

Middle East Studies in Taiwan since 1957

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Abstract: Taiwan's Middle East Studies discipline was founded by Taipei's Republic of China (ROC) government in National Chengchi University (NCCU) in Arabic Department, Turkish Department and Diplomacy Department. NCCU has created "Middle East Language and Culture Intramural Courses" in College of Foreign Language and Literature, "Islamic Civilization and Thought Research Center" in Arabic Department, "Summer Camp for Middle East Studies" and the planning "Center for Middle East Studies" in College of International Affairs. "Islamic Research Institute" was established in 2009 by NCCU. In short, the Middle East Studies related discipline in Taiwan is unique to NCCU and there are also students launch research related to the Middle East rely on their own backgrounds in other universities. There are two significant features in Taiwan's Middle East Studies discipline: 1) from government-led development path to university-led academic freedom development path; 2) prosperity in Middle Eastern humanistic studies versus weakness in Middle Eastern social science studies.

Key words: Taiwan • Middle East Studies • NCCU • Arabic and Turkish • Department of Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, especially the 9/11 incident, the endless stream of hotspot issues in the Middle East have triggered widespread concern in the world and the Middle East Studies is likely in the trend of being an important and famous disciplinary. Compared with the Middle East Studies disciplinary in the United States and European countries which was based on long-term disciplinary accumulation and construction as well as Western years of interaction experiences with the Middle East, after the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Middle East Studies "restarts in later 1970s, with the unremitting efforts in 1980s, it enters its 'prosperous period' in the early 1990s" [1]. The great progress of the construction of Middle East Studies disciplinary in mainland China was elated with government's vigorous support, the establishment of PRC diplomatic relations with the Middle East countries and the emancipation since the Reform and Opening Up policy (1979 till now). Taiwan region is one integral part of whole China, examining the development of Middle East Studies

in Taiwan's colleges and universities is of positive practical significance in the overall understanding of China's Middle East Studies and is beneficial for affording experience and lessons for the Middle East Studies in mainland China.

The Background of the Development of Taiwan's Middle East Studies:

The contacts of the National Government of the Republic of China (ROC) and Middle Eastern countries began at the end of World War II in the 1940s, Chiang Kai-shek, the supreme commander of Chinese Theater, who attended the Cairo Conference held in Egypt; this is the first time that Chinese supreme leader visits a Middle East country. But the Chinese civil Muslim scholars came to the Middle East countries to learn Arabic and Islamic Studies was earlier than the official diplomatic contacts, such as Ma Jian, Lin Zhongming and Zhang Ziren, who were Chinese Muslim students studying in Egypt, received the ROC government official Gong Zizhi who paid his visit in Egypt in 1930s. In 1939, with the support of the ROC government, the Chinese

Muslim students studying in Al-Azhar University organized a Hajj delegation to Mecca so as to disseminate the anti-Japanese war in China. In the late 1940s, ROC government begun to establish diplomatic relations with Middle East sovereign states, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. On the one hand, China intensified students dispatch to the Middle East countries to learn Arabic with both foreign affairs personnel reservation planning and advanced studies of Islamic scholars considerations; on the another hand, Peking University, which moved to Yunnan Province during the anti-Japanese war, invited Ma Jian who had finished his study learning in Egypt and back to Yunnan to join in it. Peking University's College of Liberal Arts "Dean Tang Yongtong appeared personally, invited him back to Peiping with PKU's teachers and students in Kunming and set up Arabic language disciplinary in the Department of Oriental Languages at Peking University", "Mr Wen Yiduo, Feng Zhi and other people's tentative idea of setting up Oriental languages, Indochina languages, Arabic language and Semitic languages must be based on the consideration of the development of Chinese universities' foreign languages disciplinarians and the need of academic research; why it came into being in 1946 was the leaders of Peking University Hu Shih, Fu Ssu-nien, Tang Yongtong agreed with this need and afforded their support" [2]. Ma Jian was appointed professor and set up Arabic Language discipline in Peking University in 1946. With the intensification of the civil war and the ROC government eventually moved to Taipei in December 1949, Ma Jian and many Peking University teachers and students insisted on staying in Peiping and waiting for the taking over of Communist Party of China (CPC), this laid a solid foundation for the development of People's Republic of China (PRC) universities' Arabic and Middle East Studies disciplinary.

