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The ESSC as a Tool for Understanding Writers’ Lives and Society

—Comparison of Young People in the United Arab Emirates and Japan by Examining Each Country’s ESSC Stories—

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Zayed University (2007-2012)

Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the UAE young people by comparing with Japanese young people. As a tool of comparison, the Extremely Short Story Competition or ESSC, an anthology of English short stories is employed. Two ESSCs written by UAE youth and Japanese youth are examined respectively. Stories in these two are created under the similar conditions. Analysis of the frequently-appearing topics in each ESSC roughly outlines daily lives, general mindset, behavior, preference, values and culture of two groups. These data help us to understand the holistic life and society of young people in the UAE and Japan.

Results of topic analysis show that youth in both countries are in the midst of seeking for their identity, and regard friends to be important. Both youths also appreciate the beauty of nature and feel affection toward living creatures. As a unique trend for Emirati youth, they talk about death very often. It may largely attribute to the high ratio of fatal traffic accidents. The UAE society is highly family-oriented, and life is connected to Islam and God. As for Japanese youth, they are keen to engage a various kinds of hobbies. They also like to express their romantic feeling and thankfulness to their environment.

The ESSC was originally created to develop English learners’ writing ability. This study newly proved that the corpora generated by ESSC would illuminate writers’ life and society, and the ESSC could contribute to sociological understanding of ESSC writers.

Keywords
United Arab Emirates (UAE), Japan, Young People, Daily life, Society, the ESSC
I Introduction

Since the establishment in 1971, the United Arab Emirates (henceforth referred to as the UAE) has dramatically transformed from a deserted nomad community into a modern prosperous nation. The UAE attracts foreign investors, business people and travellers, making it possible to obtain UAE's economical and commercial information easily. In spite of that, little is known about the UAE citizens. Having lived in the UAE between the years 2006-2012, the author of the present paper realized that people in the world tend to have stereotyped images on the UAE citizens such as ‘People in Arabian Nights’ or ‘Oil Billionaires’.

To get rid of these stereotyped fantasies, this study attempts to unveil common UAE citizens, especially young generation who bear the country's future. To distinguish the UAE young people, they are compared with Japanese young people. As a vehicle for comparison, the Extremely Short Stories Competition or ESSC, a collection of English short stories written by Emirati and Japanese young people is examined.

As transportation and internet communication have developed, contact with different nationals who have other culture and religion has been increasing. To live together with people from different social background peacefully, it would be necessary for us to acquire the exact information of the people worldwide.

This study may contribute to give new information on contemporary UAE young people. In addition, it suggests a new usage of the ESSC. The ESSC is invented to enhance English learners' writing ability, but it would be also beneficial to comprehend writers' lives and society from the view point of sociological studies.

II Material and Methodology

2.1 Existing Studies

Why we still hold well-worn stereotyped image on the UAE people has some reasons. Foremost reason is it is difficult to reach them directly even if we live in the UAE. The population of the UAE citizen is only 0.9 million as of 2012 and the expatriates in the UAE outnumber them by 8 to 1. Secondly, Emirati people hardly live outside of their countries. Quite a few young Emiratis study abroad, but the destinations and the period of their stay are limited. Thirdly, many Emirati people do not prefer to appear in the media. Above all, women in this area have strong tendency to avoid being exposed in public due to Arab-Islam tradition.

When we like to collect information on common Emirati people, it is a good way to read what they write about life and society in case we cannot approach them physically. Again, it is difficult to look for what ordinary Emirati people write, especially in English. The UAE education may be the cause of shortage of literary work. Traditionally
education in the UAE has emphasized memorizing Qur’an and has not paid much attention to make students write composition. Thus, people are not used to write essay, thesis, nevertheless novels.

Unlike some Middle Eastern countries which have affluent literary works in the long history, the UAE has only produced a small number of authors so far. Mohammad Al-Murr, the most famous short story writer in the UAE, depicted daily life of UAE people. Even then, the historical background is as of twenty century, stories do not demonstrate the up-to-date situation. Khamis, a young Emirati woman, offered her impression on the UAE society in her short story. Although it helps to learn the society briefly, Khamis’ opinion might not represent the general women’s minds, because she was educated in the Western countries, which was not very usual for Emirati women.

