

Moderator's introduction to the workshop

There are two goals in convening the workshop themed “History and Literature in Classical Arabic” and inviting Chinese, Arab, and Western scholars to meet and share their experiences while conducting research on the Arab civilization. The first one is to explore a path to study the Arab civilization through multiple perspectives and conversations. This is to avoid concealing and distorting Arab civilization’s complex and pluralistic nature as Orientalist and nationalist essentialist research paradigms did previously. The second is to further advance Chinese academia’s understanding of Arab civilization. Without fundamental studies and understanding of civilizations, area studies cannot progress in-depth, and global awareness and responsibility cannot be successfully nurtured by contemporary Chinese people.

Two topics drew lively discussion among the participants in the workshop. One is the issue of modernity of classical history and literature written in Arabic. It is an issue of how we can go back to the historical context in which these works were produced and scrutinize the evolution and innovation embodied in the works themselves. At the same time, it’s also about how to reevaluate the works in question in the contemporary context as well as how to explore the potential of dialogue between them and contemporary social ideological trends. The other revolves around the way different cultures and different nations perceived each other, and the way they construct the “self” through imagining the “other,” as reflected in classical history and literature written in Arabic. This topic is relevant to how we should bridge the rift in human society caused by identity

politics and identity conflicts.

The presentations of and discussions between the participants in the workshop also reveal that the aim of research in contemporary times on classical writings in the Arabic language and on the Arab civilization is not to search for the supposedly intrinsic features and essential characteristics of the Arab civilization and the Arab nation in order to explain the complex social and political conflicts in the Arab world today, but rather to bring the production of knowledge back to its original historical context, to present the complexity and pluralism of the Arab civilization, and to discuss and try to elucidate the multiple possibilities of the classical writings' texts, so as to expose the one-sided distortion and exploitation of civilization and cultural traditions by contemporary conflicts. The success of the workshop highlights the necessity in contemporary times of studying the traditions of history and literature in the Arabic language as well as the multifaceted Arab civilization. Only when an open and inclusive attitude toward the world that aims to seek common ground while preserving differences is adhered to can Chinese academia and the public explore and understand "self" and "others" in a more objective and rational way. Only so can we integrate into the world more proactively, fight back parochial essentialism, nationalism and populism, and thereby achieve prosperity together with all other civilizations in the world.

Lian Chaoqun

September 25, 2019

The 22nd Broadyard Workshop
History and Literature in Classical Arabic, II
September 14-15, 2019

The Broadyard Workshop (博雅工作坊) with the theme “History and Literature in Classical Arabic” was held by the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) on September 14 and 15. Among the participants and attendees of the workshop were more than 10 experts and scholars in the field of history and literature in Classical Arabic from universities including Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing International Studies University, Ningxia University, the Lebanese University and University of Göttingen, as well as students and teachers from the Department of Arabic Language and Culture at Peking University.

Prof. Zhang Hongyi’s presentation was on Sa’ ālik (brigand) poets and Lamiyyat al-Arab.

She said the Arab tribe is a community of high kinship awareness and strong interpersonal relations. Prior to the Islamic era, tribe provided the most substantial bond between Arabs in their life. Therefore, many think that all Arabs back then were tribespeople; individuals contributed to the tribe and were also protected by the tribe, and life in that era was quiet and peaceful. Zhang Hongyi pointed out that this perception is flawed in that tribes were also composed of different classes, between which various relationships such as attachment and oppression existed. In addition, there were also tribespeople that got expelled from their tribes and became vagabonds, losing all rights, with no

tribes to protect them and avenge them for blood feuds. The poems of Zuhayr and al-Nabigha show us the bright side of tribal society, but we should also notice the dark side of it, especially in regard to the Sa' ālik, or the vagabonds.

The Sa' ālik were those who had been forced out of their tribes because of crimes, those who were children of black Ethiopians, or those who were destitute. She went on from here to introduce Al-Shanfara and his Lamiyyat Al-Arab. Al-Shanfara was known for being a fast runner, and it was said that he could take leaps that were 21 steps long. Al-Shanfara died in the year in which the Ethiopians invaded Yemen, an indicator that he lived in the same age as Imru' al-Qais, one of the great Jahili poets and a poetry annotator. Imru' al-Qais holds an important place in the history of Arabic poems and is respected and admired because of his style: exquisite metaphors and rhetorical expressions, robust figures of speech, and the delicate and detailed description of Arab lives and societies in the Jahiliyyah period, especially the vivid portraits of the Sa' ālik.

Prof. Zhang Hongyi cited several verses as examples:

1. A vagabond poet who had left the tribespeople that abashed him regained peace with his nature in the wilderness, and felt that his life now was much better than it had been before:

Get ye up, O sons of my mother, the return of your beasts
from their watering;

...

And I have (other) familiars besides you; —a fierce wolf,
and a sleek spotted (leopard), and a long-manedhyaena.

They are a family with whom the confided secret is not

betrayed; neither is the offender thrust out for that which has happened.

The poet expressed his feelings in a straightforward fashion, showing his mind and thoughts freely:

And each one (of them) is vehement in resistance, and brave; only, that I, when the first of the chased beasts present themselves, am (still) braver.

And if hands are stretched forth toward the provisions, I am not the most hasty of them. For the greediest of a party is the most hasty.

And that is naught by a stretch of (my) generosity, out of a kindness towards them. And the more excellent is he who confers a favor.

2. The poet exclaimed that his supplies were more than enough and thus needed no grace from his tribespeople. He had an ambitious heart, a trenchant blade, a first-class bow and good lads by his side, what else was there to be worried about?

Three companions; — a dauntless heart, and a trenchant drawn sword, and a slimly-long yellow (bow)

That twangs loudly; of those with smooth flat surfaces, ornamented with clasps passed on to it, and a suspensory,

Which, when the arrow glides forth from it, moans, as though it were a bereaved (mother) robbed of her child, who lifts up her voice and weeps aloud.

3. Scholars discovered that al-Shanfara dedicated the whole poem to portraying the life of Sa' ālik poets, and in this part of the poem he depicted his inner feelings in great details:

And on a day of (the canicular period of) Sirius, when his gossamer floats melting about, and his vipers, among his

over-heated rocks, writhe in agony,

I set up my face right against it, with no screen in front thereof, and no cover, save a tattered At-hami rag,

And a shaggy head of hair, on which when the wind blows, there fly out, as fluffs from its tufts, what might be combed away;

Far, in time, from the touch of oil, and from a riddance of vermin; soiled with filth; disheveled.