Taipei's ROC government inherited the victory heritage of WWII and had maintained diplomatic relations with many Middle East countries. Before Beijing came to contact with the Middle East countries, Taipei authorities' relations with the Middle East countries were relatively stable. After the Bandung Conference in 1955, some Arab countries began to contact with Beijing, Egypt, Syria and Yemen established diplomatic relations with PRC in 1956 while broke off diplomatic relations with ROC, the Taipei authorities was full of the sense of urgency when

encountered the competition of Beijing. In order to strengthen the training of ROC diplomatic personnel towards the Middle East, Taipei authorities set up Department of Oriental Languages and Arts at National Chengchi University (NCCU)¹ in 1956. Firstly, in 1957, "in order to train talented persons of Arabic language, setting up Arabic language group with in this Department. At the beginning, due to the lack of teachers and equipments, it cannot enroll students every year," in 1978, "in view of the Arab world's pivotal role in the international arena and the development of ROC-Arab countries relations, Arab language group was upgraded to a separate department and the Minister of ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ting Chung-ming was appointed to be in charge of the affairs of this department." [3]. Secondly, in 1958, with the support of Chiang Kai-shek, within the Department of Oriental languages, "setting Turkish language group; and with the consent of the ROC Ministry of Defense, inviting Mr. Liu Enlin served as the opening group teacher and then Mr. Ma Ming-dao also joined the teaching staff," in 2000, the Turkish language group was upgraded to the Department of Turkish Literature [4]. Till now, National Chengchi University is the sole university in Taiwan holding Arabic and Turkish language disciplines. In a long period of time, there are no embryonic form of Middle East Studies in Taiwan, Arabic and Turkish majors are mainly on the research of language and culture.

The Current Situation of Middle East Studies in Taiwan: As to the Department of Arabic at NCCU, its teachers abstained degrees in Arabic, Middle East Studies or Religious Studies from Egypt, Jordan, Libya and the United Kingdom; their research areas not only contain Arab language and literature, but also Islamic civilization and religion, Middle East history and society. Take the undergraduate teaching for an example, in addition to the Arabic grammar and conversation courses, there are many other courses related with Middle East studies: Grade 1st, *Middle East General History* as a required course and *Arab Nation and Culture*, *Arab Society* and *The Political and Economic Relations within the Middle East* as elective courses; Grade 2nd, *Islamic Civilization* as a required course and *Arab Geography* and *The Relationship among Middle East Nations* as elective courses; Grade 3th, *The Literature History of Arab* as a required course and

¹Chengchi means politics, NCCU was set up in mainland China and rebuild in Taipei in 1955.

The History of Islamic Thoughts, Journalist Arabic, Muslim Thinkers, Arabic Letter and Commercial Arabic as elective courses; Grade 4th, *Koran and Hadith* and *Anthology of Arab Poems* as elective courses [5]. On this basis, Department of Arabic at NCCU set up "Islamic Civilization and Thought Research Center" with the aim of reflecting the status quo of Taiwan's Middle East studies and Islamic studies, "elementary educational institutions focus on this important academic field can not be found in ROC", "the Islamic world studies should be placed on the same level as that of European Studies, American Studies and Japanese Studies", "it is necessary for Taiwan to establish an institution for Islamic research and education" [6]. Islamic Civilization and Thought Research Center edits "Sino-Arabian Series of Books" and The Sino-Arabian Association publishes and prints them. The title of No.25 of this "Sino-Arabian Series of Books" is *Collected Works of Middle East and Islam: The Political, Social and Cultural Changes of Modern Muslims*, which is the collected works of the first conference on the Middle East and Islam in NCCU. Islamic studies expert Dr. Chang-Kuan Lin points out in the Preamble: "For a long time, the Middle East and Islamic studies is always an important and famous disciplinary in the developed countries; but in the Middle East and especially the Greater Chinese world, it has not yet truly recognized its importance and puts a lot of research resources to it. Within Taiwan, except for NCCU, it seems that very few scholars focusing on the research field of Middle East and Islamic studies" [7]. The situation of Department of Turkish is similar to that of Department of Arabic, besides Turkish grammar and conversation courses, there are also *General Theory of Turkey*, *Turkey Geography*, *Topic Studies of Turkey* and *Turkish History* as required courses [8]. Overall, the depth and breadth of Arab Studies is better than that of Turkish Studies in NCCU.

