

A Systematic Study: Evolving China-Arab Relations from Economic Partnership to Cultural Understanding

Mubarak Altwaiji, Professor of literary theory & criticism, Department of Languages and Translation, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia

Nourah Salem Alshammari, Research Scholar, Department of Languages and Translation, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia

(Received: 12-02-2026; Accepted: 20-04-2026)

Abstract: China has made significant efforts in enhancing cultural understanding with the Arab World states and become a significant cultural partner in the last decade. This study investigates China-Arab World cultural understanding and the Chinese cultural evolving role in the region. The study uses different theories of cultural relations such as Realist Theory, Conventional Realism & Transition Theory, Liberal Theory, Dependency Theory, and Soft Power Theory to interpret recent history and reach a comprehensive conclusion on how trade relations and economic interaction shape mutual cultural understanding between the two regions. China always emphasizes that the growing cultural rapprochement with the Arab nation is based on mutual interest and the win-win strategy, emphasizing China's shift from economic interests to a more active involvement in cultural openness with the region. Further, this study draws on analysis of China's cultural role in the Arab World where China significantly gains strength and poses major threats to the economic and cultural interests of other superpowers in the region. Moreover, economic success with the Arab World nations has given China the opportunity to gain considerable cultural popularity and acceptance, not only among the governments and the elites, but also at street level.

Keywords: Cultural Understanding; Civilizations; China; Arab States; International Relations theories.

دراسة منهجية: تطور العلاقات الصينية العربية من الشراكة الاقتصادية إلى التفاهم الثقافي

مبارك التويجي، أستاذ دكتور نظريات النقد الأدبي، قسم اللغات والترجمة، كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعة الحدود الشمالية، عرعر، المملكة العربية السعودية.

نورة سالم الشمري، باحثة في اللغويات والدراسات الثقافية، برنامج ماجستير اللغويات التطبيقية، قسم اللغات والترجمة، كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعة الحدود الشمالية، عرعر، المملكة العربية السعودية

(تاريخ الاستلام: 2026-02-12؛ تاريخ القبول: 2026-04-20)

مستخلص البحث: برزت الصين كشريك ثقافياً هاماً لدول الشرق الأوسط، وأسهمت في تعزيز العلاقات الثقافية مع الدول العربية. تتناول هذه الدراسة التفاهم الثقافي بين الصين والعالم العربي، ودور الصين الثقافي المتنامي في الشرق الأوسط. تستخدم هذه الدراسة عدة نظريات متخصصة في العلاقات الثقافية، كالنظرية الواقعية، والواقعية التقليدية ونظرية الانتقال، والنظرية الليبرالية، ونظرية التبعية، ونظرية القوة الناعمة، للوصول إلى معرفة كيف تطورت العلاقة التجارية والاقتصادية إلى تفاهم ثقافي متبادل بين الجانبين. تؤكد الصين دائماً أن التقارب الثقافي مع الدول العربية يقوم على المصالح المشتركة واستراتيجية الربح المتبادل، مشددة على تحول الصين من التركيز على المصالح الاقتصادية إلى الانخراط الفعال في الانفتاح الثقافي مع المنطقة. كذلك، تستند هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل دور الصين الثقافي في العالم العربي، حيث تكتسب الصين قوة كبيرة، وتشكل منافساً دولياً كبيراً في المنطقة. علاوة على ذلك، فإن النجاح الاقتصادي مع دول العالم العربي منح الصين فرصة الحصول على شعبية وقبول ثقافي كبيرين، ليس فقط بين الحكومات والنخب، ولكن أيضاً على مستوى الشارع.

الكلمات مفتاحية: التفاهم الثقافي؛ الحضارة؛ الصين؛ الدول العربية.



DOI: 10.12816/0062560

(*) Corresponding Author:

Mubarak Altwaiji, Professor of literary theory & criticism, Department of Languages and Translation,

College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia

Nourah Salem Alshammari, Research Scholar, Department of Languages and Translation, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia

Email:

mubarak2006ye@gmail.com & mubarak.saif@nbu.edu.sa

Nourahsalem2017@gmail.com

(*) للمراسلة:

مبارك التويجي، أستاذ دكتور نظريات النقد الأدبي، قسم اللغات والترجمة، كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعة الحدود الشمالية، عرعر، المملكة العربية السعودية.