Zhang Hongyi pointed out that the Sa' ālik poets' works, represented by al-Shanfara's Lamiyyat, are full of dislike and disgust toward tribes and happiness and relief for breaking away from tribal life, in stark contrast with the Arab's praise for the tribe's value and the pride they take in tribal characters. If we scrutinize these poems, we can find that one of the tribal values is completely absent from them: the sense of honor for their clans. This is because the Sa' ālik poets were expelled from their clans, wandered in solitude, and could trust no one except their own spirit and blades to fend off misfortune and suffering. Therefore, what the Arab Sa' ālik poets expressed in their works was the pain unique to the Jahiliyyah period and the struggle against the society. These poets would never stop fighting against dark reality as long as they were still alive, and they would strive to show others who were truly the messengers of the heavens.

Jordanian Professor Samira Salami, from PKU's School of Foreign Languages, gave a presentation on al-Mutanabbi's poetry. She said that the talent of al-Mutanabbi is well-known. His works cross the boundaries of time and space, making countless readers in ancient and modern times obsessed, and his

works are also the focus of literary researchers. Up to the present, people often mention al-Mutanabbi, and interpret and analyze his works.

Salami pointed out that existential philosophical questions are what the East and West have been thinking about through the ages. Al-Mutanabbi, who lived in the first half of the 14th century, and some contemporary existential philosophers have a certain intersection of ideas. Al-Mutanabbi is an extremely modernistic Arab poet, and this kind of modernity is ahead of his time. He broke into the maze of “modernity” much earlier than his contemporaries, and his new ideas shine with a light which breaks all the boundaries between time and space. Therefore, to research Arab modernism pioneers, we cannot limit ourselves to the middle of last century. Instead, we should look back upon history, and explore the modern elements which Arab cultural classics reflect in history. Even though these elements go far back, they are the main carriers of Arab modernity; they break the barriers of time and show us the new features sprouting in that era, especially the spirit of freedom. The poems of al-Mutanabbi present his universal standpoint toward “existence” and “humanity” and realize the inspiration of rationality and aesthetics by questioning history, essentially shocking Arab people’s way of thinking. However far away that era is, this is undoubtedly a modernity.

Salami further examined the existential spirit which al-Mutanabbi’s poetry reflects, from the introduction of the view of existential freedom, to prove that these philosophers’ spirits were already embodied in an Arab poet who pursued liberty and cared about humanity.

At first, she quoted a text about “freedom and responsibility”: how many people are obsessed with freedom, and how do existentialists view freedom? People exist freely, and the key to existence is freedom. Freedom is the choice of humans and their responsibility for destiny. The degree of freedom is the degree of existence. Salami thinks that, in existentialists’ view, freedom is a responsibility that belongs to all beings. Existentialism holds that freedom is the responsibility of humans that comes with enjoying complete humanity.

Salami mentioned that if someone reads the poems of al-Mutanabbi and knows about his writing and his life, the reader will find that the poet most liked to think about questions of freedom and responsibility. The views of al-Mutanabbi and existentialists resemble each other on these questions.

Regarding al-Mutanabbi’s philosophy of life, he insists being his own master and king of his own destiny. He said that if he wants, he can be honest to himself and make his own decisions. He is proud of his suffering from wandering from place to place, because it is a defense of his freedom. He persists in his freedom. Day after day and season after season, he endowed a huge spiritual power in his poetry, and invited people in distress to confront destiny’s challenges. In those dim years, al-Mutanabbi rode his horse of poetry to express enthusiasm. He said that if destiny was a defiant challenger, his poems and every single syllable could be a steed. Al-Mutanabbi knew clearly that choosing self is the only choice. With respect to al-Mutanabbi’s universal sentiments, he liberated himself and the world. He dreamed of the newness of nation and society. His poetry is incisive, penetrating, stirring, and thought-provoking,

comforting those in distress and encouraging them to get rid of the shackle of destiny. He was responsible for liberating himself, or even more, for liberating the world. He adhered to stubbornness, and cared about the whole world. Al-Mutanabbi did his best to change that generation, believing that he was able to save the Arabs from the claws of foreigners.

Al-Mutanabbi spread his thoughts to readers and helped people get rid of numbness through poetry. He let people see reality clearly, showed them a wonderful world, and inspired them to see real humanity. He aimed for the highest and saved the world from desperation, and he was a true pioneer of his age. Al-Mutanabbi encouraged people to be self-improving and fearless, never give in to destiny, and not fear hardships. He opened the gate of bravery for readers, and inspired them to leave numbness and decadence behind. Al-Mutanabbi used a series of special images to describe those who give up freedom with metaphors such as “corpse,” “puppet,” “lamb,” and so on. At that time, there were Arabs who gave up their own freedom and forgot nature, becoming “thing” instead of a “human”; they were numb and satisfied with being dejected, and thought nothing mattered, giving up all responsibilities. Al-Mutanabbi said that he went into a herd of lambs, obedient and following others’ orders. Al-Mutanabbi tried to make the Arabs sober and inspired.

Al-Mutanabbi worried that people would lose their sense of responsibility. He thought that the sense of responsibility is a part of humanity. Those who are responsible are noble, and the nations with a sense of responsibility are noble. Al-Mutanabbi felt aggrieved when he saw those who lost their sense of

responsibility, and felt his heart bleeding for the sinking of the nation when he saw the Arabs lose their sense of responsibility. This sadness is lonely but noble as well. He was a person of integrity and honor and never yielded or lowered himself. He wanted to be gold in mud and to be a noble man among the evil. He expressed his ambitions in poems, and many great works contain his noble feelings.

Salami said that the existentialism from more than a thousand years ago has now become the “philosophy of the twentieth century” in many people’s view. Existentialism addressed many questions related to human existence and nature, such as freedom, responsibility, principle, and so on. Al-Mutanabbi’s poetry shines with the light of existentialism and communicates with all generations and contemporary people, transcending time. We could say that Al-Mutanabbi is the father of Arab modernism.

Prof. Zou Lanfang, from the University of International Business and Economics, gave a presentation entitled “The Beauty of Arab Classic Poems.” She discussed this theme from three aspects: the beauty of Jahiliyyah poetry, the beauty of Nuwas’ poetry, and the beauty of al-Niffari’s poetry.

Jahiliyyah poetry embodies a unique comparative perspective on the world and everything on earth. It is not only a stimulus to the senses, but also a stimulus to thought. In the image of wind and sand, time and space are linked, intertwined, and tossed, and they are dazzling, as in the mist or the maze of space. Therefore, when seeing dilapidated walls and feeling distracted, Jahiliyyah poets release the depression of the soul and melancholy in the heart through space. This kind of space

endows things with power, and human being's desire to control and master becomes the first impetus for things. The life of Jahiliyyah poets is the interlacing of time and space and combination of contingency and necessity. The chivalry of Jahiliyyah poets is not arrogance but a spirit of valor and courtesy, which can make the poets tolerate their enemies. Killing enemies is not their goal, but rather protection of friends. This is also a kind of chivalrous spirit which shows a knight's firm faith of being fearless and unstoppable. At the same time, for those knights, the real victory is to win with courage and nerve; they are not proud of huge power, but of controlling their power, raid or strike. Thus, their spirit of chivalry reflects the knight's personality, and this personality can be classified as moral character and an "unsubmissive" individuality.