In addition to the sole study of Middle Eastern languages and history and cultures, there is also Middle Eastern international relations studies in NCCU; although this is relatively weak when compared with European Studies and American Studies, it is also in the leading position of Taiwan. The predecessor of the Department of Diplomacy at NCCU is the Department of Diplomacy at KMT² Central School of Politics established in 1930 in Nanjing, it is the oldest Department of Diplomacy in the history of Taiwan and even the whole China. College of International Affairs at NCCU is consisted of Department of Diplomacy, Graduate Institute

of East Asian Studies and Graduate Institute of Russian Studies. Nowadays, the research area Middle Eastern international relations is chaired by Professor Deng-ker Lee, his related books and articles are: *CPC's Diplomatic Policy towards the Middle East since the end of Cold War* (1995); *Middle Eastern International Politics and Oil* (2007); *Study on Hamas and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process* (2007); *Study on Iranian Nuclear Issue* (2006); *Taiwan's Role in the Reconstruction of Iraq* (2003); *Study on the Military Cooperation between CPC and Israel in Post-Cold War Era* (1998); *Beijing's Middle East Policy in Post-Cold War Era* (1994); *The Review of the ROC-Saudi Arabia Relations* (1989); research reports mainly includes: *Special Topic on Middle East Studies* (2008); *Study on the Arms Transfer and Israeli Foreign Policy* (1996) [9]. In all, the key research fields in IR studies neither in NCCU nor in other Taiwan universities are focusing on European Studies, American Studies, Russian Studies and Japanese Studies. In addition to NCCU, it cannot find Middle Eastern international relations studies' prototype in other universities.

Based on the existing achievements from Department of Arabic Language, Department of Turkish Language and College of International Affairs, NCCU integrates related resources and the project of training Middle East Studies expertise is gradually becoming a reality. In 2006, College of Foreign Languages at NCCU establishes "Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses" which is a prototype of Middle East Studies disciplines to an great extent. Intramural Courses system is a major innovation in Taiwan's colleges and universities, its target is breaking the gap between different majors and disciplines while building versatile experts with specific multi-disciplinary background. Its implement approach is with some college as the basis and encourages its own students choose elective courses from other colleges while opens its own courses to students from other colleges. It is differentiate from Master degree Intramural Courses that "Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses" just opens to no more than 30 NCCU students as elective courses, including undergraduates, graduates, Ph.D. students and part-time students from departments and institutes of International Trade, Nationalities, Chinese, Education, Geography, English, Law, Politics, Diplomacy, History and so on. This reflects the direction and meaning of interdisciplinary. "Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses" curriculum planning as follows:

²KMT is Kuomintang, also known as Chinese Nationalist Party, Sun Yat-sun and Chiang Kai-shek are KMT's early top leaders. KMT was the sole Party ruling Taiwan and mainland China at the same time in later 1940s.