نورة سالم الشمري، باحثة في اللغويات والدراسات الثقافية، برنامج ماجستير اللغويات التطبيقية، قسم اللغات والترجمة، كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعة الحدود الشمالية، عرعر، المملكة العربية السعودية

البريد الإلكتروني:

mubarak2006ye@gmail.com & mubarak.saif@nbu.edu.sa
Nourahsalem2017@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, China has become a dominant economic player in the Middle East, not least due to its need for oil. Further, since the declaration of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on Sep 7, 2013, China-Middle East understanding has been driven by economic cooperation, trade relations, infrastructure development, and cultural positioning (Kent 2020; Niblock 2020; Sharma 2023; Xinhua 2024). As China continues to build its economic power in the region, it works to convert its power into cultural connections and geopolitical influence. This prominent role makes China enjoy considerable popularity in all the societies of the Middle East and North African countries, not only among business and political elites or governments but also among ordinary people. The main objective of this study is to examine the evolution of China-Arab states cultural relations, with a particular focus on aspects and dimensions contributing to the strengthening the cultural ties such as common interest respect, language interest, political support, and economic collaboration. The study methodology provides a few theories that set a good ground for later discussion in the study. Key International Relations theories will provide a theoretical explanation for the dynamics shaping China-Arab states interactions.

At the official level, all Middle Eastern countries (including those hostile to one another, like Syria, Iran, and Bahrain) are on friendly terms with Beijing. At the popular level, China has become a leading player in education and cultural programs and the Chinese language has entered school curricula in most of the Middle Eastern countries. Further, many studies and opinion polls reflect China's popularity at street level: "A common explanation is that Beijing offers resources 'with no strings attached'. While this is persuasive at elite level, it cannot explain China's popularity among the masses who might benefit from conditionality to fight corruption or promote human rights" (Friedrichs 1634). Why, then, does China attract such popularity in the Middle East and North Africa? Is it for political agendas? Is it for economic reasons? Is it for cultural reasons? Is it for one of the mentioned reasons, or is it for all the reasons combined? *Peter Singer*, a Professor of Practice at Arizona State University and *Strategist* at New America, argues that as the US's rivalry with

China intensifies in an increasingly polarized world, the Middle East chooses to get closer to China which is becoming the real rival to the West in the whole region:

China is working to present itself as a responsible alternative to the U.S. in the Middle East, just as many are questioning Washington's long-term commitment to the region...Beijing stacked up strategic win after win, not just expanding its economic presence, but convening leadership summits, brokering peace deals, and even holding a joint military training exercise with one of the U.S.'s most important allies in the region. While shifts in power and influence often become evident only after the fact, history could one day look back on 2023 as the year that China truly began to win the Middle East. (Singer 2024)

Chinese culture has made significant inroads in the Middle East, particularly through the expansion of the Chinese language education and the spread of Chinese digital media platforms (Lynch 2024, 5). This wave of cultural understanding and economic cooperation has taken both sides to a significant level where cultural relationships translate into a strong cultural understanding. According to many strategic experts, China approaches the Middle East with a careful strategy balanced between ambitious goals and mutual interests with the region (Cheng & Lu 2024, 171). However, other experts argue that, like earlier cultural relations of other countries with the region, questions arise about whether China's interests in the long run align with the complexities of the region (Friedrichs 2019; Harris 2020; Houghton 2022). The presence of the Chinese culture in the Middle East is visible through the spread of language, education, media, lifestyle, and everyday practices, not just state-level relations. For example, the spread of Chinese language learning institutes across countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia reflects cultural transmission beyond commerce. In a report, *How Confucius Institutes in the Arab World Shape Positive Perceptions of China*, published by Jamestown Foundation in 2022, Chinese language institutes across the Arab world reflect a growing cultural and educational engagement between China and the region. The period between 2017-2022 saw a notable interest in learning Chinese language in Arab countries highlighting the possibility of integrating Chinese language into national education systems.

Country	No. of Chinese Language Institutes	Location
Saudi Arabia	5	Prince Sultan University, University of Jeddah, King Abdulaziz University, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Confucius Institute, King Saud University
United Arab Emirates	5	University of Dubai, Zayed University (Abu Dhabi & Dubai), Chinese Language Institute Middle East (CLIME) (Abu Dhabi), PrimeUp Institute (Abu Dhabi)
Egypt	3	Confucius Institute at Cairo University (Cairo), Confucius Institute at Ain Shams University (Cairo), Confucius Institute at Suez Canal University (Ismailia), Confucius Unit at Pharos University (Alexandria),
Jordan	2	Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Confucius Institute (Amman), Confucius Institute at Philadelphia University
Lebanon	1	Confucius Institute at Saint Joseph University
Morocco	1	Hassan II University (Casablanca)
Bahrain	1	University of Bahrain (Confucius Institute)
Tunisia	1	Confucius Institute at University of Carthage
Sudan	1	Confucius Institute at University of Khartoum
Total	20	