The poems of Nuwas are controversial. The poet mentions what he rejects and detests, and also what he accepts and advocates, then he argues against both. He opposed the nomadic customs of the Arabs and rejects religious and moral preaching. He advocates a settled civilized life and getting rid of religious rules, and that is why we often find a unique way of thinking and moral system in his poems. His poems discover people's energy and desire, and bridge the gaps between emotions and activities, desire and energy.

The poetry of al-Niffari mingles both activity and inertia. The connotation of the words does not only focus on the surface of text but on its symbolic meaning and insinuation. The meaning of his words originates in rational original meaning but goes beyond this, which means these words must be understood through explanation. Therefore, his word use is profound and

flexible, and his meaning is not limited to the surface text. Al-Niffari interpreted religion from his own perspective, so his cognitive perspective is different from a traditional religious one. He used his own methods to interpret Qur'an, from the surface to the inside. Al-Niffari believed that people's perception is unrepeatable and constantly new, so his words have unlimited meanings, mingle history and modernity, carry historical memory, and present Arab creativity. In addition, the poetry of al-Niffari has a compassionate humanistic empathy. People's worries, longings, desires, and doubts flood his poetry, which makes readers feel a distinctive kind of zeal, excitement, and joy, and which can also let readers unload the burdens of life and believe everything will be fine. His poetry lifts the boundary between human and god; this is the personification of deity and also deification of human thoughts.

Prof. Hammoud Younes from Beijing University gave a presentation entitled "Modernity in the poems of Abu Tammam."

Younes thinks that modernity is about the present consciousness. It tries to break through the known, traditions, or even classics and transcends the past through new forms of creation and different views. Based on this understanding, modernity is new and changing. The concept of modernity is relative, and it is closely related to time, so we can talk about modernity in each era. Each era has its own modernity, and the poems in each era can prove this. For example, during the period of Jahiliyyah, the activities of brigand poets, their rebellion against prevailing values of society, and the performance in Jahiliyyah poems offer modernity which is different from their

predecessors.

In early Islam, poems contained a lot of modernity, and poets innovated the forms and contents of poetry. Also, during the period of Abbasid Dynasty, poets had many innovations in the creation of Jahiliyyah classic poems, such as the works of Bashir ibnBurd, Abu Nuwas, and Abu Tammam, among others.

Regarding the connection between modernity, literary form and content, Younes opined that modernity is not only related to time, but also closely related to the content of poetry and prose in literature, and innovation is also reflected in literary form and content. Abu Nuwas' transformation of traditional poetic forms during the Jahiliyyah period is clear proof of modernity reflected by poems of the Abbasid Dynasty.

When Younes talked about the debate between traditionalists and innovators, he said that there are two schools among literary critics. One is the traditional school, which adheres to all the forms of poetry; the other one is innovative school. The famous literary critic Ibn Qutaybah expressed objective opinions about this phenomenon in the introduction of his book, *Poetry and Poets*. Younes explained the modernity in the poetry of Abu Tammam from three aspects. First, being uncommon when it comes to meaning. Ancient Arab poets used uncommon meanings of certain words to endow them with poetic meaning in order to express philosophical ideas. Second, using excessive metaphors, and other literary devices such as puns and contrasts. Third, separating image and art.

Duan Zhijie, associate professor from Heilongjiang University, discussed the impact of commercial civilization on early poetry in the Abbasid Dynasty. She said that commercial

civilization refers to the sum of spiritual civilization created by people in the process of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption. It mainly refers to social psychology, value systems, ways of thinking, concepts of human relations, aesthetic taste, and other things that people have accumulated over a long period of time through spiritual creative activities amid commercial practice. Literature and commercial culture constantly produce information exchange and interchange, and both influence and permeate each other through human beings as an intermediary. The uniqueness of literature itself restricts the way in which it adapts to the commercial cultural ecology: obeying or resisting.

When literature obeys its commercial cultural ecology, the following factors could be used to verify the impact of commercial culture on literature. First, economic values. It is firstly manifested as money worship, and this idea always shows an upward trend in the period when commercial activities are very frequent. Commercial culture has values that pay extra attention to consumption, and the pursuit of the enjoyment of life is the embodiment of such values. Second, moral values. The change of economic values must lead to the change of moral values, and the moral values of commercial culture will challenge the traditional cultural order. Commercial culture places an emphasis on individual values, rather than social values or moral values. Under the influence of commercial culture, poets pay more attention to personal emotional expression and the depiction of real-life experience. Third, aesthetic values. According to the aesthetic values of commercial culture, all literary and artistic creations only have

one purpose: entertainment.

When literature resists its commercial cultural ecology, the opposite effect appears. In terms of economic values, literature manifests as weakening the status of money or even regarding money as “the root of all evil.” In terms of moral values, it maintains and strictly follows traditional morals, and it puts people’s social values and moral values first, while putting individual values second or even ignoring them. As for aesthetic values, literature reflects a pursuit of moral purification and enlightenment, and holds that the ultimate purpose of literary creation is to educate people.

Poems during the early Abbasid dynasty broke through moral barriers, and many new forms appeared.

First, Khamriyya (Ode on Wine) appeared, highlighting individual values, personal emotions, and life experiences, and daring to express them in poetry. For example:

Don’t cry for Layla, don’t rave about Hind!
But drink among roses a rose-red wine,
A drought that descends in the drinker’s throat,
bestowing its redness on eyes and cheeks.
The wine is a ruby, the glass is a pearl,
served by the hand of a slim-fingered girl,
who serves you the wine from her hand, and wine
from her mouth — doubly drunk, for sure, will you be!

Second, the eroticization of poetry. The development of commercial culture in early Abbasid contributed to the arousal of individual consciousness and release of hedonistic consciousness. With the gradual development of commerce, hedonism consistently spread in early Abbasid society, and both

rulers and common people were all affected by the hedonism of commercial culture. For example:

A pampered girl as perfect as the full moon
Sang to an inebriated heart
Those charming eyes
Stunned us to a final rest

Another example:

A slave was born alone
Like if all women were her servants
When the virgins visit
They gather around her like an idol
I was thirsting but she didn't quench me
with love, or heal my heart

Bashar ibn Burd once boldly challenged religion in his poems:

They said our meeting is inappropriate and they lied
There's no obligation, nor harm in a kiss
Those who judge others will never accomplish their deeds
The ardent, brazen one wins.