There are some English autobiographies of Emirati people. Nevertheless, these protagonists are outstanding figures in some specific areas such as politicians, lawyers and company executives. English Daily newspapers also pick up articles of some local people, but they are also chosen few who did something special.

It is true that poetry is widespread in Arabian countries. Even so Arabian poems do not always represent a poet’s life and society, and poetizing is mainly Bedouin tradition. In other words, not all the Arabs write poetry.

Existing research on Emirati people and society conducts group or individual interview and questionnaire investigation to gather people’s voice. Interview and questionnaire investigation are efficient methods in sociological study. Be that as it may, it would happen that interviewees and answerers hesitate to say the truth, or exaggerate the truth in front of interviewers and questioners. Literary work would be able to complement the downside of the interview method more or less. Matsubara (2011) studied the profile of young Emirati women by using the ESSC as literary work, yet it does not cover Emirati men. All things considered, study on UAE people’s profile will not be sufficient enough.

2.2 The advantage of using the ESSC as literary work

The ESSC is a compilation of English short stories; we can obtain a great number of stories in one ESSC anthology. It is relatively easy to perceive the message of each writer, because each story is consisted of only 50 English words. This enable any person to write a story even he/she is not good at English. A person who just started learning English can write a story as well.

The ESSC stories are made by ordinary people, not by professional novelists or elite academic researchers, that is to say the ESSC provides us the general people’s voice.

Writers’ anonymity and public exposure (Hassall 2006a:144) of a story are also characteristics of the ESSC. A writer can choose to make the real name public, or use pseudonym. As Hassall explains (2006b:90), writers can disclose something delicate and
taboo subject because of the anonymity.

Thanks to these distinctive advantages, writers are even more motivated to produce stories, therefore the ESSC becomes a collection of what general people like to express.

2.3 Methodology
To underscore young Emirati people, young Japanese people are compared with them. As a tool of comparison, two ESSCs written by Emirati youth and Japanese youth respectively are employed. Every story is categorized according to a topic which is supposed to be a digest of what a writer wants to express. The first process is to extract frequently-appearing topics and unique topics of Emirati and Japanese stories. The next process is to analyze the general mindset, behavior, preference, values and culture of writers in the two countries. These processes will clarify the holistic life and society of two countries’ young people.

Although Stories in the ESSC include facts and fictions, this is irrelevant to this study, because it deals with the topic of a story which would reflect a writer’s interest.

Several reasons are given why Emirati young people are compared with Japanese young people. Firstly, the ratio of entering tertiary education is quite high in both countriesii. That means high school and university students are ordinary people in the UAE and Japan. Secondly, both writers are not native English speakersiii. Thirdly, there was the ESSC in each country which was written under the similar conditions; namely ‘Pearls of Emirati Wisdom’ (henceforth referred to as ‘Pearls’) written by UAE youth and ‘Rays of the Rising SUN’ (henceforth referred to as ‘SUN’) written by Japanese youth. Here are the same/similar conditions.

- Stories in both ESSCs are collected nationwide in 2006.
- ‘Pearls’ writers are all university/college students aged 17-23. ‘SUN’s writers are junior high school to adults, but 96%iv of the writers ranged 13-24.
- Both are written by male and female. The male-to-female ratio is around half.
- The number of stories is 963 in ‘Pearls’ and 513 in ‘SUN’v, but the total number of writers is about 500 for both ESSCs.

Fig. 1 Pearls of Emirati Wisdom (UAE)  
Fig. 2 Rays of the Rising Sun (Japan)
2.4 Limitation

Although ‘Pearls’ and ‘SUN’ contain a large number of young people’s stories, these two cannot cover all the sort of young people’s voice. For instance, teenagers who didn’t belong to school were excluded. The writers were only persons who knew the ESSC and willingly submitted the stories.

With these reasons, to be more precise, this study is the comparison of school students in 10s-20s between the UAE and Japan.

In the matter of the contents of the stories, we need to consider the fact that Emirati people do not have complete freedom of speech even the ESSC assures writers’ anonymity. Article 30 of the UAE constitution states there is partial freedom of opinion and expressing.

