, Bayview Educational, 2013, 562.

after the end of the combat. Furthermore, due to war-time inflation and devaluation of the franc, by the time Chinese laborers returned, their wages earned in France was not as good as the average wage of laborers in Shandong. In other words, Chinese laborers risked their lives hoping for a better life but ended up not benefiting much from the experience financially either.\textsuperscript{290} At the end of the day, it was the ordinary laborers who bore the heavy brunt of the war.

The Arab laborers from North Africa, on the other hand, were conscripted into the French army. Historian Richard Fogarty and Abdallah Laroui point out that many of them based their decision to go on the promise of upward mobility and a change of social status within the French Empire.\textsuperscript{291} In addition, Driss Maghraoui also argues that in the case of Moroccan laborers, “ideological coercion,” which includes religious and moral dimensions evoking the concept of holy war in propaganda campaigns and such universalistic French ideals as liberty and equality, was as effective a means of attracting Moroccans to joining the war as the socioeconomic factors.\textsuperscript{292} During the war, some of these Arabs, were captured by the German army, and then faced intense pressure to take up arms against France in the ranks of the Ottoman army, an ally of Germany.\textsuperscript{293} Whereas the disorienting and unsettling experience of Chinese laborers lies in the blurred space of peace and war at home and abroad, the epic challenge that Arab laborers faced

\textsuperscript{290} Xu, 241.


was how to negotiate and position themselves among competing and externally imposed understandings of what a Muslim should do during the war. It is an equally bewildering and confounding experience for them.

If it was the spatiotemporal mediation that brought the Chinese and Arab laborers together, then once they arrived in France, they still occupied an ambiguous rhetorical and legal space in France. These laborers dug trenches, carried ammunition, toiled in docks and railway yards, worked in arms factories, and cleaned up shells, grenades and bullets after the war. However, they were not citizens. Their arrival in France pushed it to search for an “innovative” way to administer them. The solution was to put the Chinese workers together with laborers from the French Empire: Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Malagasy, and Indochinese. As a result, although Chinese laborers were not imperial subjects of either France or the United States, they were constantly referred as “colonial laborers.” Arab laborers faced a comparable but different dilemma: they were not citizens but colonial subjects, yet were theoretically they were the objects of a process of assimilation that would provide them with the benefits that France could offer. Practices, however, often fell short of rhetoric. Discrimination revealed that race did matter in the supposedly color-blind society of France. The acute tension between the rhetoric of republican universalism and egalitarianism on the one hand, and the practice of racial prejudice on the ground by the French and American military officials on the other hand, was the root cause of putting Chinese and Arab laborers in an ambiguous


295 Fogarty, 2008, 2.
rhetorical space. The awkward position of in-between citizens, colonial subjects, and independent workers was their ambivalence in the legal sphere. Furthermore, once they were recruited, even as laborers rather than combating soldiers, they were strictly regimented by the War Ministry’s Colonial Labor Organization Service, which regulated and punished them with military rules and laws, including field punishment and court martial. Conviction sometimes could mean death penalty. This shows that Chinese and Arab laborers were in an ambiguous legal position on issues related to their rights and benefits, but confined to a strict military category when it came to punishments and regulations. Their wartime lived experience was unfair, disconcerting and confusing, to say the least.

Due to the liminal space Chinese and Arab laborers occupied during the war, their identity was problematic as well. For the Chinese, each worker was thumb-printed and assigned a number, which was stamped on a bracelet fixed to his wrist. As a result, these numbers became the only identification of Chinese laborers in a foreign land. Since they were originally from remote regions, sometimes even the laborers themselves did not know their own surnames. When they lived in a family village, they were often addressed by their milk name (ruming) which are unofficial names given by their family before they were given an official names. Since the infant fatality rate was high at that time in China, many families never gave their children an official registered name for fear that the children might die. Milk name was a very common practice in the familial setting. However, once they were uprooted from the village and brought to a foreign land, their milk names seem very strange to French officers. Therefore, even if the Chinese were not colonial subjects of the French Empire, they were managed as colonial laborers with
identification numbers. The field reports of French and American military officers refer to Chinese laborers only by their numbers, rather than names. To the officers, these laborers who worked for them were an abstract mass, without names and individuality. The French officers also used the term “colonial workers” to refer to the laborers of color without distinction. This is contrasted with their use of the term “immigrant workers” to refer to non-French European workers. When the American Expeditionary Forces re-contracted these laborers, American military officers uncritically borrowed the term “colonial laborers” and applied it to both Chinese and Arab laborers, even if Chinese and Arabs were certainly not colonial subjects of the United States. The uncritical usage of the term “colonial laborers” by American and French military officers shows the penetrating effect of French colonial policy towards peoples of color and how prevailing French ideas about race decisively shaped their experiences in the war.

The commemoration after the war also reflects the lack of space that these laborers occupied in the memorial sphere. The Pantheon of the War opened with great fanfare by the French president Raymond Poincare in October 1918. Its earliest version included Chinese laborers, but after the United States entered the war, the artists realized that they needed space for the Americans. As a result, they decided to paint the Americans over the original place that was reserved for the Chinese laborers.296 Worse even, the idea of putting Arab laborers did not seem to cross the mind of the artists. This piece of commemorative work of the war is a poignant example of how the war laborers were quickly forgotten. Due to the weakness of their native countries, at the end of the

day, their hard work could not earn themselves a deserving place of recognition in the
games of the “great powers.”

Regarding time, E. P. Thompson once argued how factories changed the sense of
time among English commoners from task orientation to linear management of time
according to shifts in factories.\textsuperscript{297} This concept can be useful in understanding the
changing sense of time for laborers during wartime. According to \textit{Chinese Students
Monthly}, a journal published in France by Chinese students who went to France as
interpreters, laborers were not used to the strict punctuality at all. Their sense of time had
to change while working in France:

The men here, as elsewhere, are placed under the rule of military law and are
punished in accordance therewith. For offenses, such as impunctuality,
“soldiering,” or quitting work early, they are fined two, or four, or eight days’
wages, varying of course with the gravity of the offense. For serious cases, the
men are imprisoned in local jails.\textsuperscript{298}

This shows that impunctuality or slackness at work were serious offenses due to
the urgency of war. Reporting on time to daily duty in the construction fields completely
changed the temporal rhymes of the workers’ lives. Before the war, they could simply
continue their lives with the time units of days or months, rather than hours and minutes.
But building roads and trenches in wartime France made Chinese and Arab laborers
acutely aware of time. The urgency of war pushed them to be more punctual and
effective.\textsuperscript{299} As a result, the First World War synchronized the lives of ordinary laborers

\textsuperscript{297} E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,” \textit{Past and Present} 38 (December

\textsuperscript{298} I. H. Si, “With the Chinese Laborers Somewhere in France,” \textit{Zhongguo liumei xuesheng yuebao
(Chinese Students Monthly)} 13, Issue no. 9, 1918, 447.

\textsuperscript{299} For more on the changing concept of time in China, Qin Shao, “Space, Time, and Politics in Early
Twentieth Century Nantong,” Modern China 23, No. 1 (Jan., 1997): 99-129; Wen-Hsin Yeh, “Corporate
Space, Communal Time: Everyday Life in Shanghai’s Bank of China,” The American Historical Review
from different corners of the world. It gave them a sense of public time that might never otherwise have occurred to them if they were working in the rural villages of China and the Arab world.

On the other hand, historian Vanessa Ogle argues that even under the advocacy of standard time, on an individual level there were still many cases of resistance and chaos. The temporal landscape from the 1870s to 1940s was pluralistic. This is true in the case of Chinese and Arab laborers in WWI France as well. Whereas the war synchronized the rhythm of their lives in general under strict military rules and regulation, they were also human beings with moments of weakness and fear during wartime circumstances. When the pressure became too much, they sometimes chose to escape. For example, during the night of September 4-5, 1917, a number of German aircraft raided Dunkirk. Bombs fell on Chinese and Egyptian Labor Corps camps. On the Chinese side, 15 laborers were killed and 21 others were wounded. After that many of them scattered and wandered off into the dunes in fear of another bombardment. Four days later, 153 Chinese were still absent. Some never returned. Those who remained were frightened and refused to go to work. When the military officers came to discipline them,


they were greeted by a shower of stones, bricks and tools, causing deaths and injuries on both sides. The Egyptian camp at Boulogne was also bombed on the same night. After that, the Egyptian laborers went on strike, rioted and attempted to break out their camps. The different forms of resistance—passive escape or active strike—all disrupted the temporal synchronicity that the French and American military authorities wanted to impose on the Chinese and Arab laborers. The wartime experiences of ordinary laborers, especially their sense of time, were, paradoxically both standardized and at hoc.

For these reasons, I argue that WWI is a historical time. In Koselleck’s analyses about time, he mainly refers to time periods of longer duration as historical times, such as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. However, if applying the criteria of what constitute a historical time established by Koselleck himself, it seems that WWI can be argued to be a historical time as well. Although WWI lasted for only four years, the impact it left on the lives of ordinary peoples was tremendous, long-lasting, and multi-faceted.

In addition to the laborers, the peculiar circumstances of WWI also brought Chinese elite intellectuals from both China and abroad (many of them were studying abroad in the US) to work as interpreters for Chinese laborers in France. Some future Chinese leaders in politics, diplomacy, education, or literature were among them, including Yan Yangchu (also known as Y.C. James Yen), Jiang Tingfu, Lin Yutang, Cai Yuanpei, and Wang Jingwei. Without the war, there probably would not have been

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occasion for members of the high and low echelons of Chinese society to interact on a personal basis. In a sense, WWI France was also the spatiotemporal mediation for shared experiences of Chinese lettered elites and unlettered peasants outside their native country. After interacting closely with the laborers for an extended period of time, Yan Yangchu, a passionate advocator for rural education, wrote in a letter to his friend to express his belief that awakened and organized laborers could have enormous power. Indeed, many of the laborers who returned from France to China later became the earliest members of the Chinese labor movement in the 1920s.

WWI was not the last time that Chinese and Arab laborers encountered each other either. Due to the similar underlying structure of scaffolding interests of different world powers, later during the Indochina War (1946-54), North African soldiers and laborers also fought in Vietnam where they encountered Chinese soldiers again. Only this time, ironically, they were on the opposite sides of the combats. History has a peculiar way of bringing together and dividing apart of the lives of ordinary peoples.

The Lived Experiences of Chinese and Arab Laborers

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During WWI, France was credited as a color-blind society for welcoming soldiers from around the world to their soil. People believed that republican ideals pushed many French people to consider treating nonwhites as equal members of a universal humanity. Yet, this color-blindness had limits. The pull of racism—the impulse to consider people who were not white Europeans as inherently inferior—caused many of these same French people to discriminate.\(^{305}\) Furthermore, the widespread welcome to soldiers contrasted sharply with the antagonism towards laborers. Foreign laborers were not only seen as competitors for French jobs and French women, but also as a substitute labor force that permitted the French government to send more French men to the battlefield. Foreign soldiers, on the other hand, became a positive symbol of the international effort to free France from German aggression.\(^{306}\) As a result, whereas the African American soldiers received equal treatment in France, the Arab and Chinese laborers were way down in the racial hierarchy in French society, which included white officers, nonwhite officers, French soldiers, non-French European soldiers, nonwhite soldiers, non-French European immigrant workers, and at last colored laborers. The worked and lived conditions of Chinese and Arab laborers were not only distinct from the French and non-French European workers, but also from that of African American soldiers.\(^{307}\)

As differentiation and segregation was prevalent in wartime France, there was vast distance between Chinese and Arab laborers even if they worked side by side. As a result, they did not get along. The major reason for the animosity between Chinese and

\(^{305}\) Fogarty, 2008, 271.