Duan Zhijie said that when commercial culture was impacting original Arab moral standards and people's values, the appearance of ascetic poets resisted the erosion of commercial culture. They sought to purify the mind in religion, advocated self-righteousness, and broke with extravagant life of materialism. For example:

You who deride the poor, won't you learn
Affluence is more despised
Poverty is better than wealth
When you don't look blindly

You sin to make your wealth greater

Instead of getting closer to Allah

People started to rethink the relationship between money, wealth, and life. They thought money is neither almighty nor the only sign of wealth. Contentment and spiritual wealth are the greatest wealth in life. For example:

To be rich and discontent is to be poor

And to be satisfied with less is to be rich

Wealth is in one's heart, and there lies the utmost wealth.

The economic values that emphasize consumption in commercial culture promote enjoying life and valuing real life. The Abbasid people who conformed to commercial culture paid attention to real life, and spent each day as the last day in life, enjoying drinking and spending money freely. In their eyes, the present life is transient, and life is death.

Reproduce to death

And build to ruin

All will end in ashes.

They thought that death wanders around people anytime, and people are wretches who survive in the shadow of death.

The eyes of every living being

The flag of death is flying

Cry over yourself, poor man

If you know how to cry.

The worry of death in the present life made them persistently pursue the afterlife, and they believed that there would be eternal happiness in the afterlife.

Qian Ailin, the assistant professor from the Southern University of Science and Technology, spoke about the

relationship between Maqamah and the Latin medieval beast-epic *Ysengrimus*.

Maqamah is a traditional Arabic literary genre, and it first appeared at the beginning of 10th century. *The Maqamat of Badi Al-zaman Al-hamadhani* includes 52 short stories with different themes and it is the first work in the form of Maqamah. The protagonists of *The Maqamat of Badi Al-zaman Al-hamadhani* are the eloquent rogue Abul-Fath al-Iskanderi from Alexandria and Isa ibnHisham who tells his stories. Every story has the same beginning: "Isa ibnHisham told us..." and Isa starts to narrate the stories by saying he meets Abul-Fath al-Iskanderi in different places in Islamic countries. Some of these locations will be familiar from the headlines: Mosul, Basra, Samara, and Baghdad.

The Maqamat of Badi Al-zaman Al-hamadhani basically can be divided into seven parts: first, foreshadowing; second, the preface in which Isa explains where he comes from; third, the sentences which connect the preface and the anecdotes; fourth, the anecdotes which comprise the most important part of *Maqamah* (one work usually has two or more); fifth, a scene where Isa recognizes the often disguised elegant rogue; sixth, the ending of the poems; seventh, a final ending which includes the farewell of both. Among the stories in *The Maqamat of Badi Al-zaman Al-hamadhani*, only ten have endings.

Qian Ailin pointed out that *The Maqamat of Badi Al-zaman Al-hamadhani* first prevailed in the region of North Africa, because Ibrahim al-Husri once talked

about the influence of Abu Bakribn Duraïd to Al-hamadhani in his *Zahrât al-Adab* (*Flower of Literature*), and other scholars also recorded this. Qian Ailin's speech focused on whether Maqamah impacted the monster stories in the 11th century in Europe. Qian Ailin made a comparison to *Ysengrimus*, which uses many dialogues to shape the image of an eloquent wolf in order to satirize clergymen and their behaviors. In *Ysengrimus*, the eloquence of the protagonist resembles protagonists in Maqamah.

In addition, another element which resembles *The Maqamat of Badi Al-zaman Al-hamadhani* is that similar poems appear in the end.

Qian Ailin said that in future research we should find more examples which prove that Arab Maqamah did influence the monster stories in Europe; we should analyze who brought Maqamah to Europe, and Europeans' attitude to it. We should work with Spanish Classics scholars to obtain more definitive results in the future.

Prof. Masoud al-Daher, from Lebanese University, mainly studies Arab history and society. His presentation was entitled "The Blockade and Famine Strategies towards Mount Lebanon from 1915-1918."

Lebanon became a possession of the Ottoman Empire in 1516. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Lebanon people revolted many times against the double oppression of the Turkish sultan and local feudal masters. At the beginning of the 17th century, Fakhr-al-Din II's power flourished. He set up an army and implemented social reforms, establishing Greater Lebanon, which was functionally independent. However, the Turkish army

arrived, and Fakhr-al-Din II surrendered and was executed. At the end of the 18th century, Bashir Shihab II inherited the unachieved goals and made use of peasant uprising to finish off several powerful feudal families and centralize domination by his own hand. In 1831, he allied with Muhammad Ali, the governor of Egypt who revolted against Turkish rule, and expelled Turkish people from Lebanon. In 1840, after Egyptian troops withdraw from Lebanon, Britain and France kept provoking conflicts between the Christian Maronites and Islamic Druze to fight for domination of the Lebanese market. Turkey took the opportunity to reoccupy Lebanon and divided it into two provinces. The north was ruled by a pro-French Maronite feudal master, while the south was controlled by a pro-British Druze feudal master. In 1860, a feud happened between Maronites and Druze, and French troops intervened. Since then, the autonomy of Lebanon has been recognized and guaranteed internationally. Its chief executive was appointed by the Turkish government and agreed on by France, Britain, Russia, and other countries, and the entire region believed in Christianity.

Al-Daher described the Great Famine of Mount Lebanon during World War I and analyzed the causes. It is known that Lebanon suffered from double oppression and blockades during World War I. It suffered from an internal direct blockade from Ottoman troops and their German allies, and external controls imposed by Britain and France on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Because of this, Lebanese people paid a high price in both lives and money. Al-Daher opined that the Great Famine of Mount Lebanon was the consequence of European countries' plotting to destroy the Arab regime. European

countries used propaganda carried out by the Ottoman regime on Lebanese people during the war to block information and cut off local and external commerce, isolating local people from receiving any help, resulting in the famine. According to statistics, the Great Famine of Mount Lebanon caused nearly 180,000 deaths.

Al-Daher said that there is not detailed research on the Great Famine of Mount Lebanon. He collected governmental documents, social organization reports, magazine articles, and personal memoirs to conduct an objective and comprehensive analysis of its causes.

Al-Daher concluded that today, more than 100 years after the famine, Lebanese people should ask themselves whether the related materials for research are authentic, and how authentic they are. Why did Lebanese historians not make academic contributions in this respect, but rather refer to other countries' research? Undoubtedly, it is an extremely complicated question. It is painful to ask these questions in light of the suffering the Lebanese people went through, but our research cannot stop because of this. It must be realized that this situation is the result of multiple factors, including internal and external reasons, and political and religious reasons. Thus, we must examine the underlying causes and learn from them.