Group A: Basic Language Courses (required)		Group B: Advanced Language and Culture Courses (Elective)	
	Category	Name of Arabic Courses	Name of Turkish Courses
First Year: 1) <i>Junior Arabic</i> 2) <i>Junior Turkish</i> 3) <i>Introduction to Middle East Languages and Culture</i> (elective)	I. Advanced Language	<i>Arabic Letter and Commercial Arabic; Journalist Arabic; Selected Works of Classical Arabic Readings; Koran and Hadith; Arabic Translation</i>	<i>Turkish Conversation Skills Training; Turkish Idioms and Proverbs Application; Commercial Turkish; Turkish Phonetics and Syntax; Ottoman Language; Turkish Dialects; Journalist Turkish</i>
Second Year: 1) <i>Senior Arabic</i> 2) <i>Senior Turkish</i>	II. Introduction of History	<i>Middle East General History; Islamic Civilization</i>	<i>Turkish History</i>
	III. Introduction of Literature	<i>The Literature History of Arab; Anthology of Arab Poems</i>	<i>Appreciation of Modern Turkish Literature; The Literature History of Turkey; Anthology of Turkish Novels; Anthology of Turkish Masterpieces</i>
	IV. Topics on Middle East Culture	<i>Arab Society; The Political and Economic Relations within the Middle East; The Relationship among Middle East Nations; Arabic Calligraphy; Arab Geography; Modern Islam; The History of Islamic Thoughts; Modern Arab Women</i>	<i>Turkish World – Introduction to Culture and Tourism; Turkish Nation and Culture; Minor Asian Civilization and Mythology; Turkish Arts and Culture Appreciation; Turkish Language and Culture; Turkish Society and Culture; Introduction to Islam; Central Asian History; Turkish Cultural History; Turkish Folklore Studies; Central Asian Turkish Folk Customs and Culture</i>
	V. Other	<i>Introduction to the Arab World; Introduction to Arab Nation; Middle East Women; Introduction to Modern Middle East Politics and Economy</i>	<i>Turkey Geography; Turkish Arts and Crafts; Case Studies of Turkey; General Theory of Turkey; Turkish Tourism; Contemporary Turkey; Turkish Linguistics; Turkish Politics and Economy; Introduction to Turkish Economy; Turkish Performing Arts</i>

Note: The chart comes from the website of College of Foreign Languages at NCCU.

It is not difficult to see from the above that, “Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses” is related with interdisciplinary, such as Middle East history, politics, economy, religion, nationalities, arts and international relations. These non-foreign language major students who join in “Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses” actually accept the interdisciplinary Middle East Studies training and they are Taiwan’s future Middle East Studies talents and reserves.

As a response to College of Foreign Languages’ “Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses”, College of International Affairs and Center for Strategy and International Security Studies at NCCU hosts “Summer Camp for Middle East Studies” for Taiwan college students, its purpose is “to enhance college students’ understanding of current Middle East affairs, recognize the relationship between ROC and the Middle East countries and develop their interesting in Middle East Studies.” Take the “Summer Camp for Middle East

Studies” held in 2008 as an example, there were 60 campers with many courses: *Understanding the Middle East: Middle East Democracy and Human Rights; Middle East Oil Producer Sovereign Wealth Funds; Middle East and the Energy Crisis; Relations between ROC and Middle East Countries; Islamic Fundamentalism; Islam and Women; Arabic/Turkish Conversation; Arab Literature Appreciation; Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Terrorism; and Al-Jazeera and Islamic Media.* Summer Camp ers also took part in Model International Middle East Peace conference and visited ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CPC Corporation³ and Taiwan External Trade Development Council [10]. Summer Camp was co-hosted by Department of Arabic at NCCU, its courses were mainly on politics and international relations, economy, trade, energy and media and was complement of “Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses”. In June 2009, Institute of International

³CPC Corporation, Taiwan, its former name was China Petroleum Corporation before February 2007, it was established in Shanghai in 1946.

Relations (IIR) at NCCU signed a Memorandum of academic exchanges with King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies. With the strength of NCCU's Diplomacy and IR studies, College of International Affairs' "Summer Camp for Middle East Studies" and College of Foreign Languages' "Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses", IIR plans to set up the first research center for Middle East studies in Taiwan's universities. In September 2009, "Taiwan Association of Islamic Studies" (TAIS) was established at NCCU, "The aims of TAIS are to promote the study of Islamic world in Taiwan, to enhance the civilians' understanding and recognition of Islam and to achieve the dialogue between different religions and cultures for the purpose of enlarging the civilians' world vision. The promotion of international academic interchange is also considered as our mission toward the foreign world" and its members including scholars from within and outer of Taiwan [11]. On November 25, 2010, Taiwan's first "Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies" was jointly organized by IIR and Department of Arabic at NCCU, which means a combination of regional studies and humanities research. In the opening day of the center, two-day "Taiwan-Arab Forum" was held.