Jamestown Foundation: <https://jamestown.org/>

A further notable point is that the China-Middle East cultural reality shows that the traditional monogamous relationship between many cultural superpowers and the Arab World is now over and the region as a whole has gone into a more open and strong relationship with China (Kent 2020; Aras& Şaban 2021; Colombo 2021; Alterman, 2024). The European, American, or Russian engagements in the Middle East that expanded economically, politically, and strategically over the last seven decades have been marked by cycles of insecurity and instability. In recent years, their primacy has manifestly faded. This study investigates the Chinese cultural rapprochement with the Arab states and examines how cultural exchanges contribute to mutual understanding. The study addresses the following questions: How and why have China–Middle East relations become strong at present? What forms do these relations take, particularly in the cultural sphere? And How can International Relations theories explain these dynamics? Together, answers for these questions will provide a framework for understanding the role of cultural understanding in shaping China–Arab relations and highlight its significance within the broader context of their evolving partnership.

This study contributes to explain China–Arab World relations using different cultural theories such as Realist Theory, Conventional Realism & Transition Theory, Liberal Theory, Dependency Theory, and Soft Power to reach a comprehensive conclusion on how trade relations and economic interaction shape mutual cultural understanding between the two regions. By doing so, the study focuses not only on government or elite perspectives but also on popular attitudes toward China, highlighting public opinion across the region. This cultural dimension - the cultural engagement – will focus on cultural promotion through education, media, mutual interests, and the political ties.

1.1 CHINA’S SUCCESS: THEORY-BASED Discussion

As we have noted, China’s growing popularity in the Arab world and the entire Middle East is a macro phenomenon. China’s relation with the Arab states can be illuminated using theories in international relations to explain the behaviors and outcomes of this relationship. In particular, it is informative to use multiple International Relations (IR) theories to gain the best understanding of the nexus between the rising cultural position of China and the fall of the US. This can also tell us how

the rising cultural position of China affects elite attitudes and public opinion in the Arab world. International relations (IR) theories are the tools to help us understand and explain not only the pattern of China-Arab states' relations, but also the secret of China's popularity in the entire region. The most prominent theories used in such studies are Realism, Conventional realism, Liberalism, International political economics, Liberal theory, Dependency theory, Transition Theory, and Soft power. All are used to make broad and specific predictions about cultural, political, and socioeconomic relations. Employing Realism, Conventional Realism and Transition Theory, Liberal Theory, and Dependency Theory allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the interplay between strategic interests and emerging cultural engagement. This theoretical pluralism enriches the discussion by moving beyond the constraints of a single framework and offering a more comprehensive explanation of the gradual shift from economic partnership to deeper cultural understanding.

1.2 Realism

Realism as a concept in international relations is a straightforward approach to mutual relations in which nations are hypothesized to work simply to increase their own influence. Realism states that nations that manage to gain power, have positive impacts and influential roles, and will thereby get more power as they can eclipse the achievements of less powerful nations and imperial powers. From a realist perspective, international relations are driven by the pursuit of national interests and cultural understanding. States seek to strengthen their position in an international system where competition is constant and trust is limited. In this context, achieving entirely stable or uniformly positive outcomes is not always possible. As a result, cooperation often takes the form of win-win strategies, where states pursue mutual benefits while still prioritizing their own interests. This theory also suggests that stronger states tend to shape the behavior of weaker ones, as less powerful countries often align themselves with major powers to secure economic or political advantages. It also helps explain how power relations influence both economic partnerships and broader patterns of interaction between China and the Arab world.

As far as the Arab world is concerned, realism is evident in the foreign policy of China. The relationship between China and the Arab world – that has raised eyebrows in west due to the failure of the western power to maintain a balanced relationship with the region – has succeeded in many aspects: firstly, China takes into account the historical factor in the Chinese-Arab relationship; secondly both sides work together to improve bilateral economic relations; thirdly, China has become the main political support for Arab political and security issues in international organizations; lastly, China's political, cultural and socioeconomic rise in the Middle East and the decline of the Western influence asserts that China leads a new power balance and also emphasizes the Chinese realist political approach to international affairs. Realism theory provides a clear landscape of China-Arab states relations in terms of cultural understanding and economic cooperation. It further helps explain China's rising role in the Middle East as part of an emerging global power balance.