Prof. Jens Jacob Scheiner from the University of Göttingen in Germany gave a presentation entitled "The Christians' Image in the Eyes of Muslims: Taking al-Azdi al-Basri (786-825) as an Example." He introduced al-Azdi al-Basri and the conquests and expansions in the Bilad al-Sham and Greater Syria, described the images of Muslims and Christians in detail, and cited hadith

to prove that Muslims take a fixed and negative way to view Christians.

Scheiner stated that the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by Allah, and then passed on to the companions by Muhammad orally. It is the fundamental classic of Islam and the origin of Arab Islamic culture, as well as the basis of the Arab national politics, economy, religion, military, education, law, and other aspects. Hadith originally meant "news" or "narrative," and later it specially referred to Sunnah, the records of the deeds, sayings, and silent approvals of Muhammad. For the questions that are not specified in the Qur'an, one can seek answers and evidence from hadith. Hadith is the interpretation and supplement of the Qur'an. It is the criterion of Muslims' lives and behaviors, and also the basic source of Islamic Law (Sharia).

There are generally two points of the Qur'an's attitude toward Christianity. First, the Qur'an affirms Christian basic doctrine; second, it criticizes and condemns the part of Christian doctrine which oversteps monotheism. The Qur'an states that "Indeed, those who have believed and those who were Jews and the Sabeans and the Christians and the Magians and those who associated with Allah – Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed Allah is, over all things, witness." Regarding this uncertainty, the Qur'an makes a judgement that "Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient." In hadith, many examples that show antagonism between Islam and Christianity or Muslims and Christians can be found. For example, "to believe in God alone and in Muhammad, to perform our prayer(s), to turn (the faces)

towards the direction of our prayer(s) (*qibla*), to adhere to our Prophet's normative practices (*sunna*), to break the Cross, and finally to give up drinking wine and eating pork." The "cross" here is the cross in Christianity, and the superiority of Muslims can be clearly seen from the texts. Today Muslims always treat Christians with a hostile attitude, and part of the reason is because after the Crusades, the Western Christian world launched wars in the name of Christianity. Therefore, the Muslim world in the East is generally hostile to Christianity.

Scheiner cited three parts of hadith to prove his opinions and pointed out that the result is surprising and confusing. Can we trust all the historical materials? Are the views which we accept are objective and credible? Scheiner said no. He said that due to a lack of understanding and communication, Muslims have a fixed stereotypical image of Christians, and cultural exchanges and ideological discussions are needed to break this barrier.

Yoones Dehghani Farsani, post-doctoral student from PKU's Department of Arabic Language and Culture, give a presentation entitled "Hadith Authority: the characteristics of *Sahih al-Bukhari*," and shared his research with attendees.

Yoones said al-Bukhari spent 16 years collecting and sifting nearly 100,000 narrations from 1,080 scholars, and eventually completed the collection *Sahih al-Bukhari*. It is one of the six most authoritative hadith collections of Sunni Islam and viewed as one of the two most trusted collections of hadith along with Sahih Muslim. *Sahih al-Bukhari* is the most reliable Islamic classic besides the Qur'an, and it is also a compilation of Muhammad's words and deeds. *Sahih al-Bukhari* is divided into

93 volumes, covering the contents of Islamic belief, law, economy, politics, family, war, and so on.

Yoones explained the reasons why most hadith scholars adopted a chronological style. At first, most hadith were arranged in accordance with the chronological order of historical development, thus forming a conventional arrangement mechanism. This arrangement was adopted by the Islamic linguistic field and pedagogical field, and it is also a convenient way for hadith scholars to collect and record hadith.

As a master of hadith, al-Bukhari had his own theoretical system. Every chapter of Sahih al-Bukhari reflects his view of law. His biggest difference from other hadith scholars is that, according to his view of law, he divided hadith into different chapters such as business, marriage, contract, testimony, war, and so on, and recorded the contents in different categories. Sometimes he even divided a section of hadith into pieces and placed them into different chapters according to contents. The reason for adopting this method, which was totally different from the previous ones, is because al-Bukhari believed that, first of all, Hadith readers are already familiar with the historical context of Islamic events, so there is no need to repeat history; second, he wanted to clarify the contents of these verses to help readers understand the key points, so he usually attached detailed explanations and examples.

He concluded that the view of law of al-Bukhari, his meticulous attitude when collecting text from hadith and the compilation method are called “Bukhari’s conditions” by later scholars. This means the narrator must be reliable, moral, prudent, clear-thinking, and have correct views, together with

other conditions. “Bukhari’s conditions” deeply influenced later hadith scholars.

Prof. Xue Qingguo from Beijing Foreign Studies University compared Chinese traditional culture and Arab tradition culture. He opined that Chinese civilization and Arab civilization occupy extremely important positions in the world civilization map. They both belong to what Karl Jaspers called the “Axial Age” of civilization, and there are mainly six aspects in common between them.

First, Chinese and Arab civilizations are both great civilizations with a long history, rich culture, brilliant achievements, and far-reaching influence. Chinese language, literature and art, scientific inventions, lifestyle, moral etiquette, and especially thought dominated by Confucianism and Taoism constitute the body of Chinese civilization which has been passed down and never discontinued. Ancient Arab civilization also had a long history. As early as the 13th century BC, clan societies and nations appeared in Yemen, southwest of the Arabian Peninsula. In the 7th century, Islam rose and quickly became the dominant element of Arab civilization. Since then, the Arabs have left the peninsula to expand territories, and created the splendid and diverse Arab-Islamic civilization with the people in conquered lands.

Second, both Chinese and Arab civilizations have unity and diversity. Since the Qin Dynasty, a unified country and cultural system were formed in China. In addition to Han culture, Chinese civilization also includes the cultures of various ethnic minorities. During the long historical development, although there have been temporary disturbances and divisions, unified

government and society have always been the norm in Chinese history. Arab civilization is also a unified culture. All the members of the Arab nation use the same language, Arabic, and believe in the same religion, Islam, and these constitute the main characteristics of unified Arab culture.

Third, both Chinese and Arab civilizations have strong characteristics of tolerance, adaptability, and assimilation, which greatly enriched the two civilizations. During the long evolution of Chinese civilization, Chinese have shown open and inclusive minds. Absorption of foreign ideas and cultures in China reflects not only strong tolerance, but also a strong ability for assimilation. Arab civilization also possesses strong tolerance and capacity for penetration. The emergence and prosperity of Arab civilization was a result of collision and fusion of many ancient Eastern and Western civilizations.