Lastly, there are limitations of the author’s capability for reading of stories. There might be misunderstanding or oversight of topics.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the effect of English learning by the ESSC and its linguistic analysis.

III Results

3.1 Category of topics

All the stories in ‘Pearls’ and ‘SUN’ are categorized by the topics listed below. Here are the topics that contain more than 10 stories in either ‘Pearls’ (P) or ‘SUN’ (S), or both (B).

- Appreciation of nature (B)
- Appreciation of UAE (P)
- Appreciation of Japan (S)
- Transience of human life (B)
- Childhood memory (P)
- Future dream, ambition and ideal (B)
- Dream in his/her sleep (P)
- Fantasy (B)
- Romantic feeling (B)
- Self-introduction and self-reflection (B)
- Gratitude and satisfaction (B)
- Moral Message and encouragement (B)
- Hatred and betrayal (P)
- Heartbreak and loneliness (P)
- Philosophy (P)
- War (P)
- Death (P)
- Traffic accident (P)
- Failure story (P)
- Comedy (P)
- School work (P)
- Demining difficulty (B)
- Helping people (B)
- Family (P)
- Father (P)
- Mother (P)
- Brother/sister (P)
- Grandfather/grandmother (P)
- Relatives (P)
- Baby and birth (P)
- Ruling family (P)
- Friend and friendship (B)
- Pet, animal and living creatures (B) - Hobby and club activity (B)
- Islam and God (P) - Travel abroad and cultural exchange (S)
- Marriage (P) - Short trip, leisure and event (B)
- Sports (B) - Holiday (P)
- Music (S) - Social issues (P)
- Hometown (S) - Others (B)

There are topics that directly indicate a person or thing such as ‘my friend’ and ‘the cat’, and topics that are abstract such as ‘encouragement’ and ‘loneliness’. Both kinds of topics are equally counted as one.

Some stories contain more than one topic. For example,

“Thank you for...” My parents taught me how to love. I thank them. I am happy now. I hit lots of snags. At that time I was helped by friends. I thank them. I am happy now. You are here now, so I am here now. Thank you. I am happy. (SUN #397)

In this story, there are 3 topics, namely ‘parents’, ‘friend and friendship’ and ‘gratitude and satisfaction’.

3.2 List of frequently-appearing topics

The most frequently-appearing topics in each ESSC are shown in Table 1 in descending order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Pearls (UAE) number</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>SUN (Japan) number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Moral Message and Encouragement</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-introduction and Self-reflection</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Friend and Friendship</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Failure story</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Heartbreak and loneliness</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pet, Animal and Living creature</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Short trip, leisure and</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV Discussions

Topics categorized in chapter 3 were discussed as follows.

4.1 Frequently-appearing topics in both countries
4.2 Frequently-appearing topics only in the UAE
4.3 Frequently-appearing topics only in Japan
4.4 Topics which were not frequently-appearing but very unique to UAE
4.5 Topics which were not frequently-appearing but very unique to Japan

In each section, a typical story in the discussed topic was introduced. Discussion to explain why the topic was frequent or unique would be followed based on the UAE and Japanese social index as well as the author’s direct observation on both countries.

4.1 Frequently-appearing topics in the UAE and Japan

4.1.1 ‘Friend and friendship’

‘Friend and friendship’ was a very popular topic in both ESSCs. It could be said that friend is one of the main concern for young people regardless the nationality. As a general tendency, Japanese writers emphasize friends who have the same hobbies with writers. In contrast, UAE writers emphasize friends who enjoy outing with writers.

“Friendship” The greatest thing for me is friendship. Friendship is a special kind of love, it just grows between good friends. A best friend is someone who understands silence as well as words. I believe that nothing on earth is as great as friendship, no jewel: no pearl shares its worth. (Pearls #273)

4.1.2 ‘Self-introduction and self-reflection’

‘Self-introduction and self-reflection’ was also a popular topic. As a common aspect for the UAE and Japan, some writers introduce themselves quite simply by describing which school they belong to, what they like and what they do often. The other writers quest for their significance of existence rather philosophically. The latter writers seem to feel vague anxiety for the future. Overall tones of the latter writers in both countries
were rather similar. It may be universal that young people are struggling to discover their identities. The next story is an example of self-questioning.