1.3 Conventional Realism & Transition Theory

Conventional realist theory accounts for configurations of influential powers. John G. Gunnell argues that conventional realism is a theory of sociopolitical phenomena and an approach to the study of politics. Gunnell argues that “everything we designate as “real” is rendered conventionally, which entails a rejection of the widely accepted distinction between what is natural and what is conventional” (2020). Conventional realist theory asserts homoeostatic balance of power “whereby countries strike alliances that cancel each other out or, alternatively, for power transitions whereby world history is a succession of hegemonic state systems” (Friedrichs, 1639). This theory is much connected with power Transition Theory which is similarly relevant in the study of China's rise and US's decline in the region. Conventional realist theory and Transition Theory inform us that the stability that powerful states strive to achieve can be followed by hegemonic period, leading to wars that either reinstate the stability and order or launch a new one (1639). Conventional realists agree that China operates not only on the economic and political levels but also on social, cultural, and historical

factors in engaging with the Middle East, at official and public levels. The use of conventional realist theory here provides a more flexible framework for understanding China-Arab state relations where the importance of state interests and cultural understanding helps account for the formation of this cultural relationship, particularly the shift from purely political and economic engagement toward broader patterns of cooperation.

1.4 Liberal Theory

In 1997, Andrew Moravcsik asserted that in liberal theory governments and politicians are “semiautonomous” in building foreign relations. Moravcsik argues that politicians and government rest equally on both popular support and business opinions in establishing states’ foreign policies: “In many traditional areas of foreign policy, ‘politics stops at the water’s edge’...The state may be “disaggregated,” with different elements—executives, courts, central banks, regulatory bureaucracies, and ruling parties, for example—conducting semiautonomous foreign policies in the service of disparate societal interests” (Moravcsik, 1997; p. 519). As far as China-Middle East cooperation is concerned, Liberal theorists expect that the more economic potentials in country A (the Middle East) leads to gaining more business interests from country B (China). On many occasions, China expresses its cultural ties and economic interests with Arabs, and we hypothesize China’s interests in both resource rich countries and resource poor countries in the Arab world are well maintained for several geopolitical reasons such as enforcing global balance and regional security. Liberal Theory is always used to reflect upon investigating the cultural dimensions by emphasizing cooperation, interdependence, and the role of institutions and people-to-people exchange in shaping cultural relations. In the context of China-Arab states cultural relations, this theory helps understand the growing educational programs, cultural initiatives, language learning, and soft power engagement between the two sides.

1.5 Dependency Theory

Dependency theory is a sociopolitical and economic theory developed by Raul Prebisch, the United Nations Economic Commission director for Latin America, in the late 1950s. The dependency theory refers to the dependence of developing/under-developed countries on developed countries. From

a developing country’s perspective, the periphery’s economic and political dependency on the capitalist core resulted in despair, rage, and revolt within developing countries aiming to change such an unequal and inequitable capitalist attitude. As far as Chian-Arab world relationship is concerned, increased dependency in trade, political support, and geostrategic collaboration is in rise. Further, this dependence on Chian has a welcome effect: it increased trade with China, reduced dependence on the West, and restored stability between countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. This also sounds positive on China who reflects powerful credentials as a third world leader offering a superior development model and rescuing under-developed countries from the Western hegemonic stranglehold: “China has been remarkably successful with this strategy – embracing the liberal international economic order while at the same time pursuing mercantilist goals” (Friedrichs 1642).

Reflecting on President Xi’s statements on the region, an Ethiopian–Chinese pair of authors say: “In fact, the Chinese have no gene in their blood to invade Africa and it is crystal clear that unlike China, the Western world has had an influential history in the African continent... China has actively promoted the development of friendly relations and cooperation with Africa” (Addis & Zuping 2018, 357). The evident to us is that the China Arab world relation has every reason, according to this theory, to be characterized by vertical dynamic that reflects the growing ties rather by a horizontal interaction. Thus, Dependency Theory diagnoses the regional interaction of the two sides as partners but not a system divided between a center and a periphery. The critical perspective provided by dependency theory on China-Arab cultural relations highlights how cultural exchange can be linked to broader economic and structural inequalities within the global system. Accordingly, China’s growing cultural presence-through language institutes, educational programs, and trade initiatives- also reflects that political power expansion reinforces asymmetric relations between the two sides. Therefore, tendency theory offers an important, yet, partial explanation of the cultural dimension of this relationship.

1.6 Soft Power

Soft power in international relations is the ability of a country to get what it wants through attractions rather than coercion or payments (Nye, 2002; p. x).

Following the opinions of some constructivists such as Emrah Yildirimcakar and Zhaoying Han, China has made good efforts in order to introduce its image in terms of soft power: “As home to about half of the world’s oil deposits and gas reserves, the Middle East has become highly important for China... Beijing has reverted to a soft power strategy that seeks to establish ‘win-win’ economic and political networking with Middle Eastern states while Washington has sought to counter this strategy by reducing the region’s economic dependence on China” (199). China has invested heavily in strengthening cultural and economic ties with the Middle East to promote the influence of its soft power. This opinion finds that this effort has achieved an enormous effect (Sharma 2023, 23). According to this opinion, China’s soft power has become stronger than before and people in Middle Eastern and North African countries have positive viewpoints about China’s respect for their cultural and personal freedom. Soft Power Theory introduces an effective approach for understanding the cultural dimension of China-Arab relations by highlighting attraction, cultural appeal, and influence through non-coercive means. Analysis shows that China’s expanding cultural diplomacy in the Arab world, including language institutes, educational exchanges, media outreach, and broader initiatives strengthens cultural understanding and enhancing its global image.