Fourth, the evolution of both Chinese and Arab civilizations experienced a historical track from prosperity to decline and invasion by Western colonialism, and struggled to explore and achieve a revival of their civilizations since modern times. Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Chinese civilization, which had experienced a long period of prosperity and stability, gradually lost motivation for innovation and progress, confronting danger because of backwardness, and Chinese people made arduous and persistent efforts for national rejuvenation. Arab civilization entered a long period of decline from the late Abbasid Dynasty. During the Mamluk Sultanate and the period of the Ottoman Empire, Arabs were under foreign rule and their civilization was declining. Napoleon's invasion in modern times awakened Arab people's awareness of national

independence, and political and cultural elites determined to achieve a revival of their civilization through reforms.

Fifth, both Chinese and Arab civilizations have encountered the fierce impacts of Western civilization and experienced intense and complicated interactions between tradition and Westernization. This deeply influenced the future direction of the two civilizations. Since the Opium Wars, China had fought against Western colonialism and imperialism, and studied advanced Western ideology, culture, science, and technology. This harmoniously constitutes the main themes of Chinese modern history. Since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, European colonization and invasion have impacted the thought and culture of the Arabs. Just as the medieval Arab-Islamic civilization once influenced and inspired the West, the modern West became a mentor and model for the Arabs to learn and imitate.

Sixth, Chinese and Arab civilizations, as representative Oriental civilizations, share some similar values, such as: the pursuit of harmony; a focus on moderation, friendliness and peace; valuing family, tolerance and justice; an emphasis on the group; a pursuit of the balance between the material and the spiritual; and advocating etiquette. In addition, the Chan (also known in English by the Japanese name Zen) aspect in Chinese culture resembles the Sufism in Islamic culture, and both focus on perception and introspection, pay attention to irrational factors in cognitive process, advocate the pursuit of individual freedom, and use symbolic language for expression.

As for the main differences between Chinese and Arab civilizations, Xue Qingguo opined there are two. First, Chinese

civilization is essentially a secular civilization, while Arab civilization is mainly a religious civilization. Second, Chinese civilization is a farming civilization, while Arab civilization is a nomadic civilization.

Dr Walid Abdullah, the journalist and editor of people.cn, gave a presentation entitled “Between History and Legend: China in the Eyes of Ancient Arabs.” He said that the image of China discussed here is a cultural phenomenon intertwined with subjectivity and objectivity, and this phenomenon can be explained through historical documents of two periods.

During the heyday of the Abbasid Dynasty, the image of China in the Tang and Song dynasties, depicted by the businessman Sulayman and historian al-Tabari, was not perfect. For example, they believed that the monarchy was not fair, and their descriptions of people’s lives and social customs did not match the powerful image of China recorded in Chinese historical documents that form Chinese people’s impressions today. Abdullah said that these opinions in Arab writings are the subjective view of their writers.

After overturn of the Abbasid Dynasty, the image of China depicted in the writings of the traveler Ibn Battuta and some *littérateurs* and historians greatly changed. For example, the *litterateur* Yaqut al-Hamawi once wrote, “The emperor in China is a hard-working and ambitious monarch. There is no monarch who pays attention to and reviews troops like him in any country. He is very brave and powerful.” The historian Ibn al-Wardi wrote, “The Chinese are the most educated, the most righteous, and the most skillful in handcraft... They are also so adept in engraving and painting that even the works of a

teenager cannot be surpassed by artisans in other countries.” In terms of security, Abdullah quoted historical descriptions as saying that China at that time “was very safe and good to travel in. Even if you carry lots of money and travel alone for nine months, you do not need to worry at all.”

Abdullah said that although ancient Arab documents related to China are relatively scarce, researchers can still find some Arab fragmentary descriptions of China. The image of China, formed by these fragments, involves both negativity and positivity, subjectivity and objectivity, sometimes admiration, and sometimes disgust, blending reality and legend.

Yuan Lin, a lecturer at PKU, analyzed the factors which have contributed to the peaceful coexistence of all ethnic groups in Oman over the ages. She pointed out that the concept of “ethnic group” refers to a group of people who have a common cultural identity and their cultural identity can be distinguished from that of other groups of people. The maritime trade and a special geographic position connecting the Persian Gulf with the Indian Ocean led to multiple ethnic groups living together in Oman, home to Arabs, Baloch, and other minority groups originating from South Asia and East Africa. The Omanis include Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and more. Unlike other Muslim countries, Ibadhiyah is the main sect.

Yuan Lin said that most of the countries in the world consist of multiple ethnic groups. Tragic ethnic conflicts and racial segregation happen from time to time, but there are also many countries, like Oman, where all the groups coexist peacefully. The factors which contribute to the peaceful coexistence of those ethnic groups in Oman mainly include

historical factors and modern factors.

First of all, Oman has inherited a cultural tradition of peaceful coexistence in its long history. The most important point is that the geographical identity of Oman was formed very early, and the Omanis gained a collective identity before Islam was born. In addition, Ibadhiyah advocates the values of peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding, and this also becomes an important factor.

Second, from the beginning of his rule, Sultan Qaboos focused on transcending the barriers of tribes, sects, and ethnic identities to establish a modern Omani national identity. For example, in addition to promoting a national identity in schools, he promoted the use of Arabic as the standard language to break the negative impact of multilingualism on the establishment of national identity. He also advocated a national census, popularized communication equipment, and improved the transportation network, thereby strengthening relations among Omani citizens and reducing their dependence on tribes and ethnic groups. In addition, Sultan Qaboos devoted himself to implementing a comprehensive and fair distribution policy among all groups. It included housing and educational resources, so that all Omani citizens could fairly enjoy the material and financial resources in the country, providing a powerful guarantee of further achieving the peaceful coexistence of all ethnic groups.

Yuan Lin opined that the coexistence of various ethnic groups in Oman did not exist in the beginning but was formed gradually. However, like other countries in the world, Oman is also facing huge political and economic challenges. Under this

circumstance, if Omanis can hold the values of tolerance, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence, they will find the best way to overcome challenges, with the harmonious coexistence of all the ethnic groups.

Prof. Jin Zhongjie from Ningxia University shared his research on ancient Chinese inscriptions in Arabic. He said China currently has 6 to 10 million Arabic inscriptions which are scattered all over the country, mainly in Quanzhou of Fujia Province, Hangzhou of Zhejiang Province, Yangzhou of Jiangsu Province, Henan Province, Yunnan Province, and Beijing. He summarized the main characteristics of Chinese ancient inscriptions in Arabic, from engraving time, engraver, calligraphy, form, language, and content.

Jin Zhongjie said the engraving mainly appeared in the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing and Republic of China periods. There are two types of engravers, Arab expatriates and native Chinese Muslims. The inscription forms mainly include poetry and prose. According to inscription languages, the inscriptions can be divided into Chinese and Arabic inscriptions, Chinese, Arabic, and Persian inscriptions, Arabic inscriptions, and Arabic and Persian inscriptions, among which Arabic inscriptions are the majority. In terms of content, the inscriptions can be divided into epitaph inscriptions, biography inscriptions, inscriptions in memorial of the establishment of a temple, essay inscriptions, discipline inscriptions, decorative inscriptions, and worship inscriptions.