Arab laborers was ignorance. They were unlettered peasants in the first place who did not have much cultural sensitivity. To make things worse, strict colonial rules kept them separately so they had little chance to get to know each other. Chinese laborers held racist ideas about other laborers, especially those from North Africa. They did not seem to understand that there were different races and thought that only bad people were black and called them “black devils.” Overall, they had problems with North African laborers simply because of the issue of skin color. As for their relationship with other Arab laborers, in the reports to the Chinese government, Li Jun, an official designated to the Chinese Labor Corps in France, mentioned that Arab and Chinese laborers often suffered fatal casualties as a result of their fighting. Journal of Chinese Laborers Abroad (Huagong Zazhi) also reported that in one French factory, Chinese laborers did not get on well with the Arabs. In late May 1918, their relationship had deteriorated into group fights in an industrial factory in Caen. Three Arabs were killed and a dozen Chinese wounded. To prevent further trouble, the French government removed the Arabs to other locations and also punished about forty Chinese laborers. The Chinese, however, developed close bonds with the Vietnamese, their fellow Asians. Li Jun mentioned that whenever the Chinese got into fights with North Africans, the Vietnamese


309 Ma Chonggan, “Huagong zai fa zhi qing xing,” Yue Han Sheng 29, no. 8, November 1918.

310 Ji Jun, Huimin Zhao gong (File No. Five), in Chen Sanjing, et al., Ouzhan huagong shiliao.

joined them against the North Africans.\textsuperscript{312} However, because the Vietnamese were then French colonial subjects as well, the French government did not want them to be influenced by the Chinese ideas and tried hard to keep the Vietnamese from the Chinese as well.\textsuperscript{313}

The ignorance regarding Chinese and Arab customs was not just by the Chinese and Arabs laborers themselves, but also on the part of the colonial officers. Many French and American officers viewed colored workers with suspicion. They treated the non-French European laborers differently, on the other hand, probably because they knew their culture better. For example, the following Chief-in-Command Report of the Labor Bureau in the AEF shows the lack of knowledge of the American and French officers on Chinese and Arab laborers:

\begin{quote}
The two major non-American nationalities that performed a large proportion of the civilian male labor were Chinese imported by the French for war service in the safe sectors and North Africans from the French colonial possessions, which were drafted for service. The former consisted of northern Chinese who were large and strong, and excellent workers on heavy duty…. North-Africans, coming from Morocco and Tangier, were large strong men, and excellent workers. It is doubtful if any labor of the AEF consistently gave as large an output per man as these Kabyles…. each of the AEF companies had furnished with it a French adjutant or officer, and two or three enlisted French soldiers…. At first more or less difficulty occurred, due to this French supervisory personnel, partly by reason of the lack of understanding on the part of the AEF as to the conditions of the contracts and partly due to the French personnel having a lack of proper knowledge of the handling of labor.\textsuperscript{314}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{312} Li Jun, \textit{Huimin Zhaogong} (File No. Five); Xu, 142; Chen Sanjing, et al., \textit{Ouzhan huagong shiliao}, 380-81.


Since this is an official report, the American Chief-in-Command John Price Jackson probably downplayed the problems occurring under his supervision. According to other sources, the problems between the Chinese and Arab laborers seemed more severe. But Jackson did admit the lack of knowledge about Chinese and Arab laborers. Therefore, one thing is clear: the lack of sufficient knowledge by the French and American military officers contributed the further animosity between Chinese and Arab laborers. The American military officers did not like Chinese coolies in America in general. When they came to France and worked with Chinese laborers in France, their discrimination and resentment often lashed out against the Chinese laborers in France as well.\textsuperscript{315} This shows that many of Americans brought misperceptions of Chinese laborers with them across the Atlantic Ocean. Such ideas were long lasting and difficult to change.

Furthermore, the language barrier was a big problem as well. Once an American military officer was urging the Chinese laborers to speed up and yelled “Come on, Let’s go!” The English word “go” is the same pronunciation of the word “dog” in Chinese. The Chinese laborers were offended and went on a rampage.\textsuperscript{316} Although some Chinese student elites went from China and the United States to work as interpreters, their endeavor was hardly enough to solve the daily problems that laborers faced with their military administrators.

The Chinese and Arab laborers were not always passive victims of violence. Their own imprudent behavior led to problems as well. On a number of occasions,

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\item[\textsuperscript{315}] Chen Sanjing, et al., \textit{Ouzhan huagong shiliao 1912-1921 (Historical Sources of Chinese Laborers in the European War, 1912-1921)}, Institute of Modern History, Academic Sinica, 1917, 398.
\item[\textsuperscript{316}] Gregory James, \textit{The Chinese Labour Corps (1916-1920)}, Hong Kong, Bayview Educational, 2013, 599.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
tensions between Chinese and Arab laborers flared into open violence. For example, in January 1917, two Chinese were shot and eight others injured at Bassens munitions factory by troops called to quell unrest between Chinese and Algerians.\textsuperscript{317} In certain circles, rumors circulated that “the North Africans are really soldiers stationed in Paris primarily to suppress any insurrectional movement that might erupt.”\textsuperscript{318} In Unieux, a particularly violent brawl broke out on May 1 in 1917. A North African poured a wheelbarrow of hot ashes onto the feet of a Chinese, which caused a general scrum. As a result, two North Africans were seriously affected, one Chinese man was killed, and twenty-five others were wounded. The next day, the general demand that measures be taken urgently to separate the Chinese and North African workers.\textsuperscript{319} The French newspaper \textit{L'Echo Bayeusain} reported on July 9\textsuperscript{th} 1918 the sentencing of fourteen Chinese laborers in Caen following a fight with Algerians on March 20\textsuperscript{th} due to competition over bread, in which four Algerians were stabbed to death.\textsuperscript{320} On January 26 1919 in Arras during a fight between Chinese and Arabs, one of the Chinese shot and killed an Arab laborer named Maschtam Rabah ben Belkcaem, aged between 25 and 28.


\textsuperscript{318} Tyler Stovall, “The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War,” \textit{American Historical Review} 103 (June 1998): 737-69, p. 750.


\textsuperscript{320} Gregory James, \textit{The Chinese Labour Corps (1916-1920)}, Hong Kong, Bayview Educational, 2013, 599.
The Chinese assailant escaped.\textsuperscript{321} On September 26 1919, one Chinese laborer was killed and on September 28 another unknown number of Chinese were killed. Both incidents took place at Béthune, perpetrated by Arabs. However, no more details were recorded.\textsuperscript{322} In the investigation into the murder of Chinese in Ollioules in 1919, the judge said that there would be nothing surprising that the crime was committed by Arabs whose camp was nearby.\textsuperscript{323} An anonymous private diary of the 185\textsuperscript{th} Company of Chinese Labor Corps stationed at Dunkirk docks in November 1919 narrates the clashes that he witnessed between Chinese and Algerians:

[I saw] a number of coolies receiving attention from a Chinese medical group...the previous night, a clash between Algerians and Chinese resulted in a number of casualties on both sides. We had every reason to believe that the affair was ended. It was a fine bright day, everything calm and peaceful. Soon after 2pm a party of Algerian soldiers (about 30) suddenly opened an attack from the brow of the hill firing towards the Chinese camp. Several were killed and wounded. Had the shooting been accurate, the consequences would have been more serious.\textsuperscript{324}

The timing of violence between Chinese and Arab laborers is important. It was prevalent mainly from 1917 to 1919, which corresponded to the crisis of morale and the rise of war weariness in France. It was a time of crises and the low point of the French


\textsuperscript{322} Arras, 11 R 1100, cited in Gregory James, \textit{The Chinese Labour Corps (1916-1920)}, Hong Kong, Bayview Educational, 2013, 599.


\textsuperscript{324} Center for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, England, records of the Royal West Kent Regiment, WKR/B8/Z1/75-76, diary of a member of the battalion with an account of work with Chinese coolies engaged on transport duties in France, cited in Gregory James, \textit{The Chinese Labour Corps (1916-1920)}, Hong Kong, Bayview Educational, 2013, 599; \textit{Hugong Zazhi} 21, April 25 1918.
war effort, ushered in a series of racial incidents, ranging from brawls between individuals to riots involving hundreds of people. The location was important as well. The ports bustling with daily activities of various sorts were particularly susceptible to ethnic tensions. In the summer there was a rash of serious riots in state arsenals and private munitions factories in Tarbes, Toulouse, Toulouse, and Bordeaux.\textsuperscript{325} The official response to these tensions was separation, pushing the two groups further apart.

These incidents tarnished the reputation of Chinese and Arab laborers in France. It became hard to assign blame for future incidents. For example, Roscoe Hersey, an officer at YMCA who supervised Chinese students’ interpreters for the Chinese Labor Corps, once observed that some bad characters have given the Chinese a bad name with the French who concluded that all the Chinese laborers are like the few who have committed crimes. This has been most unfortunate.\textsuperscript{326} The British current affairs and politics magazine \textit{New Statesman}, however, claimed that Algerians sometimes were the culprits:

\begin{quote}
The local French are very bitter against them [the Chinese] and accuse them of all the crimes of violence that are so frequent in the devastated areas. This is probably an unjust accusation since the culprits are more often Algerian.\textsuperscript{327}
\end{quote}

The reasons for such hostility were not always straightforward. In addition to ignorance and cultural insensitivity mentioned above, there were economic factors

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\item[\textsuperscript{325}] John Hornem, “Immigrant Workers in France during WW1,” \textit{French Historical Studies} 14 (Spring 1985), 84.
\item[\textsuperscript{327}] \textit{New Statesman}, September 13, 1918, Gregory James, \textit{The Chinese Labour Corps (1916-1920)}, Hong Kong, Bayview Educational, 2013, 623-24.
\end{itemize}
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involved as well. The Chinese, hired as independent workers by contract, were likely to resent being put in the same category as the Arabs, who were colonial laborers. But in the eyes of the French administration, the two groups’ laborers, albeit from different cultural and racial backgrounds, were essentially interchangeable. Furthermore, as tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims were common in China. It was likely that certain Islamic practices of Arab laborers also caused problems with Chinese laborers.

Whatever the reasons might be, the violence between Chinese and Arab laborers was real, and contributes to a fuller understanding of their daily lives. These pieces of evidence reveal an overlooked facet of day to day inter-racial interactions among foreign laborers in WWI France. They are both the victims and the actors of violence, which shows the complex relationships between the authorities that they were administered under and among the laborers.

We all have read the grand narratives of the First World War. We also all have heard of the legendary tales of the white male elites during the war. However, the lives of Chinese and Arab laborers tell different, but important stories about the war. These marginalized groups endured physical hardship and racial discrimination. And yet they survived. By exploring their wartime experiences, their sometimes idealistic aspirations for French universalism and equality and mundane quarrels caused by ignorance and petty competition, we can analyze not only the intricate inter-racial dimensions among the labor groups, but also the attitudes of French and American military officers towards the laborers of color. It also unveils how ordinary people adapted their livelihood under wartime urgency and negotiated their living existence when the pressure became too much to bear. More importantly, the peculiar circumstances under which the Chinese and
Arab laborers encountered each other in a foreign land demonstrate how life trajectories of ordinary peoples were intricately woven together by the spatiotemporal mediations of the world powers and a major world historical event.

**Conclusion**

This chapter narrates two stories of unexpected Chinese and Arab encounters outside the spheres of Chinese and Arab cultural zones. This case contrasts with the examples in previous chapters of indirect Chinese-Arab connections in China or the Arab world. However, the two cases in this chapter also contrast with one another: whereas the Chinese and Egyptian Muslim intellectuals chose to step out of their places of origin to go to Japan, Chinese and Arab laborers were themselves taken out of place. Chinese and Egyptian Muslim intellectuals had a common interest in Japan that facilitated their mutual respect and admiration, whereas Chinese and Arab contract laborers were brought to France without a common interest between them. Their mutual ignorance plus the French and American policy of segregation and separation eventually led to their conflicts. The seemingly analogous changes of life trajectories underline a major difference. Ultimately, it was a combination of the spatiotemporal mediation of circumstances and the agency of human actors that decided their lived experience at times of great transformation and locales of central historical importance.
Figure 3: Cover of Xing Hui Pian (Muslims Awake)

The three large central Chinese characters are the title Xing Hui Pian, literally means “Writings to Wake Up Muslims.” The Chinese characters on the reader’s left state “published by the Education Association of Muslims Studying Abroad in Tokyo.” Those on the reader’s right state that the pamphlet is not for sale. The three characters at the foot are “[Issue] Number One.” The Arabic at the head is “Istiqlāż al-Islām” with the Kalima underneath.
Chapter Four

A Floating Life:
Mediations on the Globe-Trotting Life of Ahmad Fahmi (1861-1933)

In Chapter Two, I discussed commodities-in-between. This chapter, in contrast, is about people-in-between. Whereas Chapter Three dealt with two groups of peoples—one lettered elites and the other unlettered laborers—this chapter narrates the story of one unique individual. By following his life trajectory, I analyze the textual, material, and spatiotemporal mediations that crystallized in his life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, transnationality does not simply depend on geography, moving from one place to another. When one writes and reads about a transnational life, one’s own thinking becomes transformed as well.