1.7 CHINA: A FRIENDLY IMAGE

China enjoys unprecedented popularity in the Arab World on both public and official levels. In March 2023, China conducted successful negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Beijing leading to normalization of the relationship between the two countries and sustaining a much-needed de-escalation in the region. The Chinese diplomatic efforts ended a four-decade enmity between Saudi Arabia and Iran and provided a welcome impetus towards peace in many parts in the region including Yemen. Pew Research Center 2005-2017 opinion polls on China and the USA in the entire Arab countries and some other Middle Eastern countries show that China is gaining a positive image in the region and even more so in Africa (Pew Research Center 2017). In comparing this result with opinions on the USA as the incumbent superpower, people in all Middle Eastern countries regard the USA as an arrogant country and show an unfavorable opinion. According to Pew Research Center, Arabs

have a stronger desire for better economic relations with China (73%) than with the USA (27) (2017). These opinion polls show that the level of China’s popularity is expected to increase as the people in the region see China’s economic, political, and cultural rise in a positive way.

China’s regional rising is also established on the basis economic cooperation and mutual benefit. China imports nearly half of its energy needs from the Middle East, mainly Arab countries which also provide critical land and sea links for China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Similarly, Arab countries find in China an alternative reliable economic, political, and cultural partner who replaced the European Union in 2020 as the largest trading partner of the region and is taking the political position of the west in a few years (Niblock 2020; Aras & Kardaş 2021; Houghton, 2022). While the Chinese influence is generally popular and positive in the Middle East, the Western influence, economic, political, and cultural, is resented in all the Arab countries especially in the major countries like Egypt and Algeria.

1.8 WIN-WIN RELATIONSHIP: CHINA-ARAB WORLD CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Historically, Beijing has sought to balance its economic interests in the Middle East with its efforts to establish a friendly cultural relationship with Arab countries. China has sought to deepen this relationship by positioning itself in alignment with the Arab world and by supporting the major issues concerning Arabs on international platforms (Wu 2021, 450). At the first Summit of China-Arab States in Riyadh, in December 2022, President Xi asserts that China is satisfied with the progress that has been made on the first Summit’s outcomes and look forward to building a China-Arab cultural community with a shared future in the new era marked by the “continued leapfrog growth of China-Arab relations” (ChinaDaily 2024). The mutual interest has implications on global balance marked by the rise of China in the Middle East and the relative decline of the Western cultural influence across the region, North Africa, and the Indian Ocean region: “China’s involvement in the Middle East has reshaped the region’s landscape, expanding beyond traditional energy sources to encompass economic, geopolitical, and strategic considerations. The country’s “non-interventionist”

approach is appealing to Middle Eastern states, which view their growing ties with Beijing as a means of diversification” (Eslami & Maria 2023). Focusing on the cultural aspects, China has advanced its cultural projects in the region with a number of initiatives including humanitarian and medical aid during the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing that soft power is essential for its position the region and its status as a superpower power.

China’s cultural promotion initiatives focus on strengthening people-people relations mainly through educational initiatives through higher education exchanges, the establishment of Chinese Language Centers in many countries of the Middle East (numbering 22 as of 2024 and 800 secondary schools teaching Chinese in Saudi Arabia only), and tourism which has seen a significant increase in the recent years: “Middle Eastern countries have long history and rich cultural heritage, which have historically been attractive to China. China

always calls for mutual respect and mutual learning of civilizations. A mechanism of dialogue of civilizations has been created between China and Arab countries within the framework of CASCF” (Houghton 2022, 135). These aspects of cooperation constitute an attempt to establish a solid and positive cultural position in the region and highlight China’s role as a responsible partner for the region. As a tool of Chinese Soft-Power, Chinese Language Centers have widely spread in the Arab world and have been welcomed by Arab elites including university academics and education policymakers. Similarly, businessmen look at China, the world’s second largest economy, as a perfect model to strengthen trade and financial relationships with and politicians find China as an alternative partner to the USA that offers a well-functioning cultural understanding and a better philosophy that may better suit Arab society than the liberal democratic model imposed by the US.