Jin Zhongjie said that systematically summarizing and studying ancient Chinese inscriptions in Arabic has corresponding academic value for understanding and studying

the cultural communication history between China and Arabia and between China and Iran, and the localization process and characteristics of Islam in China. He enumerated the shape, engraving content, and calligraphy style of the woodcut “Mihrab” of the Phoenix Mosque in Hangzhou, Arabic inscriptions in Shuinanguan in Qinyang, Henan Province from the Yuan Dynasty, the engraving in Chinese, Arabic, and Persian of Hu Dengzhou’s gravestone, a Puhaddin epitaph in Yangzhou, Arabic inscriptions in Jiaxing, and other examples, and elaborated on the focus of studies on China’s Arabic inscriptions, such as the distribution, content, characteristics and value among others. He pointed out that, because of various historical reasons, Dungan people who recently have migrated to Central Asia also retained similar inscription traditions, and the inscriptions in Tokmok are a typical example.

Alaa Mamdouh Akef (Gao Shan), a PhD student from Beijing Language and Culture University, discussed the cultural elements in Arabic classics, and dilemmas and advice in current translation.

Gao Shan pointed out that, in Arab culture, the classics refer to the works that have been written and circulated in a certain field or discipline for a long time, such as *Muqaddimah* by IbnKhalidun and *al-Iqd al-Farid(The Unique Necklace)* by Ibn Abd Rabbih in the humanities, and also *Kitab al-Manazir* by Ibn al-Haytham, *Kitab al-Filaha* by Ibn al-Awwam, and *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* by IbnSina in natural science.

He said that the cultural elements in Arabic classics can be categorized according to religion, dynasty, tradition, and environment. For example, the culture before and after Islam

was completely different; the different dynasties of the Arab empire have their own characteristics; Arabs traditions and the traditions in surrounding environments differ. Thus, all of these elements can affect the contents of classics. The cultural elements in classics make translation difficult. For instance, the characters, concepts, stories, expressions, and the narrations of many ancient ethnic groups in the Qur'an all can affect the translation. Gao Shan suggested that one should pay attention to applying the corpus, the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic, Edward William Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon, and other electronic dictionaries.

Bai Ye, a PhD student at Peking University, explored the etymological research of the word *hêkal*. He listed all of the meanings of *hêkal* and other words that share the same root. When *hêkal* functions as a normal noun, its basic meanings are hugeness, steed, temple or church, and animal bone or frame. According to these meanings, authoritative dictionaries also have corresponding explanations and example sentences, such as *Lisan al-Arab*, *al Munjidandal-Mu'jam al-Wasit*. For example, for the meaning of "steed," *Lisan al-Arab* gives the sample sentence, "The steed outstrips the wild beasts in speed." He also briefly introduced the meanings of derivatives from the same root of *hêkal*.

Later on, Bai Ye discussed the meanings of *hêkal* in other Semito-Hamitic family languages, including Ugaritic, Old Aramaic, Sumerian, and Hebrew. When analyzing the meaning in Ugaritic, he gave its written form, different pronunciations of nominative, accusative, and genitive, and corresponding pronunciations and written forms of singular, dual, and plural

conditions. For better comprehension, he expressed the same meaning of *hêkal* in a certain sentence respectively in Arabic, Ugaritic, and English.

Bai Ye also discussed the connection between the Akkadian word *ekallum*, and *hêkal*, in several Semito-Hamitic languages mentioned before. Akkadian is one of the eastern Semitic languages, dating back to 2400 BC, and it is the oldest known Semitic language. He presented the written form and meanings of *ekallum* in Akkadian texts, as well as the pronunciations of nominative, accusative, and genitive, and of singular, dual, and plural conditions, comparing it with Sumerian.

Bai Ye concluded that the original form of *hêkal* is *É.GAL* in Sumerian, and it means big house or palace. Akkadian uses the pronunciation, meaning, and written form of the Sumerian word, *É.GAL*, and adds it to its own verb transformation rules. Although the pronunciation of *É.GAL* became *ekallum*, this word still means “palace.” With the spread of Akkadian in the Middle East, *ekallum* was absorbed by Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Hebrew, and its final form became *hêkal* written in modern alphabets.

Prof. Mohamed Al Muqaddam, from the department of History at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, said he would give a presentation about modern Oman literature. He chose this topic because there are always rich connections in the humanities between China and Oman. Muqaddam discussed the novel *Celestial Bodies* and its author Jokha al-Harhi, associate professor of the Arabic language department at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. This novel contains descriptions of modern Oman historical issues.

On May 21, 2019, her book won the Man Booker International Prize. This is the first time for a writer from Gulf region to win this prize since 2005 when it was founded, and al-Harhi is the first Omani female writer to have her work translated into English and published.

Celestial Bodies describes the evolution of Oman from a traditional slave society into part of the complicated modern world, from the perspective of three sisters who live in the village of al-Awafi in Oman.

This novel provides imaginative, charming, and poetic opinions about social transformation and rarely known lives from the past. The three sisters in the book all suffer from torture and hardship in love, and this work narrates the transformation process after the end of colonization in Oman society, through the three sisters' rough lives. The novel connects modern history with the past by describing historical events, covering the layers of countryside, city, individual, society, and so on.

The book narrates that in 1920 the British signed the Treaty of Seeb with the Imamate of Oman and conceded Oman's independence. Oman was divided into two political entities, the Sultanate of Muscat and the Imamate of Oman. The sultan functioned as national leader of the first, located on the coasts, and a religious leader lead the second, located inland.

The two parts coexisted peacefully until 1950s, when the Sultanate of Muscat struck oil in the gulf. The transportation of the oil needed to go through a pipeline laid by Imamate of Oman. This caused the Jebel Akhdar War. In December 1955, British colonists captured Nizwa, the capital of the Imamate of Oman, with the forces of Sultanate of Muscat supported by the

colonists. The local defending force retreated into the mountains and launched uprisings against Britain in July 1957, but eventually failed because of massive suppression by British forces.

In 1967, Said bin Taimur, sultan of the Sultanate of Muscat, unified the whole territory of Oman under the support of the UK. Then, under the influence of socialism in South Yemen, some communist supporters started to oppose the sultan's rule. On July 23, 1970, Qaboos, the only son of Taimur, forced his father to abdicate and renamed the country the "Sultanate of Oman" which has been used ever since. In 1973, at the request of Sultan Qaboos, the British army withdrew from Oman, and Oman gradually began to promote the process of social modernization. A great number of rural aborigines started to migrate to cities, trying to lose their attachment to primitive tribes. The choices and changes of the novel's protagonists in different periods of time are tightly connected to this part of history. They are those who experienced and witnessed this history, and their destiny is linked with the wheel of history.