4.1.3 ‘Moral message and encouragement’
This topic was ranked 2nd in the UAE and 4th in Japan. Emirati stories are relatively intrusive, austere, and cynical. On the contrary, Japanese stories are encouraging in an innocent way. Generally speaking, Japanese stories have more optimistic attitude, and UAE stories are more advisory. This difference could accrue to the degree of the flexibility in each society. The detail was explained in 4.2.4 and 4.3.3.

This story illustrates Emirati characteristics.

“Never think you are the best” Life, like the earth, turns around. Everybody and everything has a beginning and an ending. If you control the world, do not hurt the people. You should understand even if you reach space, there is somebody bigger than you. Death takes the biggest person on the earth in one second. (Pearls #576)

The next story illustrates Japanese characteristics.

“It says to me” Dreams are wonderful. Dreams give me motivation. When times are heard, I can walk into the future. Do you have a dream? To have a dream is very easy! You find your favorite thing. And you mustn’t forget your dream. You must try to make your dream come true. Fight! (SUN #152)

4.1.4 Other common frequently-appearing topics
3 more topics, namely ‘Pet, animal and living creature’, ‘Future dream, ambition and ideal’ and ‘Appreciation of nature’ were commonly popular.

Both youths felt familiar with their pets and had affection to living creatures. To have future dream, ambition and ideal could be peculiar to young people everywhere.

Regarding of ‘Appreciation of nature’, Emirati and Japanese youngsters wrote about beautiful ocean, shining stars, pleasant breeze and so on, but stories in each country had own flavor. Each flavor was discussed in 4.3.5 and 4.4.1.
4.2 Frequently-appearing topics only for UAE

4.2.1 ‘Death’ and ‘Traffic accident’

The topic of ‘Death’ was ranked first with 79 stories in ‘Pearls’, while ‘SUN’ has 5 stories. The topic of ‘Death’ includes death in traffic accident, natural death and death by diseases of family members and so on. The topic of ‘Traffic accident’ is also ranked 8th with 25 stories, while ‘SUN’ has only 1 story. Most of the ‘Traffic accidents’ stories include the topic of ‘death’. Emirates 24/7, one of the UAE newspapers, dated 18th November 2012 reported ‘The UAE has one of the world’s highest traffic accident rates relative to its population.’ The number has been decreasing lately, but the ratio of the accident is still a lot higher than Japan. In 2007, the year ‘Pearls’ and ‘SUN’ were published, the number of fatal victim of traffic accident were 1,056 in the UAE and 5,744 in Japan. Considering the total residential population of Japan which is 15 times larger than the UAE, it is easy to understand how often Emirati people face mishap in roads. As for Japan, the number of fatal traffic accident was highest in the late 1960’s and beginning of 1970’s. Intriguingly, this period exactly coincided with high-growth period of the Japanese economy. Japan was in the midst of developing, population was expanding and supplies of infrastructure such as road could not catch up with the progress. The UAE may be in the transition to become matured society by following the path Japan went through.

“Bloody Ending” Three teenagers picked a car and drove it insanely. Causing disruption in traffic through speeding was their dearest hobby. However, they all met their end, when they collided with a huge truck. Fresh blood spilled in the streets, a corpse was hanging out of the window. No one was alive. (Pearl #175)

4.2.2 ‘Family’ and ‘Family members’

Besides the ‘Traffic accidents’, the reason of large volume of ‘Death’ stories could ascribe to the UAE’s demographics. Emirati women’s birth rate was considerably high in the past. According to the survey of Green and Smith (2007:269) at the 3rd populated city in the UAE, the ranges of the number of babies a woman delivered were 1·18 for grandmothers’ generation, 2·16 for mothers’ generation, and 1·6 for daughters generation. Prolificacy led the UAE family size large. While Japanese birth rate in 1960’s was 1.6·2x and it has been on the decline. Naturally Emirati people have more opportunity to face death of family members.