In recent years, transnational history has become increasingly popular.328 Biography, on the other hand, though interesting and enjoyable to the readers, is sometimes frowned upon by theorists who do not regard it as a rigorous genre of history.329 Therefore, how can historians use life stories to illuminate aspects of the past that would otherwise remain obscure, hidden, or even misunderstood? Can the trajectories of lives across transnational boundaries offer us privileged insights that

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328 I am aware of the differences between world history, global history, international history or transnational history, but use them interchangeably here to refer to the body of literature that consciously breaks away from the conventional regional and area studies. Interestingly, the history of transnational historical writing originated from Americanists who were trying to go beyond American exceptionalism and start writing American history comparatively. Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” American Historical Review 96 (October 1991), 1031-55; Michael McGerr, “The Price of the ‘New Transnational History’,” The American Historical Review 96, (October 1991), 1056-67; C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” The American Historical Review 111 (December 2006): 1411-64.

challenge conventional narratives? These are the questions raised in a recent *American Historical Review* Forum on “Transnational Lives in the Twentieth Century.”

Although the forum participants discussed life stories of individuals mainly operating in the United States and Europe, the issues they raise can be used to understand the protagonist of this chapter. Ahmad Fahmi (1861-1933) was one of the rare cultural hybrids between Egypt, Great Britain, China, and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. How can we make sense of such an individual? Was he just a random abnormality or does his existence symbolize deeper meanings of life? How typical or atypical were Fahmi’s situations? Before we delve deeper, here is a sketch of his life.

Ahmad Fahmi was born in Alexandria in 1861 in a locally well-off Muslim family that owned estates in Minya and a residence in Cairo. His father was the chief clerk in a Muslim court of appeal. He converted to Christianity by the American Presbyterian mission in Egypt in 1877 while tutoring Arabic to the American missionaries. As the American Presbyterians in Egypt did not emphasize evangelization until after the British Occupation in 1882, historian Heather Sharkey describes Fahmi as an accidental convert. However, his conversion met strong resistance from his family. Friends and relatives came to plead with him. His father even enlisted the help of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), who was one of the most famous Islamic activists of the

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331 The following narration of Fahmi’s life is largely based on Andrew Watson, *The American Mission in Egypt: 1854-1896*, United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1904, 305–11.

332 Heather Sharkey, “An Egyptian in China: Ahmad Fahmi and the Making of ‘World Christianities’,” *Church History* 78 (June 2009), 310.
late nineteenth-century Muslim world. Sensing that it would be impossible for him to pursue a Christian life in Egypt, Fahmi accepted an invitation from Lord Aberdeen to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh. In January 1878, Fahmi left his asylum in the American missionary buildings of Cairo and boarded a boat captained by a friend of the British consul of Alexandria, whereupon he sailed to Scotland. After nine years of work in a new cultural environment to study a completely new subject, Fahmi graduated in 1887. In the words of Lord Aberdeen, “it was useless for him to make the attempt” to go back, “as his life would be forfeited the moment he set foot on Egyptian soil.” Consequently, Fahmi accepted an offer from the London Missionary Society and was sent with his Scottish wife, Mary Auchterlonie Chalmers, to work in Zhangzhou, a small village town of Fujian Province in southeast China, as a medical missionary doctor. During his thirty-two year stay in China, a cholera outbreak in 1902 took Mary’s life. Years later, he eventually married another lady, Susan Rankin Duryee, a missionary of the Reformed Church in America who was working in Amoy (today’s Xiamen). Fahmi traveled with her to the United States during two long-overdue furloughs. Upon his retirement in 1919, the Fahmis sailed from Hong Kong to Vancouver and then traveled across the continental United States so that they could visit Susan’s relatives in New

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334 This Lord Aberdeen was the son of the previous title holder, who had distributed Bibles in Upper Egypt in 1861. He was also known as John Campbell Gordon and later became the governor-general of Canada.

Jersey before crossing the Atlantic to Great Britain. Eventually, Fahmi settled in London and died in 1933. His children became British and American citizens, but he never returned to Egypt. For Fahmi, home was a place very far away.

Sharkey’s pioneering study has examined Fahmi’s life from the perspective of Christian missionaries, emphasizing the “world Christianities” embodied in him. For example, Fahmi’s life and career linked three separate missions (the missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America and the Reformed Church of America, as well as the inter-denominational London Missionary Society), two mission fields (Egypt and China), two major mission-sponsoring countries (the United States and Great Britain), and two world religions (Islam and Christianity). In addition, Fahmi’s conversion also confirmed the missionaries’ belief in the universal appeals of Christianity. They took heart from the fact that even a highly literate Muslim like Fahmi who had studied at al-Azhar University, a venerable Sunni Muslim university in Cairo, could be converted. In 1897, the chronicler of the American mission in Egypt proudly noted that one of its converts from Islam, a man named Ahmad Fahmi, was serving with the London Missionary Society as a medical missionary in Zhangzhou in southern China.

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337 Sharkey, 2008, 81.

338 Sharkey, 2009, 311.

recount his story over the decades.\textsuperscript{340} Based on Sharkey’s study, this chapter, however, explores more on his identity conundrum perceived by the London Missionary Society and the local Chinese with whom he interacted intimately for many years.\textsuperscript{341} More importantly, this chapter analyzes how an Egyptian became a mediator of spreading western medical knowledge in China.

At first glance, the title of this chapter, “A Floating Life” may seem to imply randomness in the life journeys of Fahmi. However, what I want to emphasize is the rafts that make the movement of floating possible. It was the various mediations that buoyed Fahmi’s life forward. Agencies, whether it was Fahmi’s own or of other people involved in his life, or the non-human actors such as transnational missionary organizations, were intertwined and embedded in various forms of mediations. Combined together, they were the makers of Fahmi’s life, but also the causes of his lifelong identity dilemma. Different forces often pulled and pushed Fahmi to opposite directions. As a result, being in between diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious spheres, dislocation was a constant theme of his life. Therefore, floating—a state of barely surviving and moving forward with little attachment to a particular place—might be an appropriate adjective to describe the extraordinary journeys of an ordinary life.

Why does Fahmi’s life story matter to us today? His globe-trotting was at the intersection of many themes of historical inquiry, such as cross-cultural interactions, the interplay of Islam and Christianity in Egypt and China, transnational missionary networks, and the spread of western medicine in China. Therefore, this chapter is not

\textsuperscript{340} Sharkey, 2008, 78.

\textsuperscript{341} I used the term “local” and “indigenous” interchangeably to refer to the home-grown and locally-rooted Chinese western medicine practitioners in China without the condescending tone that sometimes was implied in the missionary writings.
simply a biography of Fahmi, but seeks to use his life experiences to analyze the above-mentioned themes within the larger historical contexts. His life-story exemplifies all the three modes of mediations discussed in the previous chapters. It demonstrates how an individual can transcend the conventional boundaries of languages, religions, cultures, nation states, and vast geographic distance to make contributions to humanity with his passion to acquire and spread knowledge as well as strong commitment to his own belief.

**Linguistic Mediation**

In recent years, the study of the circulation of ideas has been on the rise. From scientific knowledge to religious doctrines, ideas of various sorts travel across linguistic, cultural, and geographical zones. In Chapter One, I discussed textual mediation, which involved the process of translation from one language to another, the transfer of embedded modes of knowledge production, and the transformation and appropriation of meanings. Sharkey remarks that missionary encounters also took place through literary texts and oral exchanges within the communication landscapes. In order to disseminate, translate, and adapt ideas, the communication and reception of missionary messages were mediated by words in written and spoken languages. This was certainly evident in the case of Ahmad Fahmi.

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Fahmi’s linguistic skills were impressive. With Arabic as his native language, he briefly studied at the al-Azhar University. But as did many boys from wealthy Muslim families, he also attended the American mission boys’ school in Cairo and quickly learned English and French. With these skills, later he was assigned to teach Arabic to American missionaries. They read various devotional books together, including a daily chapter from the Bible in Arabic. The American Presbyterian missionaries emphasized Arabic Bible reading from the moment they reached Egypt in 1854 in order to propagate the knowledge of Christianity on a firsthand base. They believed that the best way to stimulate Coptic revival in Egypt was to supplant Coptic-language liturgies with prayers, sermons, and religious discussions in Arabic, the living language of the Egyptian people. But in order to achieve this goal, they needed to study the Arabic language themselves first. Thus, Fahmi was hired. The American missionaries’ original intended target audience of Arabic Bible reading was the Egyptian Copts who belonged to the Orthodox Church in order to revive Christianity in Egypt. Inadvertently, however, when they hired Fahmi, a Muslim at the time, to study Arabic, they also imparted the knowledge of Christianity into him. The informational content and the linguistic skills involved in the learning (knowledge of Christianity) and teaching processes (the Arabic language) were intertwined. As Fahmi was constantly switching between different linguistic modes of Arabic and English, it was the linguistic and textual mediation that enabled the formation of a new religious identity within Fahmi.

344 Sharkey, 2008, 89.

If Fahmi’s language skills were the prerequisite for his conversion, the interplay of Islam and Christianity in Egypt in the late nineteenth century was the larger historical context that made the conversion possible. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions first set out in 1819 to reclaim the land of the Bible and to evangelize its inhabitants in the Arab world. Over the next one hundred years, energetic and compassionate missionaries embarked on a dialectic process of failure and renewal of mission work. This larger historical context, which will be discussed in more details in the latter part of this Chapter, exposed Fahmi to the teachings of both religions as well as the most-used languages of these religions and eventually led to Fahmi’s conversion at the age of sixteen. When Fahmi left Egypt, he transformed from an Arabic-speaking Muslim to an English-speaking Christian. His innate agency to acquire new language skills and knowledge, the larger historical context of the interplay of Islam and Christianity in Egypt, as well as the contingent but crucial assistance from Lord Aberdeen combined together made the first identity change in his life.

We know little about Fahmi’s nearly ten years’ study at the University of Edinburgh. A London Missionary Society register records that he began to study medicine and literal arts in 1878. Edinburg University records also confirm that he matriculated in that year and completed his qualifying medical examinations in 1886. Fahmi’s religious identity metamorphosis caused rupture in his social ties with family and friends. Therefore, it is not difficult to surmise the challenges that he had faced.


encountered as a new Christian convert from a traditional Muslim family background to start a new life in a completely new environment. How did he assimilate into that new culture? Had he ever felt alienated? Being part of the London Missionary Society might have given him a sense of belonging and strengthened his Christian faith, but the mundane everyday life may easily wear down anyone. Furthermore, even if Fahmi had studied the English language before, he still needed to take great effort to use English to study medicine, a difficult and complex subject on its own. After all, most of the prior education that Fahmi had before he arrived in Scotland was religious teachings about Islam and Christianity. Future research needs to be done on this important period of his life because this was the crucial time of his intellectual transformation. After almost a decade of endeavor, Fahmi’s linguistic skills, passion and dedication to knowledge acquisition, and institutional support from the London Missionary Society resulted in Fahmi’s reinvention of himself from a Christian exile into a missionary doctor. From then on, he acquired a new professional identity.

Immediately after graduating from the University of Edinburgh, Fahmi embarked on another new journey of his life. When he first arrived in China, the London Missionary Society originally did not think it was necessary for him to study the Chinese language. Instead, they wanted him to start his medical work right away. In the “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow,” there is a following passage describing the organization’s opinion regarding learning Chinese:

In the Spring of 1887, Dr. and Mrs. Ahmed Fahmy reached Amoy [about ten miles from Zhangzhou]. Coupled with the welcome given them, almost amusingly exaggerated means were taken that the Dr. should go inland and begin

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348 The major archive that needs to be visited is the archives of University of Edinburg for this period of his life.
his professional work at once. Pages were sent to the Directors by the Secretary explaining that a knowledge of Chinese outside his professional work was not necessary to a physician, that “Chinese character is a dead language in Amoy,” that “the best Drs. they know have little if any knowledge of written characters,” “that it would be wrong to require an examination in the classics of the doctor.”

Fahmi, however, did not agree with this opinion and worked on the language study in spite of the organization’s opposition. As a result of Fahmi’s effort, after working in Zhangzhou for thirty-two years, he not only mastered Mandarin, but also the local dialect (Minnan Hua) in order to communicate with local patients directly, spread Christian messages to his patients and students, and mentor Chinese disciples to practice western medicine. Fahmi’s Chinese language skills enabled him to carry out work that he otherwise would not be able to do.