As NCCU comments on itself: "From Japan and ASEAN in the East Asia to India in South Asia, NCCU has been further leading Taiwan catching sight of the Middle East", "Although NCCU is first one to sow the seeds of Middle East Studies, when the diversified IR can sprout and pull closer to the distance between Taiwan and the world relying on the rise of the government and academia's Middle East awareness" [12]. Although there are no Middle East studies disciplinary in other Taiwan colleges and universities, many students finished their degree dissertations with the Middle East countries as cases, such as Wu Yu-sang's Ph.D. dissertation *An Economic-wide Analysis of Signing the FTA between Taiwan and Middle East Countries* from Aletheia University; Wei Hsueh-tzu's Master dissertation *The Analysis of Competitive Advantage and Strategy Formulation for Middle East Petrochemical Industry: A Case Study on Company S* from Tamkang University; Yu Meng-hua's Master dissertation *Studies on US Middle East Policy (2001-2006): In Case of "The Road Map" under Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* from Tamkang University; and so on. What especial for us is that there are numbers of dissertations related with Middle East Studies from Tamkang University. All in all,

Taiwan's Middle East Studies is unique to NCCU. The scholars and students who engage in Middle East Studies coming from NCCU's Arabic, Turkish and International Affairs professional majors as well as from other departments of NCCU and other universities in Taiwan who interested in Middle East studies. Many of them do their studies on Middle East through the participation in "Middle East Languages and Culture Intramural Courses" and "Summer Camp for Middle East Studies" or self-studying. In the long run, an new "Master Degree Intramural Courses for Middle East Studies" or "Middle East Studies Major" charged by College of International Affairs at NCCU should be the next step for Taiwan's Middle East Studies.

The Characteristics of Taiwan's Middle East Studies Disciplinary: Since the establishment of Arabic major in 1957 for the first time in Taiwan, the construction of Middle East Studies disciplinary of Taiwan has gone through more than 50 years. View from the motivation, development process and current reality, there are two significant characteristics:

Firstly, it has experienced the path from government-led to the universities' academic freedom development. In the 1950s, there are many difficulties in the establishment of majors relevant Middle East studies: 1) The difficulty in reality. The teachers and students of Department of Oriental Languages did not go to Taiwan with ROC government and weather the Taiwanese native or ROC government newly-build and re-build universities and colleges in Taiwan had no tradition or accumulation in the Middle East studies, which constitutes a great practical difficulty; 2) Colleges and universities' lack of interesting. Although ROC government in Taipei inherited its relative academic freedom tradition in mainland China era, the historical status of the Middle East being destined to make the Middle East studies become a important disciplinary. Taiwan's academia was also lack of concern and interest in the Middle East and it was difficult to start the study on the Middle East in a short time with normal academic growth. In this case, government-led played a key role in it. Before 1988, especially in the time of "Anti-communism and regime recovery" and "Period of National Mobilization in Suppression of Communist Rebellion"⁴, KMT's one-party military governance laid a solid foundation for ROC government in establishing relevant majors of Middle East studies through civil and military powers in Taiwan's universities. The Bandung Conference deepened the sense of urgency of ROC

⁴Period of National Mobilization in Suppression of Communist Rebellion" was issued by ROC government in Nanjing, it was: 1948-1991 in Taiwan Region and 1948-1949 in mainland China.

government. ROC government's initial motivation was to train diplomatic and military personnel but not academic research. So ROC government chose the NCCU whose predecessors were Central Party School of KMT, Central School of Politics of KMT, set up Arabic and Turkish majors and took Department of Diplomacy as the place of strategic importance in training Taiwan's foreign affairs personnel. Many teachers were sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. ROC government's competition with PRC in the Middle East was implemented by diplomats graduate from NCCU. Since the 1990s, all of the Middle East countries have established diplomatic relations with PRC and ROC turned to seek substantive relations with the Middle East countries. At the same time, ROC government's long-term "one-China" political position began to change, like that in other regions, the diplomatic competition between Taipei and Beijing in the Middle East has changed from the competition for Chinese representation to the completion between Taiwan independence and anti-Taiwan secession. ROC government's interest was limited to the economic and trade fields. ROC government's reduced political interest in the Middle East and Taiwan's democratization process speeds up the opportunity of NCCU's independent development. NCCU's Middle East studies has changed from government-led with the aim of training foreign affairs personnel to university's self behavior, it began to consider the market demands and future education planning. NCCU's Middle East studies is on the road of the combination of independent teaching, research and policy studies; students' future occupations are self-determined while diplomat is not the sole target.