In ‘Pearls’, family members were not only depicted in the topic of ‘Death’, but they also appeared in stories of ‘Short trip, leisure and event’.
Table 2. The number of stories which family members were the central theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whole Family</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Brother/Sister</th>
<th>Grandfather/Grandmother</th>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Baby</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 represents the number of stories dealt with family or family members. This result underpins that Emirati people concern about family members including relatives far more than Japanese. In other words, the UAE is rather family-oriented society.

In contrast, Japanese do not mention family members often. For Japanese youth, friends seem to be the major issue.

One more interesting thing regarding the family-related stories in ‘Pearls’ is they illuminate the UAE family structure.

“1996, a beautiful year” Thinking about my beautiful days in 1996. The day my mother had the baby. My family and I were happy. I felt a change in life. Afterwards, we went to Saudi and my sister finished school. Then, my father got a new house in Sharjah and my brother got married. (Pearls #5)

In one year, the writer’s mother had a new born baby, brother married and sister presumably graduated from a university. This story explains about their family structure thoroughly. In the UAE, women used to marry in their teens, and give birth for about twenty years or more. No wonder a mother still delivers a baby when an elder child gets married.

4.2.3 ‘Failure story’

‘Failure story’ introduced writers’ trivial mistakes in everyday life. Many stories were written in humorous way, not in cynical way. Supposedly Emirati people have a good sense of humor and like to make people laugh.

“An Improper Impression” I was late on the first day of semester. The parking lot was full. I parked my car in a messy way. Later that day, I was asked to remove it because I was blocking another car. I found out the car I had blocked belonged to my new professor. (Pearls #127)

4.2.4 ‘Heartbreak and loneliness’

‘Heartbreak and loneliness’ was ranked 6th in the UAE. This phenomenon would be rooted rather conservative society where people care about someone’s eyes. Freedom of speech is limited as stated in 2.4, freedom of action is also limited especially for single
girls. Young maidens are basically not allowed to go out alone, and their actions are always under their parents’ control. Closed society may make young people feel lonely. The next story revealed a writer’s isolation.

“Hurt”. I just cannot believe that I never open my eyes. People used to tell me that my intentions were no good. But I shut down their comments whenever I could. I just hope that my heart will eventually mend because I desperately need someone to call my friend. (Pearls #333)

4.2.5 ‘Short trip, leisure and event’
This topic included picnic, drive, parties and whatever the writers do at their leisure time.

“Eid Holiday” [Eid means Islamic holiday] Last Eid, I went to Oman by car with friends. We camped on the beach and went fishing and swimming. We also played volleyball and football. We cooked fish and chicken with rice and drank orange juice. Afterwards, I went into the desert because my brother’s car had broken down. (Pearls #227)

Going out for a barbecue at seashore or desert is very typical and popular leisure for Emirati people. This story is likely to be written by a male, because only males can go out with friends. Females cannot go far by themselves in the UAE.

4.2.6 ‘Islam and God’
‘Islam and God’ was very unique topic to the UAE. No Japanese wrote about religion. Writers expressed their immense respect for God, also described about Islamic annual events. Islam and God ought to be tightly connected to Emirati life.

“Ali: Lost and Found” Ali was a brilliant student. Everybody liked him. One of his mean friends decided to transform him into a bad guy. He started drinking alcohol. One day, he saw a mosque and clearly heard the Holy Quran. He felt the beginning of a new life and people who respected him. (Pearls #116)

4.3 Frequently-appearing topics only for Japan
4.3.1 ‘Hobbies and Club Activities’
‘Hobbies and Club Activities’ was ranked first with 77 stories In Japan, while ranked 22nd with 16 stories in the UAE. It indicates that Japanese young people usually have specific hobbies and put great value on them. The significant difference between Japan and the UAE was Japanese have a far more variety of hobbies. Japanese young people
named various kinds of hobbies, Emirati young people named only several kinds. Most popular hobby was sports for Japanese boys and girls. Japanese referred 11 kinds of sports in 36 stories\textsuperscript{x}. Emiratis referred 4 kinds of sports in 16 stories\textsuperscript{xii}. Curiously, topic of sports was raised only by men in the UAE.