In his report at the 19th National Congress of the Chinese ruling party held on 18 October 2017, President Xi Jinping asserts the principles in China’s foreign policy; focusing on a new model of international relations based on mutual respect, win-win cooperation, fairness, and justice and a world with a shared future for humanity, aimed at building a beautiful, inclusive, and clean world that enjoys stability, peace, universal security, and common prosperity. President Xi fleshed this policy out with a five-point proposal:

We should build partnerships in which countries treat each other as equals, engage in extensive consultation, and enhance mutual understanding. We should create a security environment featuring fairness, justice, joint efforts, and shared interests. We should promote open, innovative, and inclusive development that benefits all. We should increase

inter-civilization exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness, and respect for differences. We should build an ecosystem that puts Mother Nature and green development first. (Han & Zhang 2018).

Since 1990, China has enjoyed diplomatic ties with all Arab countries. In his speech at Arab League Headquarters in 2006, President Xi emphasized that “instead of looking for a proxy in the Middle East, we promote peace talks; instead of seeking any sphere of influence, we call on all parties to join the circle of friends for the Belt and Road Initiative; instead of attempting to fill the vacuum, we build a cooperative partnership network for win-win outcomes” (Chinadaily 2016). Based on such a policy, China has built a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ with all Arab states in a short span: Egypt (January 2014), Algeria (February 2014), Yemen (December 2014), Saudi Arabia (January 2016), the UAE (July

2018), Qatar (November 2014), Sudan (September 2015), Jordan (September 2015), Iraq (December 2015), Morocco (May 2016), Djibouti (November 2017), and Oman (May 2018).

1.9 REFLECTIONS: 2022 CHINA-ARAB STATES SUMMIT

In 2022, the ‘Three Summits’ held in Riyadh, the China-Saudi Arabia Summit, China-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit, and China-Arab States Summit for Cooperation and Development have been a translation of the Arab-China interest in furthering nations’ interests and relationship. President Xi states that he came to the region for three reasons: firstly, both sides seized the opportunity to push bilateral relations forward; secondly, both sides valued each other’s comprehensive strength and influence; thirdly, both sides made it a common goal to build the ‘Belt and Road’ and promote the docking of their strategies (Niu & Wang 2023, 15). He further highlighted three major issues in 2022 China-Arab States Summit: the past, the present, and the future of the mutual respect between the two nations:

1. “We have come to know and befriend each other through the ancient Silk Road. We have shared weal and woe in our respective struggles for national liberation. We have conducted win-win cooperation in the tide of economic globalization”... “Together, China and Arab states have nurtured the spirit of friendship featuring “solidarity and mutual assistance, equality and mutual benefit, and inclusiveness and mutual learning.”

2. “We trust each other and have forged a brotherly friendship. We work hand in hand and make progress together to realize the dream of national rejuvenation. We brave wind and storms together in fighting the COVID pandemic. Equality and mutual benefit are a constant driver for our friendship...We appreciate each other’s civilizations and have written a splendid history of mutual learning.”
3. “We should stay independent and defend our common interests. We should focus on economic development and promote win-win cooperation. We should uphold regional peace and strive for common security. China supports the Arab side in promoting political settlement of hotspot and challenging issues with Arab wisdom, and build a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security architecture in the Middle East. We should increase exchanges among cultures and civilizations to enhance mutual understanding and trust.”

The success of China’s ‘Win-Win’ policy with the region is due to China’s profound political efforts and support for Arab issues especially the Palestinian issue, China’s efforts in the pandemic and post-pandemic era, mutual head-of-states diplomacy, and the solid foundation of understanding and cooperation that already exist between China and Arab world.



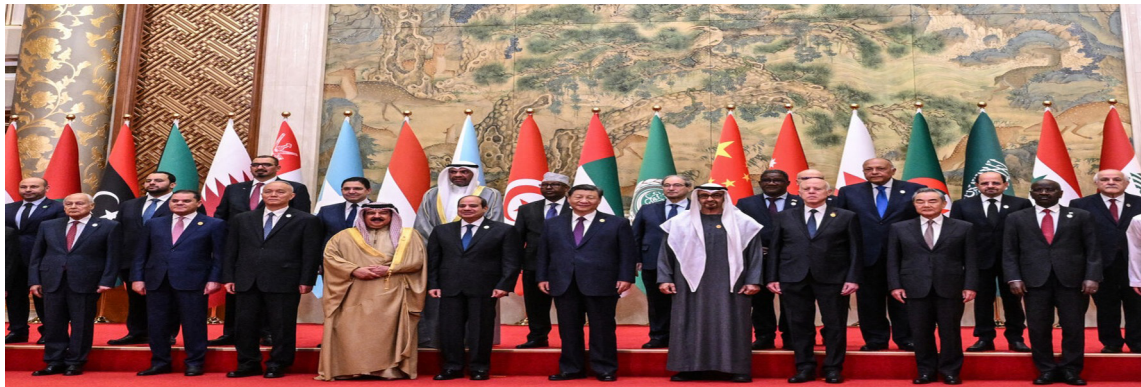
(Reuters) The 2022 China-Arab States Summit was the 1st summit of the heads of state and representatives of 21 countries of the Arab League, and the head of state of the People’s Republic of China. It was held on 9 December 2022, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