Muqaddam pointed out that, by narrating a family story spanning three generations in Oman, *Celestial Bodies* deeply delves in taboo topics from slavery to disloyalty and records the history of the transformation of Oman society from the beginning of the 20th century to date, miniaturizing the process of social change vividly, touchingly, and poetically.

Reem Saqr (Sha Keyun), a PhD student at Peking University, focused on the influence of non-Arabs in ancient Arab classic creation. She mentioned that a great number of Arab classical works' authors are not Arabs, and this brings two

questions: do non-Arab works belong to Arab culture? How should we deal with the identity issue as it relates to the ownership of the works?

Sha Keyun said that identity was not decided only by geographical factors, but also by personal belief. She took the story of the Persian Salman al-Firisi as an example. Salman al-Firisi was born in Isfahan, Persia, and once he was stranded in Medina as a slave of Jewish people.

Later on, he redeemed himself with the help of Muhammad, and then became the first Persian who believed in Islam. He was knowledgeable, and mastered doctrines about all kinds of religions and Persian tactics. Following Muhammad, he was valued and held the post of the teacher of Companions. In 627, Abu Sufyan, the noble leader of Quraysh in Mecca, led tribal allied forces to siege Medina. Salman advised Muhammad to dig trenches around Medina and build a fortress on highlands. Muhammad adopted his advice and, as a result, the Mecca allied forces were blocked and withdrew. This war was known as the “Battle of the Trench.” After that, he also participated in fighting against Jewish tribes and capturing Mecca, therefore becoming a famous tactician. When Caliph Uthman was in power, Salman died in Medina (or in Ctesiphon). Later, he was highly revered in Persia, and historians called him “the Persian national hero” and “the highest model of philosophers.” Ali said, “He is a sea that will never dry up; he knows everything and reads everything.” Shiite scholars juxtaposed him with Ali, Hassan, and Hussein, and called him “one of the saints illuminated by the light of Allah.”

Sha Keyun said, through the example of Salman, we can

discover that the way to define an Arab does not depend on a person's father or mother's lineage, but the language — those who speak Arabic are Arabs. Thus, the question posed before is solved: identity is decided by language instead of geography. Arabic works created by non-Arabs also belong to Arabs. The language is identity, and the literature is identity.

Albadawe Abdalla, a PhD student at Tsinghua University, discussed the theme of the female characters in classical Arab literature, and he mainly introduced his research on female characters and images in ancient Arab literature. He said that female characters are one of the most important elements of Arab poetry and prose, and also played an important role in the process of establishing the long history of Arab civilization. Since ancient times, many humanities scholars did research on this theme. During the Jahiliyyah period, female images stood out in poetry, and women obviously functioned as part of social reforms, so their social status was also very prominent.

Albadawe Abdalla explained the concept of “image” from the angle of ancient Arab poetry. He cited opinions, from Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, al-Jahiz, and others, to clarify the origin and development of the concept of image, pointing out that, in poetry, creating, expressing, and portraying an image are tightly related. The image in poetry is used to express significance. Significance is the raw material of poetry. Portraying image means connecting poetic text with the scene in front of the poet. He particularly mentioned “sensory description.” He said this technique is usually expressed in the form of rhetoric in order to describe the beauty of the object. Ancient poets frequently used this technique of expression when describing women. For

example, among the poems in Jahiliyyah period, almost every piece describes women's graceful appearance at length, including the eyes, face, neck, and other body parts which are full of female charm. Albadawe Abdalla came up with the concept of *ghazal*, pointing out that women's graceful appearance and virtue are often the themes of *ghazal*. He said that this demonstrates that women not only played an important position in poetry but also played important roles in society.

During the discussion, attendees talked about the content of the presentations and topics related to history and literature in classical Arabic.

Mohamed Al Muqaddam: How should we look at the issue of Al-Mutanabbi going to Egypt and singing eulogistic poems for the black eunuch, Kafur?

Salami: Kafur once promised Al-Mutanabbi generous rewards and called on him for poems. Al-Mutanabbi wanted to build up forces for the Arabs with the help of these rewards. This was his real goal. Al-Mutanabbi intended to build up his own power, and deal with Kafur. However, Kafur's power was strong, and Al-Mutanabbi was helpless. If one reads carefully the poems which Al-Mutanabbi wrote for Kafur, it is not hard to find his secret sarcasm toward Kafur.

Gao Shan: There are two trends, classical and contemporary, of translating Arabic poems into Chinese. What traits and difficulties do these trends possess respectively?

Zhang Hongyi: Arabic poems and Chinese poems have different traits, so translating Arabic poems into Chinese is a very complex issue. During the process of translation, one should give priority to easy comprehension of the translation.

Classical literary and contemporary literary approaches have their own advantages and suitable contexts respectively, but what matters the most is whether readers can understand it.

Lin Fengmin: In Arabic literature criticism, modernity means innovation. Is this idea correct?

Younes: Among the terms of literature criticism, there are usually different understandings for a word, and different definitions may exist for a certain term. As for “modernity,” this word did not appear in the literature criticism of the past. “Modernism” and “modernity” are new terminologies from modern times, and they have evolving meanings.

Mohamed Al Muqaddam: During the process of comparing and introducing cultures, because of the similarity between “Zen” and Sufism, can one use “Zen” to interpret Sufism?

Xue Qingguo: A similarity does exist between “Zen” and Sufism, but they are two different concepts. It is to some extent meaningful for bilateral cultural exchanges to introduce “Zen” to Arabs or introducing Sufism to Chinese. But I don’t think it is proper to interpret Sufism with Zen.

Younes: There were many non-Arabs participating in establishing Arab civilization in history. For example, during a period of great prosperity in Abbasid Dynasty, the degree of Arabs’ opening-up to the outside world was extremely high, and they welcomed people from a variety of nations to contribute to their country’s development. Because of this, innovative ideas thrived. What changes is environment, instead of people; and if there is an environment for innovation, the people in that environment will be able to innovate. However, if society is ignorant, the people inside this society will be correspondingly

ignorant. Nowadays, there are also many Arabs who are drawn to Western civilization. Ahmed Hassan Zewail, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1999, expressed publicly on television that his choice to settle in the US was to create a real environment of pursuing science for himself. If he stayed in Egypt, it would be impossible to obtain this kind of environment. The environment in the US is more suitable for innovation, and the reason why plenty of Arabs scramble to study in the West is also to pursue the innovative academic environment there. The present time in the West is just like the Abbasid Dynasty, known as a “golden age.” Thus, we can find many non-Westerners who contribute to society in the West.