

Reframing the Arab World: Arab Images in China's Media and Perceptions among Chinese Gen Z

Professor Ke Guo

Professor, School of Journalism and Communication,
Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China

Email: keguo@shisu.edu.cn

Qingying Han

Graduate Student, School of Journalism and Communication,
Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China

Email: 0243100427@shisu.edu.cn

Abstract. This paper explores the images of the Arab world in China's media and perceptions among Chinese Generation Z and examines how media representations and demographic factors shape their perceptions about the Arab world. Employing media representation theory and social cognitive theory, the paper adopts mixed methods by resorting to content analysis of Chinese media and a survey among Gen Z youth. The paper has found a predominantly neutral to positive portrayal of the Arab world in Chinese media (including mainstream and social media). Social media emphasized cultural exchanges and lifestyles while mainstream media focused on international affairs in the Arab world. Survey results indicate that Chinese youth hold nuanced, generally favorable perceptions of Arab countries, associating them with rich cultural heritage, religious traditions and modernization, with minimal emphasis on negative stereotypes. Demographic factors showed no significant impacts, whereas media uses and intergroup contacts weakly correlated with positive attitudes and reduced stereotypes. The study has highlighted the reframing role of Chinese media narratives in fostering nuanced cross-cultural

understanding on the Arab world, suggesting longitudinal trends and mechanisms of prejudice reduction.

Keywords: Arab World, Images, Perceptions, Chinese Gen Z, Media Representation, Social Cognition.

Introduction

China has maintained close contacts with the Arab world. Ancient connections via the Silk Road facilitated trade and cultural exchanges. Modern interactions are reinforced by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aligns with Arab development goals. In recent years, the China-Arab relationship deepens beyond energy trade into technology, security and geopolitics, as both sides have found common path in reducing Western hegemony, promoting sovereignty and securing energy flows.

Despite their commonality in trades and energy and geopolitical proximity, Arabian countries have largely remained unknown to most Chinese public, especially among Chinese Gen Z youth, due to geographical distance and cultural diversity. Though many studies have focused on global perception of Muslims and the Arab world (e.g., Merskin, 2004; Ogan, Willnat, Pennington, & Bashir, 2014), they are still understudied in China. Specifically, researchers have found an overall negative framing of news coverage of Muslims and Islam, and non-Muslim Chinese still hold a negative stereotype of the Arab world (Luqiu & Yang, 2018). These findings underscore the need to reassess how Arab images are currently represented in Chinese media and perceived by young audiences in China.

As the most digitally native and globally connected generation, Gen Z (born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s) represent the future of China and play a crucial role in maintaining stability and technological leadership. Their changing

values and perceptions will influence China's trajectory and global perception about the Arab world in unexpected ways. Hence, this paper aims to: (1) examine how Chinese mainstream and social media portrayed the Arab world between 2022 and 2025; (2) assess Chinese Gen Z's perceptions of the Arab world; (3) identify whether demographic, media, and intergroup factors influence their perceptions; (4) discuss how media uses or intergroup contacts of Chinese Gen Z affect their stereotypes toward Arabs, if any.

This study employs a mixed-methods design, combining large-scale media content analysis with a nationwide survey of Chinese Gen Z respondents to explore the inter-plays between media exposure, intergroup contact and perceptions. Academically, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literatures on media representation, country image and intergroup perception by highlighting a Chinese perspective on Arab portrayals. Socially, it offers insights into how China's digitally native generation understands the Arab world amid intensified geopolitical conflicts and cultural exchanges.

Literature Review

Media Representation and Perception:

The idea of representation derived from the cultural-critical paradigm of media studies in the 1960s, first in the UK and then in the USA. The constant and highly intensive flow of media information is filled with representations that establish

norms and common sense about people, groups and institutions in the contemporary society (Fürsich, 2010). Hall (1997) explains the relationship among representation, language and meaning and described representation as a central process where meaning is produced and shared by languages among members of a culture, connecting language and meaning to culture. It is closely tied up to identity and knowledge when we use a language to convey or express the idea of belonging to a culture, or the sense of identification with one's local community (Hall, 1997). Therefore, representation plays a crucial role in how we see others and how we are seen by others. Subsequently, Dyer (2002) highlights that "how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation." Even if we can represent the reality by texts, images, sounds or other cultural symbols, these representations cannot equal to what the reality exactly is. Hence, "representations now have real consequences for real people in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can perceive in any given society" (Dyer, 2002).