The complex linguistic and textual mediations reoccurred throughout Fahmi’s life of learning and teaching. Historian Bridie Andrews has demonstrated that the process of western medical knowledge production, contestation, and combination in China often took place through the process of translation. Chinese physicians translated information about bacteria and the germ theory as akin to the concepts in traditional Chinese medicine. Furthermore, at the turn of the twentieth century, many translations came from the Japanese and German languages because Chinese students often went to Japan.

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349 Unknown Author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District),” dated August 1918, document found at the Zhangzhou Local Gazetteer Writing Committee, Zhangzhou, Fujian, China.

350 There were different models of western medicine in China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For a detailed overview, see Xi Gao, “Foreign Models of Medicine in Twentieth-Century China,” in Medical Transitions in Twentieth-Century China, edited by Bridie Andrews and Mary Brown Bullock, Indiana University Press, 2014, Chapter 9.

and Germany to study medicine.\textsuperscript{352} However, in the rare case of Fahmi, the teaching process was a straight transmission of western medical knowledge to Chinese physicians in Chinese rather than through translation. The original source of knowledge came from England, rather than Japan and Germany. Fahmi acquired the medical knowledge in English, but spread it in Chinese (especially \textit{Minnan Hua}, a Fujianese dialect) directly to his students. The translation process was mediated by Fahmi himself, rather than by local Chinese students. As a result, an Egyptian man crossed the linguistic boundaries in bridging the intellectual diffusion of western medical knowledge from England to China. Fahmi’s students, such as Jiang Tianhan, Zhu Chucai, Li Yongqing, Yang Baodao, and Lin Yuanjing, who later became well-known practitioners of western medicine in southern China, received the knowledge directly in their own native language.\textsuperscript{353} Fahmi’s effort made their learning process a lot easier and broadened his students’ intellectual horizon. In addition to the medical knowledge, Fahmi also taught them the Latin alphabet so that they could learn a bit of English as well.

As for Fahmi’s general knowledge about China, in contrast to the Chinese-Arab intellectual connections discussed in Chapter One, Fahmi’s information came directly from China rather than through reading English or French translated writings. He acquired the Chinese language from the Chinese people that he interacted with. But at least at the initial stage of his language study, the language of instruction was most likely in English. Therefore, this particular Chinese-Arab intellectual connection involved both

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\textsuperscript{353} “Zhangzhou xiehe yiyuan yange” ("The Evolution of Zhangzhou Union Hospital") in \textit{Zhangzhou Xiangcheng wenshi ziliao} (\textit{The Literary and Historical Sources of Xiangcheng District in Zhangzhou City}), vol. 1, no. 4, 267.
\end{footnotesize}
the direct interactions and indirect textual and linguistic mediations. Since Fahmi never returned to Egypt, he did not have a chance to spread his knowledge about China and the Chinese language back to the Arab world. But he probably had spread this knowledge to the westerners and diaspora Arabs in Great Britain and the United States when he interacted with them after his retirement from China. This mode of combined direct interactions and indirect textual and linguistic mediations in Chinese-Arab connection was rare at the turn of the twentieth century when there were not many Arabs who had lived in China for a long time. But it has become increasingly common today when many Arabs come to China for business or academic study. Some have lived in China for a long time and made it their second home. Most of them, however, have returned and continue to spread their knowledge about China and the Chinese language in the Arab world.\footnote{In addition to using the Chinese language to teach western medicine and provide medical services, Fahmi’s practice also included reading Bible chapters to the local patients. Western missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century China adopted the principle of spreading medicine and saving souls at the same time.\footnote{For example, Jonathan Spence, “Peter Parker: Body or Souls,” in To Change China: Western Advisers in China 1620-1960, New York: Penguin Books, 1980.}}

In addition to using the Chinese language to teach western medicine and provide medical services, Fahmi’s practice also included reading Bible chapters to the local patients. Western missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century China adopted the principle of spreading medicine and saving souls at the same time.\footnote{Most of the medical missionaries did not take on the further mission of preaching Christian messages because they did not know the Chinese language. Instead, they left this task to the priests and pastors at the church. Fahmi, however, took this mission seriously. He believed that people needed more spiritual consolation especially when they were ill and...}

\footnote{Although this dissertation is a historical analysis, it is my hope that the analytical point that I am gleaning out can transcend the original historical time period and be used to understand present day Chinese-Arab interactions as well.}
in despair. Therefore, he conducted Bible readings together with his patients in the hospital wards. He also did this with his medical students. However, his efforts met resistance from the local government. Again as the “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow” describes it:

On the day of opening the hospital, “runners” [yamen chai yi, 衙门差役] from the Yamen [衙门, the local bureaucracy] arrived, saying that the city magistrate sent word he was very glad that a work of healing has began, but that there must be no preaching of the foreign doctrine. Dr. Fahmy sent word “if the Magistrate has anything to say he must please come and speak to me himself. The Magistrate did not appear, and no other word of criticism of the hospital has ever been heard.356

With strong commitment to his own belief, Fahmi continued his work. Those Bible reading sessions were in Chinese this time. As a result, another interesting trans-lingual practice occurred. While Fahmi received the Christian message in Arabic in Egypt, he spread it in Chinese in China, neither of which was the commonly used language of Christianity. Fahmi’s linguistic skills enabled him to mediate Christianity’s global dissemination across vast geographical boundaries. His colleagues remembered the efforts of Fahmi and his wife in this regard:

The results of the gospel teaching at the hospital—its daily worship, with a preaching service on alternate days for the out patients, of its large Sunday-school that the Dr. led and kept up for some years—of the work of its colporteur in the men’s wards, and that of the matron, Bible women, unmarried ladies and Mrs. Fahmy on the women’s side is a matter that should be written by itself. Many hearts were truly touched towards God in the hospital, and beginnings of a Christian life were made through it.357


This above description shows the impact that Fahmi and his wife had on the lives of his patients. Certainly, Fahmi’s individual agency, though crucial, was not enough in achieving this goal. This process was also made possible by the networks of Christian missionary institutions around the world. Without the American Presbyterian Church in Egypt and London Missionary Society in Great Britain, Fahmi probably would never have gone to China. As a result of individual efforts and institutional support and through providing medical service and consoling people’s emotional needs, Fahmi gradually dispelled the hostility and suspicion of local people towards western medicine and Christianity.

People’s perception of Fahmi’s identity also involved the linguistic boundaries that he crossed in written texts and spoken languages. In Sharkey’s astute analysis, on paper in English Fahmi’s name was “A. Fahmy.” Consequently, Fahmi looked and sounded like British as any other London Missionary Society missionary.\(^{358}\) Fahmi’s name in Chinese was “Ba Amei” (巴阿美) which was a Chinese transliteration of his Arabic name Fahmi, but sounded no different from that any other British or American missionaries either. Although in English, his name still contains an initial “A,” when it was further transliterated in Chinese, even that letter “A” was omitted. Furthermore, most frequently, local people simply called him “fanzai yisheng,” (番仔医生) which literally means a foreign doctor.\(^{359}\) Since at that time, most of the foreigners in China were Anglo-

\(^{358}\) Sharkey, 2009, 326.

\(^{359}\) Zhuang Zongpei, “Zhangzhou xiyi diyi ren—ba yisheng” (“The First Western Doctor in Zhangzhou: Ahmad Fahmi”), Zhangzhou Xiangcheng wenshi ziliao (The Literary and Historical Sources of Xiangcheng District in Zhangzhou City), vol. 3, no. 4, 276.
American, it was natural that local people assumed him as British because he worked for a British missionary organization.

Interestingly, just as the American Presbyterian Church celebrated Fahmi’s conversion when it occurred and continued to recount his story over the decades, local Chinese remembered and retold Fahmi’s story in Zhangzhou long after he left China as well. However, their perceptions of Fahmi were not consistent, but changed over time, especially during the dramatic 1960s. Although most people remembered him as a beloved doctor, during the Cultural Revolution, one local writer wrote a highly critical op-ed piece condemning Fahmi as a British imperialist. The author did not know Fahmi personally at all, but carelessly labeled Fahmi as a British imperialist due to the general anti-imperialist sentiment during that era.

Similarly, for lack of a better label, Fahmi’s co-workers in the London Missionary Society also labeled his identity on paper as British. Sharkey points out that European and American missionaries called newly converted “native” workers by many titles, such as “lay preachers,” “native evangelists,” “teachers,” “Bible Women,” or, in parts of India as munshis (meaning language teachers and translators) among the Protestants. Among Catholics, they were often called “catechists.” European and American sources rarely, if ever, called them “missionaries.” However, when it came to the case of Fahmi, the London Missionary Society declared this man to be an “English missionary” for the

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360 Zhang Lianjin, “Ying Mei diguozhuyi zhe liyong Jidujiao zai Zhangzhou jinxing qinlue de zuixing” (“The Sins of Anglo-American Imperialists Using Christianity to Invade Zhangzhou”), reprinted in Zhangzhou Xiangcheng wenshi ziliao (The Literary and Historical Sources of Xiangcheng District in Zhangzhou City), vol. 1, no. 3, 169-78.
convenience of their staff directory. After all, it seemed too awkward to call this Egyptian man as a “native” in China.\footnote{Sharkey, 2013, 11.}

Perceived by his fellow missionaries and Chinese patients and student as British, was Fahmi’s cultural and social conversion complete as British then? Although his own society listed him as an “English missionary” and in the end Fahmi settled and passed away in England, he never managed to obtain a British citizenship. Furthermore, when he needed protection from the British consulate in China during the Boxers Rebellion, his request was rejected because he did not hold a British passport.\footnote{Sharkey, 2008, 231.} In his seventy-two years of life, he spent almost half of it in China. His sojourning in Fujian was the longest stop of his life. Did he feel more at home in China or in Great Britain, or anywhere else? How did he perceive his own identity? The imperfect evidence we have so far is fragmentary and only reflects how other people perceived him, rather than his own self-identification. People involved in his life saw or heard a piece of his multi-faceted identity and formed their perception or judgment of Fahmi. Future research needs to be done on how Fahmi perceived himself and how he managed to live with his identity conundrum.\footnote{The major archives that need to be visited for this issue are SOAS CWM archives and American Presbyterian Church archives in Philadelphia.}

**Material Meditation**

The history of western medicine in China is a large topic worthy a far more in-depth treatment than I can do here. For example, it has been examined as a clash with the
traditional Chinese medicine.\textsuperscript{364} Or, for better or for worse, it is interpreted as a marker of modernity for the body of individual Chinese.\textsuperscript{365} Less ideologically oriented, Dr. Carl F. Nathan treats western medicine as a form of interaction among individual medical practitioners and patients.\textsuperscript{366} Building on his way of understanding, in this chapter, I attempt to analyze the spread of western medicine in China from a different angle—to revolve it around the discourse of materiality. Historian Jonathan Spence treats “missionary” in the broad sense of those who were sent overseas to perform a stipulated service, rather than purely religious tasks.\textsuperscript{367} Fahmi’s main mission in China was to provide western medical service, which is an alternative form of materiality. As examined in Chapter Two, materiality consists of the production and the consumption sides. Fahmi and the Chinese disciples that he trained to practice western medicine were the producers. The local people in Zhangzhou who received the treatment were the consumers. The interactions between doctors and patients were also a process of interactions between producers and consumers. However, as this service was not intended for profit, this form of materiality may not be categorized as a commodity.


Fahmi established the first clinic in Zhangzhou in 1888. The following paragraph is a description of the conditions of his practice in the early years:

The house itself was ill-adapted to the work. There were three small rooms downstairs for men patients, and the same number upstairs. A room about 16 by 16ft. with a partition to divide it in two parts served as consulting and operating rooms, while half way up to their ceilings was a loft on which the boxes of instruments were stored. There was no light in the operating room except through a window of Chinese fashion closed by a solid blind. Across the court were two small rooms for women in-patients, and two more for the students. In-patients were soon too many for their rooms, and the men had to be placed in the court.\(^{368}\)

After five years of initial efforts, Fahmi established the first modern hospital in Zhangzhou in 1893. At the beginning, Fahmy found an old dilapidated house in a good position not far from the church, spending months getting it repaired and ready to open as a dispensary and make-shift hospital. Later, the hospital gradually established Departments of internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, gynecology and dermatology. Furthermore, Fahmi named it “Hok-im I-koan,” which means “The Good News [Gospel] Hospital” in English. Scholar Michelle Renshaw points out that Christianity played a significant role in the development of modern hospitals in China.\(^ {369}\) This was obvious in the case of Fahmi as indicated by the name of his hospital as well as the Bible reading activities that he carried out with his patients and students. Whereas some of Fahmi’s patients chose a Christian path later in their lives, all Fahmi’s students were Christian converts.