Conceivable reason why there were few ‘sports’ stories in the UAE would arise from its physical education. It is not eagerly promoted, especially for female. Many parents do not want their daughters to play sports. Parents are afraid their daughters have lose chance to marry by doing sports seriously. In their opinion, sports make daughters tomboys, which would be a negative factor in finding a marriage partner.

“Dance” I joined a dance club nine month ago. I couldn’t dance when I started. My first performance was at a PE festival, we danced ‘Girls’. Then I became interested in another genre; ‘Lock’. I danced ‘Lock’ last month in my school festival. I was happy to dance with my club mates. (SUN #64)

4.3.2 ‘Romantic feeling’

‘Romantic feeling’ was ranked 7\textsuperscript{th} with 27 stories in ‘SUN’. To have interest in opposite gender and confessing romantic feeling is natural for adolescents. However, there were not many romantic stories in ‘Pearls’: ranked 27\textsuperscript{th} with 15 stories. In the UAE, boys and girls are basically segregated after they enter elementary school. Until they marry, they are not allowed to have boy/girl friends. This restriction especially applies to girls. Many adults try to prevent young men and women from meeting each other. Even if a young single man and woman are in love, they cannot speak out their feeling unless the partner is his/her fiancée. Emirati people cannot possibly post this kind of story as shown below.

“Broken Heart almost” It happened on a very sunny day. She appeared in front of me. I was surprised by her. She was beautiful. I fell in love with her at first sight. But she was a foreigner. Therefore, there was difficulty with language between me and her. But I never gave up. (SUN #46)

4.3.3 ‘Gratitude and satisfaction’

‘Gratitude and satisfaction’ was ranked 8\textsuperscript{th} with 24 stories in ‘SUN’ and ranked 35\textsuperscript{th} with 10 stories in ‘Pearls’. Satisfaction feelings by Japanese direct to people who surround the writers; namely parents and friends, but also direct to social environment. This fact may signify the society is safe and sound.

“Happiness” We have more happiness than most people because we can eat food every day. We can come home to our houses. We have clothes. We have family cars.
We can receive education. We can play soccer. We can go to the amusement park. So we should feel happier in our lives. (SUN #118)

As stated in the previous chapters, Emirati people live in an inflexible community with limited freedom of speech and action, which is very different from Japanese society. On top of this, as will be stated in 4.4.3, wars and conflicts in Arab states are afflicting them. It is understandable that the number of stories which express ‘Gratitude and Satisfaction’ is much more in Japan than in the UAE.

4.3.4 ‘Music’
‘Music’ had 20 stories in ‘SUN’ but only 3 stories in ‘Pearls’. The UAE’s paucity of ‘Music’ stories may caused by its educational policy. In UAE’s mandatory education, students have music class only first 2 years to 5 years. Emirati adults tend to think that music is something interruptive to Islamic faith, because music can hamper the concentration of Islamic prayer. This makes Emirati people away from music, or not keen on music, whereas Japanese writers stress the importance of music. Their favorite music has wide variety; pops, rock’n’roll, classic, jazz, opera, punk, heavy metal and reggae. Some writers refer their performance of guitar, violin, oboe, and vocal percussion, and some talk about their music club activities.

“Music” I think music has very important meanings. When I feel down, I listen to my music. Then I am borne up by my favorite music. Music has deep meanings. Song writers have various particular opinions and convey them through music. So we sometimes cry when we listen to our music. (SUN #209)

4.3.5 Season and weather in ‘Appreciation of nature’
32 Japanese stories appreciated nature. 15 out of 32 referred the seasonal beauty and transition, and 11 Japanese referred weather. Interestingly, many writers explained the weather conditions and natural phenomena would alter their moods, and specific weather conditions would remind them of the past memories.

“Rainy Day” I do not want to go out on a rainy day. Someone’s sorrow is always there. It was a rainy day when I last saw her. It was a rainy day when I parted in anger with him. I do not want a rainy day. It has begun to rain. (SUN #327)

Japanese writers give information to readers that Japan is blessed with the rich nature and Japanese are very sensitive about weather and season.
4.4 Topics which are not frequently-appearing but very unique to the UAE

4.4.1 ‘Appreciation of nature’

23 Emirati writers portrayed desert in positive sense and the word ‘camel’ appeared in 10 stories. Frequent usage of these words reflects that Emirati people are proud of their indigenous landscape and creatures.