1.10 THE 2024 CHINA-ARAB CONFERENCE IN BEIJING

On May 30, 2024, President Xi Jinping made a few remarks as he gave a keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the 10th ministerial conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum saying: “both China and Arab states strive to accomplish their historical missions of national rejuvenation and faster national development. Building a China-Arab community with a shared future is a strong statement of our common desire for a new era of China-Arab relations and a better future for the world” (Xinhua 2024). The development of Arab world-China relationship has great potential and broad prospects, and both sides have willingness and sincere willingness to further improve relations and strengthen cooperation. Unlike the Western imperial and hegemonic attitude, China’s positive image in the region is a result of the growing influence in the friendly engagement with Arab politicians, elites, and public on the basis of ‘win-win’ rather than playing the role of ‘Regional Policemen’. On many occasions, President Xi stresses ‘win-win’ relationship in China’s role in the Middle East by promoting mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and building a regional cooperation in which both sides, China and the Middle East, benefit. In this case, the Arab world “wins” access to a reliable superpower and the second-largest economy in the world and the Chinese side “wins” a huge market and a strategic influence in Arab society at a relatively low cost.

President Xi’s speeches are conducive to establishing a strong cultural relationship, maintaining stability and peace in the Middle East, and promoting mutual understanding. Xi refers to four future strategies which will improve strategic trust between China and Arab states and further consolidate cooperation in various fields:

1. China will work with the Arab side as good partners to make our relations a model for maintaining world peace and stability. In this turbulent world, peaceful relations come from mutual respect, and lasting security is built on fairness and justice. We will, together with the Arab side, respect the purposes and principles of the U.N.
2. China will work with the Arab side in the spirit of equality and mutual benefit to make our relations a fine example of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. The Silk Road spirit is passed on from generation to generation. It keeps China-Arab relations abreast with the times to the benefit of the two peoples. In this interdependent world, we will further synergize development strategies with the Arab side.
3. China will work with the Arab side in the spirit of inclusiveness and mutual learning to make our relations a paradigm of harmonious coexistence between civilizations. In a world of growing diversity, more dialogue means less confrontation, and more inclusiveness means less estrangement. Peace, truth, integrity, and inclusiveness are the common pursuit of Chinese and Arab peoples. We are ready to work with the Arab side to promote people-to-people exchanges, champion the common values of humanity, and create a stellar example of mutual learning among civilizations in the new era.
4. China will work closely with the Arab side to make our relations a model for promoting good global governance. The entire humanity shares one common future, which has become an inevitable trend. But deficits in governance, trust, peace, and development are getting wider. This calls on us to improve global governance under the principle of planning together, building together, and benefiting together.



(al-monitor) The 2024 China-Arab Conference in Beijing May 30, 2024.

2. CONCLUSION

China and the Arab world are enjoying one of the best eras in the history of the two nations. China's popularity in the Arab world is highly significant, not only among elites and politicians but also at street level. This is reflected in the interest of the people in China's culture, language, products, politics, and political attitude toward the region. Similarly, China always asserts that the China-Arab world relationship is built on a Win-Win policy and that it will continue on the basis of mutual understanding. Bringing different theories into the analysis has been particularly useful. The analysis reflects that, in the absence of negative experience with China during the colonial era, people in the Arab world are more receptive to aspirational talk highlighting China's gentle intentions. These theories also predict that China-Arab World friendly relations will continue to be stable since there is no status contestation associated with issues or projects in common.

This study finds that China and Arab countries are serious in improving strategic partnership -cultural, political, and economic - that restores order and peace in the region and weakens Western longstanding cultural influence in the region. Arabs, elites and common men, find in the Chinese existence in the region a project of stability that stands on ground of win-win relationship and mutual interest. Thus, this study finds that following a win-win philosophy, the merits of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), development projects in many Arab countries, the Chinese support for Arab issues, mutual concerns on regional security strengthen the cultural understanding between the two sides. Further, opting between China's win-win strategy or other the Western understanding, the Arab world

perceives the cultural understanding with China with positive implications on the economic growth and political stability of the region.

2.1 Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

2.2 Funding

This work receives no financial support from any institution.