As the hospital was not meant for profit, the fees for the patients were very cheap, with the first time charge of only five pence for out-patients and two shillings for in-

\(^{368}\) Unknown author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District),” dated August 1918.

patients. The patient then would receive a patient card, which was valid for one year, during which period no matter how many visits, no further money would be charged.\textsuperscript{370} All patients who were too poor to pay were given free treatment and medicine. Fahmi successfully ran the hospital as a medical missionary until his retirement in 1919 despite tremendous financial difficulty.\textsuperscript{371} Funding was tight from the beginning. To make things worse, the London Missionary Society also further cut the budget. “Sketch of the London Missionary Society work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District)” recorded that:

The London directors decided that the grant of 80 pounds for the Changchow hospital must be halved and divided with the newly opened medical work at Hui-an…Dr. Fahmy therefore resolved to make a bold push at once for entire self-support, lay a deep conviction in his mind that it was the right thing to do, that the healing given in the hospital was but cheapened in the eyes of those who had learned its efficiency if they gave nothing in return. The same people who came back would give larger sums back to the hospital. The plan was at once successful. It was coupled with a frugal control on everything non-essential to the patients’ well-being and a strict oversight against waste and theft. It was this strict oversight that ensured success as much as the other, although it added greatly to the labor of the hospital’s head [Dr. Fahmi]. Since 1903 no grant from the Society has been received, nor any funds been asked for at home.\textsuperscript{372}

The financial challenge did not stop Fahmi. With his innovations in hospital policy, he managed to continue providing medical services. The production and consumption of this service started from England and ended in Zhangzhou. The role of producers and consumers in the process of spreading western medical knowledge and service was dynamic and constantly changing at different stages. When Fahmi was studying in Great Britain, he was a consumer of the medical knowledge provided by his

\textsuperscript{370} Unknown author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District),” dated August 1918.

\textsuperscript{371} Sharkey, 2008, 81.

\textsuperscript{372} Unknown author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District),” dated August 1918.
teachers. The British missionary and educational institutions were the facilitators in Fahmi’s pursuit of knowledge. When Fahmi arrived in Zhangzhou, however, he then became a producer himself. Most remarkably, Fahmi, an Arab originally from Egypt, became the key mediator in this process of spreading western medicine in China.

Certainly, western medical knowledge and service was not monolithic. It came to China either with military surgeons or with medical missionaries. As historian Ruth Rogaski convincingly argues that in the mid-nineteenth century, the British medical profession experienced a period of uncertainty about the efficacy of their medical practices and British practitioners possessed diverse ideas about what caused certain disease. In other words, there was no one single “Western medicine” that was different from and superior to traditional “Chinese medicine.” This was certainly true for Fahmi’s practice in Zhangzhou. The western medicine and service that Fahmi spread was the product of his own knowledge pursuit earlier in Great Britain. Furthermore, he also had to adapt to the specificities of each individual case. For example, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District)” described some unusual medical conditions:

Here might be a man with his eye gouged out…various cases of skin disease including a baby carried in by its father with one half cheek eaten away…a woman who has travelled four days journey by boat to reach the hospital after a dozen years of misery with an enormous tumor and who goes back six weeks later rejoicing in new health and freedom. Occasionally, there is a child injured by a water-buffalo…a man from Pho-lam who has been clawed by a tiger… the agonies of a man in the first stages of opium cure…

373 Ruth Rogaski, 2004, 77-78.

For each case, Fahmi employed the limited available resources and improvised treatment according to the circumstances to save lives. As for the Chinese physicians that Fahmi trained, the western medical service production process in Zhangzhou was not driven by profit either. It originated from the dire need of medical staff. When Fahmi first established the hospital, he was the only doctor without any staff members. To solve the problem, Fahmi provided rudimentary training for young men from lower classes to assist him as attendants.

Dr. Fahmy describes himself in that first year as almost distracted by the demands of patients and the rawness of the conditions of carrying on. Day after day from two hundred to two hundred forty cases would apply at the dispensary. He had taken four or five young Chinese students who did not know the name of a drug or an instrument, or the simplest method of proceeding.375

Although at the beginning, the goal of Fahmi’s teaching was less to develop a profession than to find expedient ways to assist his medical service, the outcome was the same: a cadre of Chinese physicians and nurses was trained to support his hospital work.376

In the new hospital, during this period of 1891-1904 the young students taken on at the beginning had already given place to a second and third set, and far more helpfulness and knowledge were at the Dr’s [Ahmad Fahmi] service. The hospital was now well known throughout the district as apart from the reports of returned patients…. The Dr. prepared everything that could not be entrusted to his four raw apprentices, with their disbelief in antiseptic measures and germs; he put the patient under chloroform himself, and then gave directions to the students to keep on, would proceed to operate and watch that his orders were carried out at the same time…. Dr. Fahmy, in describing that early time always adds that the


patients recovered as thoroughly later on in a better place and with trained students.\textsuperscript{377}

One of the major reasons that Chinese disciples were attracted to study western medicine was because of their impoverishment. One of the collected papers about the history of Xiangcheng District in Zhangzhou City describes Fahmi as kind-hearted and very sympathetic to the local poor. When he saw talented children from poor family, he took them under his wing.\textsuperscript{378} Therefore, Fahmi’s medical service production process also came from his humanistic care for local people and his passion to teach. Fahmi’s students were all from lower socioeconomic and educational background. In the initial stage of their training, they were mainly acquiring whatever Fahmi had taught them. Later, however, when they became locally renowned western medicine practitioners and service providers, they then started to use their own judgment and experience to practice western medicine on their own. For example, Fahmi gave money to one of his favorite students Jiang Tianhan to buy facilities to start up his own clinic.\textsuperscript{379} In addition, Fahmi’s successor Dr. Douglas Harman and Mrs. Gladys Harman also noted:

\begin{quote}
    What he [Dr. Fahmi] did was remarkable. He had a wooden operating table, no nurses, and just a number of his medical students acting as nurses. When he left, many of the better students opened their own medicine shops and did very good work, with no other western medical help in the city.\textsuperscript{380}
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\textsuperscript{377} Unknown Author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien District),” dated August 1918.
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\textsuperscript{378} Zhuang Zongpei, “Zhangzhou xiyi diyi ren—ba yisheng” (“The First Western Doctor in Zhangzhou: Ahmad Fahmi”), Zhangzhou Xiangcheng wenshi ziliao (The Literary and Historical Sources of Xiangcheng District in Zhangzhou City), vol. 3, no. 4, 276.
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\textsuperscript{379} Zhuang Zongpei, “Zhangzhou xiyi diyi ren—ba yisheng” (“The First Western Doctor in Zhangzhou: Ahmad Fahmi”), Zhangzhou Xiangcheng wenshi ziliao (The Literary and Historical Sources of Xiangcheng District in Zhangzhou City), vol. 3, no. 4, 276.
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\textsuperscript{380} Papers of Dr. Douglas Harman and Mrs. Gladys Harman, MS 380815/1/1: “A History of Mission Medical Work in Changchow Fukien, China II: A Letter from Gladys Busby,” document found at Zhangzhou Local Gazetteers Writers Office, Zhangzhou, Fujian, China.
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This shows that at the production end of the western medical knowledge and service, there were many different stages and diverse motivations. It was not simply a spread of western imperialism in China as conventional historiography has portrayed. The above analyses add nuance to the complex process of knowledge production and contestation than we previously have understood.

On the consumption side of the western medicine in Zhangzhou, local people at the beginning were very suspicious of it. They did not like white robes that doctors and nurses wore because the white color is a symbol of death in traditional Chinese culture. Although missionary doctors believed that surgery provided them a precious tool for expressing benevolence toward the Chinese in a personal setting, the surgical operation was an unthinkable violation of the human body to them. Fahmi encountered great hostility at the beginning. The following letter described the difficulties that Fahmi faced:

Dr. Fahmy was a brilliant doctor…but foreigners, then in the 1880s were not welcomed generally and Dr. Fahmy was stoned on occasion. Therefore, it was felt wiser to build his small hospital down a narrow alleyway behind houses and shops in the main road to the Bund. It was in a flood area so the wards and other rooms were built higher than courtyard, which steps leading to each room.\(^\text{381}\)

Then when did people go to see western doctors? People went when the traditional Chinese medicine could not adequately meet their urgent and immediate need. It was a powerful means of bringing previously suspicious people to experiment with the new way of medical treatment when the physical pain in human body was tangible and palpable. As historian Paul Cohen has pointed out that a totally strange body of

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\(^{381}\) Papers of Dr. Douglas Harman and Mrs. Gladys Harman, MS 380815/1/1: “A History of Mission Medical Work in Changchow Fukien, China II: A Letter from Gladys Busby.”
experience and knowledge, administered by strangers was found capable to relieve pain only during a major life crisis.\textsuperscript{382} The cholera outbreak in 1902 was such a health crisis and caused a great deal of stress. As a result, when people had no other choice, they turned to Fahmi’s medical clinic. Although Fahmi was hardly alone in offering treatment during the epidemic, what made him different from other missionary doctors was that he spoke fluent Chinese and so was able to communicate with the patients. This was very important because a doctor’s careful explanation of the disease and treatment method can calm down a patient and elevate their fear and anxiety. By the time that the China Centenary Missionary Conference was held in Shanghai in 1907, western medicine had overcome the crucial obstacle that Protestant missionaries had encountered in China, namely “an atmosphere of suspicion, distrust, and hatred.”\textsuperscript{383}

The western medicine production in Zhangzhou and Fahmi’s medical legacy did not stop when he retired from China. After he resettled in England, his eldest son, Ernest Chalmers Fahmy, continued his father’s medical practice in Great Britain and became a distinguished obstetrician and gynecologist in Edinburgh, at one time serving as president of the Edinburgh Obstetric Society. Many years later, a medical student who once received help from Ernest Chalmers Fahmy and later also worked in Zhangzhou wrote to the granddaughter of Fahmi:

Dear Mrs. Johnston,

When Dr. Fahmy left Changchow in 1919 his hospital, Hok-im I-Koan which means Good News (or Gospel) Healing House was closed down, and for about ten


years, the London Missionary Society had no medical work in the town…. In January 1988, they celebrated the 100 years since Dr. Ahmed Fahmy started medical work in Changchow [Zhangzhou]…. In my early years in Changchow there were still some of Dr. Fahmy’s students in practice in the town, and plenty of people, patients and church members who remembered him with much gratitude and affection. I think you will be glad to know that in January of next year there will also be people in Changchow who never knew Dr. Fahmy but who nevertheless will be giving thanks for the work which he started and from which they and many others have benefited over the years.\textsuperscript{384}

This letter shows that even many years after Fahmi had left Zhangzhou, the production and consumption of western knowledge and service still continues with the students that Fahmi had trained. Fahmi lived in the fond memories of local people. Even today, senior citizens of Zhangzhou, especially those who live in the area where Fahmi used to practice medicine, usually know something about him or at least have heard stories about his life.\textsuperscript{385} His name is often mentioned in the local history of medicine in Fujian as well.\textsuperscript{386}

\textbf{Spatiotemporal Mediation}

The timing of Ahmad Fahmi’s life journeys was crucial. It was during a time of Anglo-American missionary presence around the world, from the Middle East to the Far East. Without the transnational missionary networks, Fahmi probably could never have been to different corners of the world outside his place of origin. Sharkey points out that

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\textsuperscript{385} Field interview, October 2012, Zhangzhou, Fujian, China.

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the geographic sweep of Fahmi’s career moved within the orbit of the Anglo-American Protestant missionary movement that followed the empire’s footsteps.387 To a certain extent, this is a valid point. However, the missionaries did not simply follow the empire’s footsteps because that implies a voluntary emotional attachment. On the contrary, many of them were deeply ambivalent about empires at best and some even inclined to hold anti-imperial sentiments. Therefore, Fahmi’s globe-trotting may be more accurately described as a form of missionary institutional mediation in the age of empires.