“Attraction” Her bronzed and yellow silky sands; Her black and gray stone; Her white and blue skies; Her shiny golden sun; Her high colorful buildings; Her calm refreshing air; Her nice and beautiful smells; Her green parks and streets; Her pellucid fresh water; all these attract me to my lovely country. (Pearls #139)

2 writers expressed the surprise and joy when they saw the snowfall for the first time in the UAE\[iii\]. Rainfall even made 5 Emirati writers happy. This is hard to understand for Japanese who live in the island of high precipitation. The next story conveys how much the writer felt lucky when it rained.

“You bring your luck”. It rained in Abu Dhabi, as if to replenish all those dry years. Ayesha excitedly rushed out, soaking her 1000 dirham gown, to pray in the rain which brought luck. The browns rushed back into the airport, disappointingly thinking, ‘couldn’t help but bring our weather along, how unlucky are we? (Pearls #950)

4.4.2 ‘Ruling family’

‘Ruling family’ was ranked 17th with 19 stories. These stories expressed love to the UAE ruling families. 16 out of 19 stories are about the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the UAE, who passed away in 2004. ‘Pearls’ gathered stories in 2006, yet there were still as many as 16 elegies for Sheikh Zayed. Neither any politician nor royal family is mentioned in Japanese stories.

“Zayed” He was our Father, our President. He was part of our life, the most important part. Suddenly we lost him on the night of 02/11/04. It was the saddest night for us. We promise you our Father we will do our best to achieve your dreams and develop our country. (Pearls #962)

4.4.3 ‘War’

‘War’ was ranked 20th with 17 stories. Some of them described Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Gulf Wars and Iraq War by appealing the tragedy of wars. The UAE’s newspapers feature the wars and political crisis in the Middle East every day. It should be natural that this topic will come up to their minds.
“On the battleground” Bullets spread out everywhere. Bombs fall from skies like fireballs. Fresh blood splatters on the streets. Painful screams of innocent people fill the horizons. A soldier kills, a soldier dies. Armored tanks launch blasts of malevolent fire. Lifeless bodies scatter. The depravity of humanity is cruelty in its full monstrosity. (Pearls #600)

4.4.4 ‘Marriage’
‘Marriage’ was ranked 28th with 15 stories in the UAE and only 3 stories in Japan. Some of the stories included social problem relating to marriage system. As widely known, Islam defines that men are entitled to marry up to four women. Although there is a regulation in the UAE that an engaged couple has to discuss if the bride admits her groom’s future polygamy, problem over the polygamy happens once in a while.

“Betrayal story” In 1990, a man named Jake loved Maria. After five months they married. He went away on business. One day he betrayed Maria. When he traveled to Oman, he took a second wife, then returned to UAE. She got angry because she loved Jake. She does not love him now. (Pearls #168)

4.4.5 ‘Maids and nannies’
5 stories mentioned ‘maids and nannies’ in the UAE, there is none in Japan. 4 out of 5 Emirati stories report that maids and nannies play important roles in UAE families. This story is convincing.

“My problem” I stood for 10 minutes thinking how I would cook the chicken. Suddenly the phone rang and I answered it. It was my grandmother. I told her that I was preparing the lunch. She sent her housemaid to help me. I was very happy because she had solved my problem. (Pearls #554)

4.5 Topics which are not frequently-appearing but very unique to Japan
4.5.1 ‘Hometown’
11 Japanese looked their hometown nostalgically back, while only one Emirati mentioned her hometown. In Japan, many university students live far away from their homes to attend their universities. It is true that some Emirati students live in boarding houses or student dormitories, they can return home by car within several hours. The UAE is such a tiny country where there is no long-distance train. The habitable area is within the circle of 5-hour drive.

“Coming Home” Getting off the train, I feel I’ve got back to my home town. Sounds,
air, sky, mountains, smells, people, everything here relaxes me. Time passes so slowly here it’s like the breeze. My body tells me that here is my origin. My parents are waiting for me in my home. (SUN #58)

Some stories introduce their hometown attractions such as the unique food, festival and landscape. Japan has noticeable local coloring of which people are proud.