Secondly, ROC government's diplomatic status in the Middle East led to the contrast of humanities' prosperity and social science's weakness within Middle East studies. As one part of regional studies, Middle East studies covering two major aspects: humanities and social science Humanities is less susceptible to political interference and keeps its independence for a long time, so there are abundant books and articles about Middle East history, religion and languages in Taiwan's universities. It is not only because Arabic major was set up as early as in 1950s, but also because Islam itself is also an important component of mainland China and Taiwan, Taiwan's Islamic studies accumulation roots in the mainland China. "Chinese Muslim Association" (CMA) is the main force of Islamic Studies in Taiwan. CMA was established in 1937 in Henan Province and then moved to Taipei in 1949,

its Constitution says CMA "with uniting Muslims, carrying forward the doctrine, promoting education, improving lives, assisting government, prospering Islam and constructing country as its purpose"[13]. CMA cultivates Taiwan's Muslim religious personnel while strengthens academic and social ties with Taiwan universities. Take the "Cross-cultural Journey of Learning: Experiencing Islam and Looking the Islamic World from Taiwan" in 2007 guided by National Youth Commission, ROC Executive Yuan⁵ as an example, its speakers mainly come from CMA and Department of Arabic, NCCU. Speakers from CMA teach Islamic architecture, Muslim life and Muslim communities in Taiwan; Professor Chang-kuan Lin from NCCU teaches *Entering the Time Tunnel of Islamic Civilization* from the literature and historical point of view [14]. It is because of Islamic Studies derived from Chinese Islam studies and extends to Middle East religion and history studies, as academic sectors, Taiwan's colleges and universities keep academic co-operation with their counterparties in the Middle East without ROC government's political and diplomatic influence. Taiwan is maintaining semi-official contact with most Middle East countries due to economic interests. Not only "Taipei Economic and Cultural Offices" in the Middle East countries, but also "Sino-Arabian Cultural and Economic Association" plays an important bridge and linkage role in it; "Sino-Arabian Cultural and Economic Association" establishes "Arabic Scholarship" at NCCU. As Professor Chang-kuan Lin said that "Taiwan has already missed two time-points", in other words, 1) from the discovery of oil in Iran in 1908 to the United States vigorously began to operate in the Middle East in 1991; 2) since 9/11 incident, Europe and the United States invest more effort and funds in the study of Middle East, but in Taiwan it still can not see the dawn of support in this field [12]. Because of the lag in Taiwan-Middle East political relations and its excessive preference for the study of big countries, such as Europe and US, Taiwan's IR leading powers---College of International Affairs, Department of Diplomacy at NCCU still ignore the deepening of Middle East studies. Middle Eastern international relations studies was first involved by Department of Arabic to a very large extent, but there are limitations in foreign languages-led Middle Eastern international relations studies without social science method. One student graduates from NCCU said that, "Department of Arabic at NCCU has student exchange programs with many Middle East universities, such as Kuwait University and the

⁵Executive Yuan is the Cabinet of the Republic of China.

University of Jordan. These make graduates have ‘capital’ and ‘pipeline’ to further study their languages in the Middle East.” “But in terms of academic research, the mainstream of Department of Arabic is ‘language’, the students who are interested in ‘Middle East Studies’ have to go another pipeline: the Ministry of Education scholarship as grants to continue their education.” “The tendency of emphasizing language and lighting regional knowledge only depends on a minor power to slightly compensate the imbalance (Taiwan’s ‘foreign area studies’ seems to compile under the context of general social science, such as the Institute of International Relations)” [15]. Scholars of language majors are usually lack of the accumulation of social science knowledge, which limits the in-depth development of Taiwan’s Middle East Studies.

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