In addition, the interplay of Islam and Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries set up the larger historical context for Fahmi’s religious transformation in Egypt and professional work in China. Historiography in the Middle East has explored the Christian-Muslim encounters in Egypt.388 Scholarship usually centers on the clashes caused by these encounters. However, Sharkey has noted that missionary encounters led to varied and frequently unforeseen transformations, and that had implications for things ostensibly far removed from religion; the cultural repercussions of conversion were often fraught with ambiguity.389 These encounters have often informed cultural debates about issues as fundamental as family and community.

Therefore, I choose the word “interplay” to refer to the reciprocal and mutual influence of these two religions on the lives of ordinary peoples. Fahmi converted from Islam into

387 Sharkey, 326.


389 Sharkey, 2013, 2.
Christianity. Egypt was the home of his childhood, which forms an important part of one’s growth later in life. The interplay of Islam and Christianity led to Fahmi’s religious conversion, which is a protracted process, not an isolated event. It involves religious as well as cultural and social dimensions and it is often painful for converts and their families. Fahmi’s conversion caused a social rupture with family and friends in the natal home. However, this social rupture could not cut his emotional attachment to Egypt. Fahmy did have hopes of returning. He applied to the American missionaries in Egypt in 1895, seeking a medical appointment at their Tanta hospital. This was during a time when Fahmi was working in China. As mentioned earlier, he encountered a great deal of hostility and challenges in the first few years of his work in Zhangzhou. During times of distress, homesickness might have triggered his yearning to return to Egypt. Nothing happened in the end, however. The paper trail on his application ran cold.\footnote{Earl E. Elder, \textit{Vindicating a Vision: The Story of the American Mission in Egypt, 1854–1954}, Philadelphia: United Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1958, 76–77.} This is a curious puzzle since the American missionaries in Egypt celebrated and recounted his conversion after he left Egypt. Logically they would have welcomed him back. In 1897, the chronicler of the American mission in Egypt even proudly noted him as a convert serving as a medical missionary in China. Some other factors must have been involved in the rejection of Fahmi’s application. Further research needs to be done on this point, which will illuminate some unknown forces (be it political, religious, or familial) at play in Fahmi’s life. The influence of different religions does not happen only during the process of conversion. The imprint of the interplay of Islam and Christianity on people’s identity and memory is long lasting and multi-layered. It is not always manifested in the
form a violent clash and conflict. Its influence can be ambivalent, subtle, and hunting since religions, emotions, and the society that people live in are all intimately intertwined.

The interplay of Islam and Christianity in Egypt is not a new topic: most Christian-Muslims interactions take place in societies where these two religions comprise the major religious beliefs. As these two religions spread far beyond such societies, histories of Islam in China and Christianity in China have fascinated many researchers as well. They produced excellent works that investigate their disparate influences on the Chinese people. However, it is rarely noted by scholars that both Islam and Christianity first came to China as early as the seventh century and had coexisted in this non-Islamic and non-Christian society for a long time. Given the near simultaneity of the spread these two monotheistic religions, their interplay in China is not a new phenomenon.\(^{391}\) However, few scholars have examined this topic.\(^{392}\) Therefore, I argue that the interplay of Islam and Christianity in China has left a multi-layered imprint on how people form their identities. Analyzing the Islamic-Christian impact on local people’s lives in terms of

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\(^{391}\) For example, as early as in the fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta, a Muslim scholar traveller, had already made observations of Christians in China. In the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries were quite enthusiastic on converting Chinese Muslims into Christianity. In order to achieve their goals, they did extensive research, such as: Marshall Broomhall, *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem*, Morgan & Scott, Limited, 1910; Issac Mason, trans. *The Arabian Prophet: A Life of Mohammed from Chinese and Arabic Sources, a Chinese-Moslem Work by Liu Chia-lien*, Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1921; Issac Mason, *Notes on Chinese Mohammedan literature*, Peking, 1938.

\(^{392}\) Chinese scholar Wang Jianping (1953-) has written three books in Chinese about the American missionary activities in China: *Zhongguo neidi he bianjiang Yisilan wenhua laozhaopian: Bi Jingshi deng chuanjiaoshi de shijiao ji jiedu* (*Old Photos on Islamic Culture in Chinese Inland and Frontier: Interpretations and Perspectives of Claude L. Pickens and Other Missionaries*), Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011; *Zhongguo Shan Gan Ning Qing Yisilan wenhua laozhaopian ershi shiji sanshi niandai: Meiguos chuanjiaoshi kaocha jishi* (*Old Photos of Islamic Culture in Shanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai in the 1930s in China: Documenting American Missionary Activities*), Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011; *Jindai Shanghai Yisilan wenhua cunzhao: Meiguo Hafo daxue ziliao yanjiu* (*Survived Photos of Islamic Culture in Modern Shanghai: Studies on Documents held at Harvard University in the US*), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008. Very little work, however, has been done in English. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite is the only exception, see “‘Western Gods Meet in the East’: Shapes and Contexts of the Muslim-Jesuit Dialogue in Early Modern China,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012): 517-46.
contrasting and competing dichotomies may obscure our understanding of their synthesized influences over a long duration of time. It is the intertwined global and local processes combined that shaped people’s seemingly paradoxical identity.

Islam first came to Fujian with the Arab merchants around the fourteenth century. Nearby Quanzhou city, just about seventy miles away from Zhangzhou, was one of the most important port cities of the time for maritime trade. Although many local people originally believed in folklore religions, they intermarried with foreign Muslim merchants and soon converted to Islam. The descendants of these inter-marriages constitute the first generation of Hui Muslims in Fujian.\(^{393}\) They were called *tufan* (土番), which literally means “locally born foreigners.” In addition to local conversion, there were also Hui Muslim families moving from outside Fujian province. Among them, the Ding family claims to be the descendants of Sayyid Ajal Shams al-Din,\(^{394}\) the famous governor of Yunnan in southwest China in the fourteenth century who was originally born in Bukhara in Central Asia. They were called *semu ren* (色目人), which literally means “color-eyed people.” Both *tufan* and *semu ren* were the official Chinese terms for

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\(^{393}\) Jinjiang xian chendai zhen huizu shiwu weiyuanhui, *Chendai Huizu wenshi ziliao xuanbian (Historical Records of Hui Muslims in Chendai)*, April 1989.

\(^{394}\) One branch of this Ding family descended from Sayyid Ajjal Shams al-Din Omar resides in Taisi Township, Yunlin County, Taiwan. They trace their descent through him via the Ding family from Quanzhou, Fujian. Although they feigned to be Han Chinese while in Fujian, they practised Islam when they originally arrived in Taiwan in the 1800s, soon thereafter building a mosque. In time, their descendants would convert to Buddhism or Daoist, however, and the mosque built by the Ding family is now a Daoist temple. The Ding family also has branches in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore among the diaspora Chinese communities there but no longer practise Islam; some maintain their Hui identity.

Muslims during the Mongol rule in China who enjoyed prestigious social status. During the maritime embargo imposed by Emperor Hongwu of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Zhangzhou became the only harbor that connected China with the outside world. Zhangzhou is also called Yue Gang, which literally means the Moon Harbor. It was a small river harbor in the shape of a moon (月港). Due to the maritime embargo, most of the maritime transactions carried out by foreign Muslim merchants were illegal. These merchants and their descendents made up the third group of Muslim population in Zhangzhou.

For many generations, family genealogies, gravestones, and local gazetteer records preserved the Muslim ancestry in Zhangzhou. With these texts, they transmitted their sense of “otherness” compared with the vast majority of the Han Chinese surrounding them. However, as they gradually lost their prestigious status in the society in Ming and Qing times, the Islamic traditions also faded out in their daily lives. The Arabic inscriptions on their ancestors’ graves bear only symbolic relationship to their identity as Huis. Very few of them could actually read Arabic. At this point, their Hui

395 During the Mongol rule of China, they had a preferential personnel policy, which favored first Mongols, then the Semu or non-Mongol foreigners, then northern Chinese who had been under the Mongol rule longer than the southern Chinese, and then southern Chinese.

396 Chao Zhongchen, Mingdai haijin yu haiwai maoyi (The Maritime Embargo in Ming Dynasty and Its Overseas Trade), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005; Lin Renchuan, Mingmo qingchu siren haishang maoyi (Piracy in Late Ming and Early Qing Periods), Shanghai: huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1986.

397 Zhuang Jinghui, Chendai Dingshi Huizu Zongpu (Genealogy of Hui Ethnicity in the Ding Family of Chendai), Hong Kong: Lüye jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996.

identity was more based on the ancestral heritage rather than Islamic belief and practice. They built ancestral halls,\(^{399}\) wrote family genealogy books, inter-married with Chinese, and participated in the civil exams of the Ming and Qing states. All these activities symbolized the Sinicization of the Hui Muslims in Fujian.\(^{400}\) They were making efforts to integrate into the main stream of the Chinese society and many of them had become non-practicing Muslims.\(^{401}\)

It is within this context that Christianity arrived in Fujian in general and Zhangzhou in particular in the nineteenth century. The British London Missionary Society came to Fujian in 1844 by John Stronach and William Young. Its first medical missionary in Fujian was James Hyslop who arrived in 1848. The choice of Zhangzhou to further expand missionary work in Fujian was important because it is located in the southernmost of Fujian province only about ten miles away from Amoy. Christian schools, hospitals, and churches in the city replaced madrasas and mosques as the supporting institutions for the welfare of local people. For example, the early local Christian schools were mainly charitable orphanages that provided food, shelter, housekeeping skills, and some basic Christian preaching and practices to homeless people.

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399 The Ding Family Ancestral Hall was first established around 1410s during the reign of Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty. It was destroyed in 1560 during a war and rebuilt in 1600. In contemporary time, it was remodeled into the Museum of History of Hui in Chendai. Looking from above, the structure of the building looks like the Chinese character Hui (回).

400 Ding Qirui, Ding family member participating in the civil exam and became an official in the Ming imperial court. He had to eat pork because it was given by the emperor as an imperial gift. Zhuang Jinghui, “Chendai Huizu Hanhua de Yanjiu” (“The Sinicization of Chendai Hui Muslims”) in Taiwain you Fujian shehui wenhua yanjiu lanwen ji (Anthology of Papers on Social and Cultural Studies of Taiwan and Fujian) edited by Zhuang Yingzhang and Pan Yinghai, Taipei: Institute of Ethnology at Academic Sinica, 1994, 213-34.

children, especially to girls who would otherwise find it very difficult to receive financial support from their families for an education. Some of Fahmi’s patients were Hui Muslims, but they went to a Christian missionary hospital anyway due to medical needs and received Christian preaching at the hospital. As a result, some of these Hui Muslims became Hui Christians. This seemingly paradoxical identity makes more sense if its formation is contextualized and analyzed with a longue durée approach. Christianity and Islam inhabited the same physical space that local people dwell and left imprints on local people’s lives.

The majority of the Chinese Hui Muslims in Zhangzhou received Christian teaching due to their circumstances of life. As the late historian Jerry Bentley once argued, religious conversion was seldom due to the religion itself, but often involved other factors. World religions became accepted and popular through a process of syncretism that includes political, social, and material considerations as well as spiritual reasons and good conscience. At the heart of the identity of Hui Christians lies the question of how Chinese people have responded, remembered, adapted, and benefited from the religions that were originally alien to them. The legacies of foreign religions in Zhangzhou are surprisingly long-lasting and intertwined. Far from being victimized, the local people embraced the religions and took them to their own advantage in daily life. To them, claiming an ancestral Hui Muslim lineage was not incompatible with going to Christian schools for educational purposes and Christian hospitals for medical care. New circumstances propelled them to be open to new practices.

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With the interplay of Islam and Christianity in Egypt and China as the larger historical context, an important course of event also became a key spatiotemporal mediation for Fahmi’s interaction with local Chinese. During his long sojourn in Fujian, Fahmi at first encountered a great deal of hostility from local people. However, after a cholera epidemic outbreak in 1902 during which he saved many lives but lost his own wife, he earned the respect of local villagers. In the end he was remembered as a beloved doctor who established hospitals and mentored disciples to practice western medicine among the indigenous people who had only known traditional Chinese medicine before. The crucial turning point of Fahmi’s career in Zhangzhou was the cholera outbreak in 1902.