4.5.2 Job hunting in ‘Others’

A Japanese university student mentioned job hunting. No Emirati mentioned this theme. The next story may sound very strange to non-Japanese people.

“Recruitment suit” I hate my recruitment suit. It’s uncomfortable!! So I decided I wouldn’t wear it if I didn’t have any important job hunting to do. One day, I overslept. I wouldn’t need to choose clothes if I wore it. I wasn’t late to class. Now, I don’t hate my recruitment suit. (SUN #332)

There is no job hunting season in the UAE; young Emiratis normally start looking for work after they finish education. When they look for work, they wear the UAE traditional costume. This story tells the way of Japanese job hunting is very different.

V Conclusion

Comparative analysis of topics in ‘Pearls’ written by Emirati young people and ‘SUN’ written by Japanese young people discovered what they thought, what they were interested in, and how they spent everyday life respectively. The people in oil-producing tiny Arabian Gulf country were not ‘People in Arabian Nights’ or ‘Oil Billionaires’, but people who had a lot of similarities with Japanese.

Results showed that youth in both countries were in the midst of seeking for their identity, and regarded friends to be important. Besides they felt affection toward living creatures and appreciated the beauty of nature.

As a striking feature for Emirati youth, they talked about death very often. It might largely attribute to the high ratio of fatal traffic accidents. As other characteristics, Emirati people esteemed own family highly and went out for fun together often. They also paid respect for Sheikh Zayed – the founding father, and their lives were connected to Islam. With regard to Japanese youth, they were keen to engage their hobbies and club activities. The hobbies had a number of variety; the most popular hobbies were sports and music. They also enjoyed some adolescent bitter-sweet romance whilst appreciating the living environment.

This study proved the ESSC to be a great source of writers’ information. This
information may include their daily lives, mindset, behavior, preference, social values
and culture which help us to grasp the writers’ lives and society as a whole. This
becomes possible because the ESSC is the collection of large volume of ordinary people’s
stories which epitomize their inner voices.

Knowledge formed by reading the ESSC promotes international understanding and
friendship. ‘Pearls’ would make readers feel familiar to the UAE and ‘SUN’ would make
readers feel familiar to Japan.

It would be interesting if we could compare the contents of different nationals’ ESSC
anthologies which are written under the same conditions. Currently, the ESSC has been
produced in nearly 20 countries, and it is being spread. There would be abundance of
ESSC stories waiting to be discovered in every corner of the world.

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Notes (All internet site was accessed on 29th January 2013.)

i For example, the issues are ‘Relationship between family and modernity’ (Al-ghazy, 1997), ‘Women’s identity’ (Khatib, 1990), ‘Women’s health environment’ (Winslow and Honein, 2006), ‘Childbirth and parenting’ (Green and Smith, 2007).

ii In the UAE, the university entry ratio is 80% for men and 95% for women as of 2008. (http://www.uaeyearbook.com/Yearbooks/2008/ENG/, p.235.) In Japan, the ratio going on to high school is 98% and the university entry ratio is 56.9% in 2010. (http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nihon/22.htm)

iii Emirati people start learning English at kindergartens and understand English better than Japanese who start at grade 7, yet vocabulary and usage of expression of Emirati people are limited compare to native English speakers.

iv 494 stories divided by 513 stories

v There are some writers who made multiple stories in ‘Pearls’.

vi http://www.uaecabinet.ae/English/UAEGovernment/Pages/ConstitutionOfUAE.aspx


ix Japanese population is over 120 million, and total number of residence in the UAE is about 8 million as of 2012.

x http://www2.ttcn.ne.jp/honkawa/1550.html

xi Football (13), Baseball (11), Basket Ball (4), Dance (3), Running (3), Kendo (Japanese way of sword) (2), Cycling (1), Beach Volleyball (1), Lacrosse (1), Classic Ballet (1), Tennis (1)

xii football (13), swimming (1), hunting (1), car racing (1)

xiii It snowed in the northern Emirates in 2004 for the first time on the UAE record.