3. REFERENCES

- Addis, A. K., & Zuping, Z. 2018. "Criticism of neo-colonialism: clarification of Sino-African cooperation and its implication to the west." *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 16(4), 357–373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14765284.2018.1521593>
- Aras, B., & Kardaş, Ş. 2021. "Geopolitics of the New Middle East: Perspectives from Inside and Outside." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(3), 397–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2021.1888251>
- Alterman, J. B. 2024. "The 'China Model' in the Middle East." *Survival*, 66(2), 75–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2024.2332062>
- Cheng, E., & Lu, X. 2024. "Building a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity through China's Six Global Initiatives." *International Critical Thought*, 14(2), 157–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2024.2366560>
- Colombo, S., & Soler i Lecha, E. 2021. "Europe and the 'New' Middle East: Geopolitical shifts and strategic choices." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(3), 403–422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2021.1888246>

- Eslami, Mohammad and Maria Papageorgiou. 2023. "China's Increasing Role in the Middle East: Implications for Regional and International Dynamics." <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/06/02/chinas-increasing-role-in-the-middle-east-implications-for-regional-and-international-dynamics/> June 2, 2023 Georgetown journal of International Affairs
- Gamal M. Selim. 2013. "The United States and the Arab Spring: The Dynamics of Political Engineering." *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 35(3), 255–272. <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.35.3.0255>
- Gunnell, John. 2020. *Conventional Realism and Political Inquiry: Channeling Wittgenstein*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Han, Z., Zhang, W. 2018. "Contemporary China's Values and Ideals for Building a Harmonious World. In: *Contemporary Value Systems in China*. China Insights." Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2393-5_6
- Harris, J. 2020. "China–US Tensions: Is Globalisation Dead?" *International Critical Thought*, 10(2), 263–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/021598282.2020.1775026>
- Houghton, B. 2022. *China's Balancing Strategy Between Saudi Arabia and Iran: The View from Riyadh*. *Asian Affairs*, 53(1), 124–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2029065>
- Friedrichs, J. 2019. "Explaining China's popularity in the Middle East and Africa." *Third World Quarterly*, 40(9), 1634–1654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1592670>
- Jamestown.com. 2026. "How Confucius Institutes in the Arab World Shape Positive Perceptions of China." Retrieved April 8, 2026. <https://jamestown.org/how-confucius-institutes-in-the-arab-world-shape-positive-perceptions-of-china/?utm>
- Kent, J. 2020. "Way forward in the Middle East." *Comparative Strategy*, 39(6), 507–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2020.1826842>
- Lynch, Marc. 2024. "The United States and the Middle East. Great Decisions." https://worldaffairscouncils.org/wp-content/uploads/1_Mideast.pdf
- Moravcsik, A. 1997. "Taking preferences seriously: A liberal theory of international politics." *International Organization*, 51(4), 513–553. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081897550447>
- Niblock, T. 2020. "China and the Middle East: A Global Strategy Where the Middle East has a Significant but Limited Place." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 14(4), 481–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1847855>
- Niu, S., & Wang, D. 2023. "Three Summits' and the New Development of China-Arab States Relations in the New Era." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 17(1), 15–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2023.2190610>
- Nye, Joseph S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Pew Research Center. 2017. "Globally, More Name U.S. Than China as World's Leading Economic Power." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved 2 August 2024 <http://www.pewglobal.org/>
- Pew Research Center. 2018. "Trump's International Ratings Remain Low, Especially among Key Allies: Most Still Want U.S. as Top Global Power, but See China on the Rise." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Saidin, M. I. S., & Storm, L. 2024. "The challenges of regime change and political transition in Egypt and Libya after the Arab Uprisings: critical reviews of factors and implications." *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2335771>
- Sharma, A. 2023. "China's Soft Power in the Middle East. In: Kim, YC. (eds) *China's Engagement with the Islamic Nations. Understanding China*." Springer, 23–40 Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31042-3_2
- Singer, Peter W. 2024. "Strategist, New America. How China is winning the Middle East." *defenseone.com*. Retrieved Aug 15, 2024. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2024/01/how-china-winning-middle-east/393483/>
- Niblock, T. 2020. "China and the Middle East: A Global Strategy Where the Middle East has a Significant but Limited Place." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 14(4), 481–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2020.1847855>
- Wu, B. 2021. "China and New Middle East." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(3), 443–457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2021.188248>
- Xinhua. (2024). "Full text: President Xi's keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the 10th ministerial conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum." Xinhua.

com. Retrieved on August 27 <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202405/30/WS66580c93a31082fc043ca031.html>

Xinhua. 2024. "Xi urges greater efforts to build China-Arab community with shared future." Xinhua.com. Retrieved on August 27 https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202405/30/content_WS665889d7c6d0868f4e8e7acb.html

Yildirimcakar, E., & Han, Z. 2022. "China's soft power strategy in the Middle East. Israel Affairs." 28(2), 199–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2022.2041309>