Epidemic disease in general and cholera in particular is a familiar feature of the social history of China at the turn of the twentieth century. Historian Chen Shengkun notes that cholera was originally imported to China via the sea route from India via the Strait of Malacca and spread from south (Guangdong and Fujian) to north around 1819-1820. According to Wu Lien-teh’s report on the 1932 cholera epidemic in China, of the forty-six outbreaks, ten materialized in the years of 1822-24, 1826-27, 1840, 1862, 1883, 1902, 1909, 1919, 1926, and 1932. For the case of Fahmi, under the circumstance, the cholera outbreak became a trigger that created an uneasy trust between Fahmi and his

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patients and that made the cross-cultural interaction possible. For example, the US
diplomatic report in Xiamen described the outbreak of this epidemic:

I have the honor to inclose herewith a copy of a copy of a letter received today
from Dr. J. A. Otte, Reformed Church of America Mission, concerning cholera
and plague conditions in and around Amoy [today’s Xiamen, which is about ten
miles away from Zhangzhou]. This is the first year since 1895 that we have not
had an epidemic of bubonic plague. Last year at this time we were having over
100 cases a day. For the past month we have had numerous cases of cholera, but
it is gradually on the decrease.405

Missionaries in Zhangzhou also described the local specifics and Fahmi’s deeds
during times of crisis:

That spring [1902] a fierce epidemic of cholera broke out in Changchow great
numbers died, too many for proper burial and the bodies were rolled in mats and
carried out of the city at night to be placed any way at all under ground. All the
foreigners were ordered to Amoy and many of the Chinese ran away for their
lives. But the Dr. [Ahmad Fahmi] joined by the American Dr. Otte, stayed on and
sent word to the Mandarins [Chinese] that they wished to help the people, and that
if a temple could be placed at their disposal where they could isolate the cases
they would put up placards throughout the city to that effect.406

Missionaries were historical actors and agent of transformations. However,
sometimes, their work jostled or collided with the larger social structures around them.
Fahmi and Dr. Otte’s determination to save local people during the cholera outbreak met
indifference from the local bureaucracy:

The city fathers replied with true Mandarin nonchalance, “that the offer was
most kind, but that the Drs. should not worry over this matter. Epidemics were
very common in China, and this one would be over by the Autumn.” In spite of
the Mandarins however, the Dr. [Ahmad Fahmi] was able to save lives, among
them a certain father of a family who at once began coming to church with his
sons; and the young man who had first come to his help in the hospital, in putting
up prescriptions.407

405 A letter from John H. Fesler, United States Consul, dated June 17 1902, Amoy China.
406 Unknown Author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien
District),” dated August 1918.
407 Unknown Author, “Sketch of the London Missionary Society Work in Chang-Chow (South Fukien
District),” dated August 1918.
Despite the challenges, Fahmi continued to work to save lives of local people. But unfortunately he lost his own wife:

…in the midst of saving others he could save himself and in 1902 Mrs. Fahmy died, of that dreaded scourge the cholera, and the Dr. was left homeless and desolate.⁴⁰⁸

Fahmi’s sacrifice touched many people’s hearts. Therefore, the cholera outbreak in 1902 was not only a medical but also a social event that formed bonds between missionary doctors and local Chinese patients, which led to the acceptance of Fahmi and the western medical services that he provided and promoted. Again, a medical student who once received help from Fahmi’s family recounted his memory about that epidemic outbreak in a letter to Fahmi’s granddaughter:

I expect you [Mrs. Johnson] know that your grandmother, Mary A. Chalmers, died in Changchow in 1902 during a cholera epidemic. She was buried in a little plot of ground with a few other Christian church members. I saw her grave and tombstone in my early years in Changchow…. I suggested to him [Dr. Chu, a later superintendent of the hospital] that if at all possible it would be good if he could find Mrs. Fahmy’s grave and see that it was cleaned up and restored, in memory of her and all she did in Changchow.⁴⁰⁹

Dr. Nathan concludes that western medicine was both embraced and forced upon the Chinese in the early twentieth century.⁴¹⁰ I want to add a third factor to the gradual acceptance of western medicine in Zhangzhou: larger historical context and critical


turning-point course of event, i.e. the long history of Islam and Christianity in the region and the turning point of the 1902 cholera epidemic. From the above letter, we can see that the cholera outbreak was not simply a decisive event in Fahmi’s medical career, but also a defining moment in many people’s lives and memories long after it, even for someone who might not have experienced the cholera first hand. The writer of this letter, Douglas Harman was not in Zhangzhou when the cholera erupted. He received medical guidance from Fahmi’s eldest son in Great Britain and later when he worked in Zhangzhou, he heard the stories about Fahmi and treasured it in his memory. The rippling effect of pivotal events is often far-reaching and long-lasting.

In a Zhangzhou Union Hospital report in 1939, which is the successor of the hospital that Fahmi established, Fahmi is still mentioned with great affection:

It is now more than 50 years ago that Dr. Ahmed Fahmy, of the London Missionary Society first opened a small hospital, began medical mission work and laid the foundations for our present Changchow Union Hospital. Dr. Fahmy must have been a man with great heart, a real Christian spirit and medical skill. We still hear about his work occasionally when some of his old patients come to us.411

How did Fahmi’s encounters with Chinese produce ripples that extended forward in time and space? The continuing spread of western knowledge in China and cherished memories are cases in point. His life also offers an illustration of the geographic extent and interconnectedness of the Protestant missionary institutions in a world transformed and made mobile by global imperialism and capitalism. Furthermore, Fahmi’s interactions linked Zhangzhou, a very small place in China, to the far distant Arab world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In contrast to the fleeting direct interactions between Chinese and Egyptian Muslims in Japan, Fahmi’s interaction with local Chinese lasted a much longer time. At the surface, this seems like a perfect case to examine Chinese-Arab direct and long-term intimate cross-cultural interactions. Did local people know he was originally from Egypt? If so, did he encounter more difficulty because he was different from other missionaries, or was it a little bit easier for him because of the long presence of Arabs in Fujian, such as the Arab maritime merchants that settled in Fujian mentioned before. Jerry Bentley once argued that it is possible for peoples of different societies to interact over long terms with little exchange of cultural traditions, although more commonly different cultural traditions have provoked reactions or wielded influence beyond their own communities. This was the case of Fahmi’s interaction with people in Zhangzhou. Even for long-term, substantial, and positive Chinese-Arab direct interaction in the case of Ahmad Fahmi, very few Chinese knew he was an Arab or even if they did know, at some point in time that knowledge was forgotten. When I interviewed the local gazetteer historians who wrote entries about Fahmi and the descendants of the disciples whom Fahmi once mentored, none of them knew that he was originally from Egypt. The records that Fahmi left in Zhangzhou was in English and he worked for the London Missionary Society as a western medical doctor. Local Chinese naturally assumed that he was British. Therefore, an interesting paradox arises: whereas the fleeting direct interaction between Chinese and Arab Muslims in Japan left a long-lasting Islamic cultural impact on the Chinese Muslims, the long-term interactions between Fahmi and local Chinese in

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Zhangzhou did not seem to increase Chinese people’s cultural awareness about the Arab world at all. This shows that the deepening of cross-cultural interactions does not always depend on the duration of contact. Rather, sometimes, it depends on the mutual needs and the desires of the parties involved. Chinese and Egyptian Muslims in Japan had a common goal of Islamic revival and therefore they were easily bonded together. Local Chinese in Zhangzhou, on the other hand, were more in need of Fahmi’s medical knowledge and services, especially during the cholera epidemic. They probably did not take an interest in getting to know him beyond his professional identity as a missionary doctor working for the London Missionary Society. Furthermore, Bentley also remarked that interactions between people from different societies always took place in contexts of different power relations, and power in its various forms influences the processes of cultural exchange. In the case of Fahmi’s interactions with local Chinese in Zhangzhou, the power of British cultural influence, in the form of Christianity or western medicine, was definitely stronger than that of the Arab culture, in the form of Islam and Arab merchant activities, at the turn of the twentieth century. As mentioned before, most of the local Chinese simply called him “fanzai yisheng” (a foreign doctor). This shows that local people remember him more for his profession than anything else. Therefore, it is understandable that Fahmi’s original ethnic and religious identity was over-layered by his new religious and professional identity. Fahmi did not affect local Chinese understanding of the Arab world. He did, however, leave a great impact on local people's understanding and appreciation of western medical knowledge and services. This was an

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unexpected consequence of Chinese-Arab cross-cultural interaction within the broader context of western global expansion.

Fahmi’s life journeys, however, were accompanied by a constant sense of dislocation because he was floating in between radically distinct cultures. Fahmi had crossed national, racial, linguistic, religious, and geographical boundaries, which offered possibilities for hybrid identities, but few people at the time could understand the cosmopolitanism that Fahmi had embodied. How did Fahmi understand his own time? His transnational life during a time of rising nationalisms all over the world threatened the stability of national identity and unsettled the framework of people’s conventional thinking. As a result, in his quest for identity and purpose in life, inevitably at times tensions rose between an individual, the societies where he once resided, and larger historical time that lived in. The incomplete and fragmentary traces of details that I have so far can only tell us how he struggled, negotiated, and accepted the challenges of living a transnational life.

**Conclusion**

This chapter combines a local history of Zhangzhou—depicting the locales where Chinese-Arab direct and long-term interactions occurred—and world history, to explicate the larger historical contexts at the turn of the twentieth century. While other chapters are macrohistory explaining larger processes, this chapter is a microhistory of one person but stretched across a transnational canvas. The transnational biography approach highlights the linkages between people, places, institutions crossing nation-state borders and the spread of knowledge in the interconnected world.
So, how typical or atypical were Fahmi’s life situations? D. J. Harman, a student of Fahmi’s eldest son narrated another similar but slightly different story in his letter to Fahmi’s granddaughter:

When I started at Edinburg in the K. N. N. S. hostel, at that time in George Square, my roommate was an Arab from Aden, named Ahmed Affara. He actually came from Sheikh Othman, a village near Aden, where the Church of Scotland had carried on mission work in school, hospital and church for about 50 years. The people were strongly Moslem and there had been no group, and after leaving school he helped in the hospital. He finally decided to become a Christian and he was of course disinherited by his family and underwent a considerable amount of persecution by the local community. So the Mission eventually got him away from Sheikh Othman to a school in Palestine where he studied pre-medical subjects and then went on to Edinburgh to study medicine. We went through the medical course together. After graduation he worked for a while in Palestine, but then eventually he was accepted back in Sheikh Othman where he became the Superintendent of the hospital and did excellent work. My wife and I were able to visit him there twice while en route to and from China—in the days of the old P. and O. ships stopping at Aden.414

The general circumstances for Fahmi and Affara seemed similar, for both were Muslims from Arab societies converted by western missionaries who studied medicine in Edinburgh. What made their life stories different was the missionary fields that they were sent to—one in China far away from his original home and the other in Palestine still within the Arab world. Furthermore, Fahmi could not return to Egypt, whereas Affara was accepted back in his hometown. The different factors were external ones that were beyond an individual’s control. Living a transnational life does not simply depend on an individual’s wishes and efforts, but also involve many unforeseeable external and contingent factors.

Fahmi was not alone either in spreading western medical knowledge and service

as well as Christian messages in China. According to historian Benjamin Elman, from 1874 to 1905, the number of professional medical missionaries rose from ten to about three hundred.\textsuperscript{415} Fahmi was only one of the many. But his Arab origin made him distinct from everyone else. Historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam describes connectivity as linkages between delicate, usually invisible, and mostly isolated points between complex entities whose internal composition is invariably altered by the contact; ultimately, such causal connections generate a second-order phenomenon, in the sense that a necessary meta-connectivity comes into being whenever something truly new emerges. In the ancient school of Indian logicians, it is called connection born from connection.\textsuperscript{416} In the case of Ahmad Fahmi, the interactions he had throughout his life changed the internal compositions, to different extent, of himself, his family and friends, patients and students, missionary co-workers as well as the many peoples that we are not aware of in his life. Fahmi’s lived experiences also formed surprising connections between the institutions that he was affiliated and the societies that he lived in. The threads of local history are interwoven with global process: the arrival of foreign religions integrated over time in a small place of Zhangzhou and re-connected it to a wider world.

Therefore, Fahmi’s situations were typical and atypical at the same time. The rafts for Ahmad Fahmi’s floating life were the various mediations that made his globe-trotting possible in a changing world. I hope the analytical points gleaned from Fahmi’s life can be used to explain many other transnational lives whose energy, ingenuity, tenacity, and sympathy make up the triumph of life in the past, present, and future.


Conclusions

In *Navigating World History*, historian Patrick Manning remarks that “I can state that the basic nature of the world historical beast with some confidence: it is the story of past connections in the human community.”

John and William McNeill’s bird’s-eye view of human history in *The Human Web* takes the growth of long-distance connections as its major theme as well. Jerry Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Anand Yang also establish cross-cultural interactions as a category of analysis for world history in their collective efforts of organizing conferences and editing an essay collection.

Following this approach of the leading scholars of world history, this dissertation has discussed connections and interactions of diverse kinds between two major non-western societies—China and the Arab world—during the high tide of global imperialism, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In analyzing intellectual, commercial, and interpersonal connections, it has narrated stories of movement of ideas, commodities, and people. It does not privilege any particular type of connection because they are all parts of the human activity. In doing so, it undermines the notion that the conventionally recognized world regions are natural and self-contained. Rather, borders of regions were artificially constructed and porous. More importantly, the dissertation investigates how these connections and interactions were made possible. The textual, material, and spatiotemporal mediations were embedded in themes such as translation and appropriation of meanings, transfer of agricultural know-how and western medical practices.

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knowledge, the circulation of cultural and political meanings associated with the commodities-in-between, the unexpected encounters of different groups of people outside China and the Arab world, the interplay of Islam and Christianity in Egypt and China, and the transnational lives of unique individuals.

World historian Dominic Sachsenmaier asserts that “conceptual changes are insufficient in world history if they are not accompanied by structural transformation. The history discipline is still mainly divided by area and regional demarcations. This structure provided limited opportunities to engage in sustained academic dialogue across different world regions. In the future, global historical conceptualization will depend on intensifying transnational scholarly cooperation.”

The purpose of this dissertation is not to criticize regional area studies. Nor to demonstrate that one area is better than the other. Each field has its own history of origin and circumstances of development. Despite the differences, there are many parallel themes in the historiographies of modern East Asia and Middle East, such as Christian missionary efforts to evangelize, the circulation of ideas of “western” modernity and how “eastern” societies responded to it, the rise of nationalism against colonialism and imperialism, the development of modern industry and consumer society, to name just a few. This dissertation can only touch upon

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some of them. The purpose is to build constructively on the scholarship of Middle Eastern and East Asian histories to investigate new linkages and connectivities between them so that we can develop new ways of organizing knowledge and conceptual frameworks. In this way, not only each field can benefit one from the other, the new scholarship can also contribute to world history.

Christopher Alan Bayly’s work *The Birth of the Modern World* is an exemplary work weaving different regional historiographies into a world history. Bayly narrates how the decline of the Islamic empires and the anti-European Boxer rebellion of 1900 in China, events in the non-western societies, were interrelated with the European and American history. Conversely, it also covers how the ripple effects of crises such as the European revolutions and the American Civil War worked their way through to the rest of the world.\(^{422}\) Similarly, this dissertation not only investigates how Chinese and Arab societies were connected with each other via various western and Japanese mediations, it also traces the implications of chain of events from the boll weevil disease in the American South, to Japanese shipping companies’ movement of soybeans from China to England, to the adoption of soybean cultivation in Egypt.

Despite the emphasis on connections and interactions, which focuses on the mutual influences of different societies, world history scholarship also employs a comparative approach, which is fruitful in yielding insights on finding factors of differences between societies that were under similar circumstances. Historian Kenneth Pomeranz writes that “it seems necessary then that world history recommit to broad

comparison as well as a focus on connections.”\textsuperscript{423} Therefore, while this dissertation mainly aims at establishing previously little-known linkages, from time to time, it takes excursions into comparison as well, such as the development of cigarette industries in Egypt and China at the turn of the twentieth century.

With methodologies explained, the core argument of this dissertation is that mediations of various sorts constitute the linchpins and mechanisms of cross-cultural interactions in a multi-faceted and interconnected world. Linchpin and mechanisms here are metaphors for the something that holds the different elements of a complicated structure together. They are the assembly of moving parts performing a complete and functional motion. This something and assembly is what I call mediations. There are diverse modes of mediations—mainly textual, material, and spatiotemporal—as explained in the Introduction and the subsequent chapters. However, from these three major modes of mediations, other types of mediations, such as linguistic, institutional, and contextual mediations can also be derived. Furthermore, the mediator and the mediated are also dynamic, fluid, and malleable. By examining the world via the lens of mediations, the image of the world becomes more multi-dimensional and eclectic.

Then what makes the conceptualization of “mediated imaginations” different from the currently widely accepted network theory? In recent years, the network theory has been increasingly employed in historical inquiries.\textsuperscript{424} The network approach works

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}

\item \textsuperscript{424} Such as Roger V. Gould, “Uses of Network Tools in Comparative Historical Research,” in \textit{Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences}, edited by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; John F. Padgett, “Open Elite? Social Mobility, Marriage, and Family in Florence, 1282–1494,” \textit{Renaissance Quarterly} 63 (2010): 357–411; For an introductory textbook that takes an interdisciplinary look at economics, sociology, computing and
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
best in explaining the multi-directional movement of ideas, commodities, and people, but it cannot reflect the transformations of intellectual, commercial, and interpersonal connections at the nodes of the net. For example, the transfer of western medical knowledge via the mediation of Ahmad Fahmi from England to China cannot be adequately explained by the network theory. Even if the physical movement of Fahmi across vast geographic space was made possible by the transnational missionary networks, the acquisition, translation, and application of western medical knowledge was embedded within Fahmi himself. Fahmi was a moving and transformative node. He functioned both as a mediator and the mediated because he lived at the intersections of intellectual, linguistic, and religious components of different societies. Neither can the network theory take into account the spatiotemporal contexts as well as historical contingency of events in the past. Without the historical time of WWI and the contingency of shortage of laborers in the US military forces, Chinese and Arab unlettered laborers would never have met each other. Therefore, mediation offers a more encompassing framework for us to understand world history. With luck, this perspective might be able to shed a ray of light on any other cross-cultural interactions and connections as well.

information science, and applied mathematics to understand networks and behavior, see David Easley and Jon Kleinberg, Networks, Crowds, and Markets: Reasoning about a Highly Connected World, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
Appendix: A Timetable of China-Arab Interactions in History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>138 BCE-115 BCE</td>
<td>Zhang Qian (200 BCE-114 BCE), the first Chinese traveler to the Middle East, explored the Parthian Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>651 CE</td>
<td>The first official Arab envoy to Chang’an during the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907), Islam comes into China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>751</td>
<td>Tang Dynasty and the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) fought at Talas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>751-801</td>
<td>Du Huan was brought to Baghdad and toured with the Arab army throughout the caliphate from 751 to 761, wrote <em>Jing Xing Ji</em> in 801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>756</td>
<td>The Abbasid caliph Abu Ja’far al-Mansur sent over 4,000 Arab mercenaries to join the Chinese army against the An Lushan Rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>758</td>
<td>Another Arab embassy arrived in Chang’an in order to pay tribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1225</td>
<td>Zhao Rukuo (1170-1231), a customs inspector at the city of Quanzhou during the Song dynasty wrote a two-volume book called <em>Zhu Fan Zhi</em>, introducing the Arab world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1274-79</td>
<td>Sayyid ’Ajall Shams al-Din ruled Yunnan during the Mongol rule of China (1271-1368)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1345-1346</td>
<td>Ibn Battuta visited China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1405-1433</td>
<td>Zheng He (1371–1433)’s seven naval expeditions to the Middle East and Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887-1919</td>
<td>Ahmad Fahmi (1861-1933) lived in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894-1895</td>
<td><em>al-Muqtataf</em> reports on the first Sino-Japanese War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903-1907</td>
<td>Qing Muslim ambassador Yang Shu (1844-1917) in Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Imam Wang Haoran (Wang Kuan) visited Egypt and Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Chinese Muslim students arrived in Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td><em>Dongjing liuxue qingzhen jiaoyuhui</em> (The Education Association of Muslims Studying Abroad in Tokyo) was established in Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td><em>Zhengzong Aiguo Bao</em> (A Newspaper of Authentic Patriotism) in Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td><em>Zhu Yuan Baihua Bao</em> (A Vernacular Newspaper of Bamboo Garden) in Tianjin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td><em>Xing Hui Pian</em> published in Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Soybean cultivation experimentation in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>The category of “China and the Far East” was divided into two categories of China and the other Far East states in the Egyptian customs records, symbolizing the increasing importance of the Chinese market to the Egyptian cigarette industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917-1918</td>
<td>Chinese and Arab laborers working for the American Expeditionary Forces in France during WWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Egypt was listed as a separate category of country of origin for imported cigarettes and cigars in the Chinese customs reports, symbolizing the growing importance of Egypt as a cigarette supplier to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Republic of China recognized the independence of Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Republic of China established consulate in Alexandria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Al-Azhar University agreed to accept Chinese Muslim students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Imam Ma Songting met with al-Azhar’s president Az-Zawahiri and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>King Fuad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1947</td>
<td>Thirty-five Chinese Muslim students studied at al-Azhar University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Ma Jian published Nazrah jam'i‘ah ila ta’rikh al-islam fi as-Sin wa-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ahwal al-Muslimin fi ha (Zhongguo huijiao gaiguan, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Overview of the History of Islam in China and of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conditions of Muslims There) in Arabic in Cairo by al-Fath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Ma Jian published translation of the Analects in Arabic Kitab al-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiwar li Kunfushiyus (Confucius’ Book of Dialogue), by the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salafiyya Press (al-Matba‘a al-Salafiyya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Zhongguo Huijiao Jindong Fangwen tuan visit Mecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Pang Shiqian published As-Sin wal-Islam (China and Islam) in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic in Cairo by the Muslim Brotherhood’s Section of Outreach to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the Islamic World (qism al-ittsal bi al-‘alam al-Islam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Peking University established the first Arabic language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>department in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The People’s Republic of China established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Hai Weiliang published al-Alaqat bina al-Arab wal-Sin (The Arab-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese Relations) in Arabic in Cairo, by al-maktabah an-nahdah al-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>masriyyah in Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Pang Shiqian published Aiji Jiu Nian (Nine Years in Egypt) in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beijing in Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Chen Keli (1923-1970) translated Hai Weiliang’s al-Alaqat bina al-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arab wal-Sin into Chinese and published as Zhongguo he Alabo de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>guanxi (Relations between China and the Arabs) in Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-1958</td>
<td>Several Muslim uprisings in the PRC against the Communist rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>The Arab League voted to recognize ROC as the legitimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>representative of the Chinese people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>The PRC approved the Mossadaq’s nationalization of Iran’s oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955, Apr. 18-24th</td>
<td>The Bandung Conference, watershed for the PRC-Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 May.30th</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sept. 24th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with North Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Suez Crisis, the PRC supported Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>National Chengchi University in Taiwan established the first Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and Islamic Studies Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Ain Shams University established the first Chinese language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958 Aug. 25th</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov. 1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The PRC recognized the Algerian Provisional Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The PRC set up official relations with Algeria before it gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>The PRC began aid to Algerian independence struggle against France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964 Jan.10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Tunis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-1971</td>
<td>The PRC supported Oman Dhofari rebellion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with South Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 Mar. 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Kuwait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 Aug. 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 Aug. 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 Nov. 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>The PRC supported the October War and abstains the UN resolution on ceasefire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Apr. 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Nov.</td>
<td>The PRC supported Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 May. 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Oman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Aug.</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Dec. 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC and the US issues joint communiqué for establishing diplomatic relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Feb.</td>
<td>The Islamic Revolution of Iran. The PRC recognized the new government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Dec.</td>
<td>The PRC against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1988</td>
<td>Iran-Iraq War, the PRC sold arms to both sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Riots in Xinjiang province after the Islamic revolution in Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 Nov. 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with UAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 July. 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Qatar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 April 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Bahrain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 June 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Tiananmen Square crackdown, Arab countries followed US and EU to impose economic sanctions on the PRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1991</td>
<td>The PRC condemned Iraq invasion in Kuwait and abstained UN resolution on US military intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with the Republic of Yemen after its reunion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 July 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 Jan. 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The PRC set up relations with Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 Dec.</td>
<td>The PRC set up embassy in Gaza, Palestine</td>
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