Social Cognitive Theory and Intergroup Contacts:

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), originally proposed by Bandura (1986), emphasizes that human behavior is shaped through a dynamic interplay of personal factors, behavioral patterns and environmental influences. Within this framework, both media uses, and intergroup contacts serve as significant environmental and social cues that influence perceptions. SCT is particularly well-suited to this study, as it

systematically links media exposure (a primary source of information for Gen Z) and interpersonal interactions to the formation of cross-cultural perceptions, allowing for a holistic analysis of how Chinese youth construct their understanding of the Arab world.

Media consumption acts as a form of vicarious experience, allowing audiences to observe and internalize representations of outgroups without direct interactions. Repeated exposure to stereotypical or negative portrayals can reinforce biased schemas, while diverse and humanizing depictions may foster empathy and reduce prejudice (Ramasubramanian, 2013). Exposure to media coverage of Muslim-related topics can shape public attitudes toward Muslims (Ogan, Wilnat, Pennington, & Bashir, 2014). Given that media serve as a primary source of information, audiences are likely to develop perceptions of Muslims that are framed predominantly through narratives of crisis and conflict (Rane, Ewart, & Martinkus, 2014). In this way, media functions not only as an informational source but as a socializing agent, shaping the viewer's expectations and attitudes toward unfamiliar groups (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Similarly, intergroup contacts, whether direct or mediated, align with social cognitive theory's emphasis on social modeling and reinforcement. Intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) holds that interactions between groups, especially under conditions of equality and cooperation, reduces prejudice. In recent years, scholars have extended to indirect and mediated contacts, such as through stories,

television or social media. Ortiz and Harwood (2007) demonstrated that parasocial contacts, viewing intergroup friendships on TV, can improve attitudes toward outgroups. Paluck et al. (2024) and Kteily et al. (2021) found that both online and face-to-face contacts have meaningful effects on reducing prejudice, especially when such contacts are perceived as positive, voluntary and emotionally engaging.

Country Images:

The concept of country images has become increasingly important in international communication and global branding. A country image refers to the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that individuals hold about a nation (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). These images influence how people interpret and perceive a country's culture and people and play a central role in shaping international relations among different countries.

Early research on country images emerged from international marketing, where scholars explored how perceptions of a country affect consumer attitudes on products—an idea commonly studied under the “country-of-origin effects” (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Roth and Romeo (1992) discussed country-of-origin effects by analyzing the degree of congruence between a country's perceived image and the characteristics of specific products. They conceptualize a country image as the set of perceptions, reputations and stereotypes that consumers associate with products originating from a specific country.

However, contemporary studies have broadened the scope beyond consumer behaviors to encompass a nation's political system, cultural values, foreign policy and global reputation. In the field of public diplomacy, scholars have emphasized the role of strategic communication in shaping and managing country images. Gilboa (2008) notes that governments increasingly use media, cultural programs and international broadcast to influence foreign publics and repair or reinforce their global images. With the rise of social media and digital platforms, ordinary citizens and influencers have become active participants in constructing and circulating images of nations (Sevin, 2014).

To sum up, a country image is a complex and evolving construct that influences individual-level perceptions and state-level interactions. Therefore, it is crucial to understand its formation and effects for scholars in international communication, nation branding and global affairs.

Arab Images and Stereotypes:

Early studies on Arab media images can date back to the early 1970s. Scholars examined how the portrayal of Arabs in western media was shaped by stereotypes and negative portrayals and explored the ways in which Arabs were framed in connection with terrorism, violence, and cultural backwardness. Stereotypes on Arab images can be detected in various media (Merskin, 2004). According to Lind and Danowski (1998), television seems to associate Arab images with war, violence

and perceived threats. This narrow framing perpetuates a limited and reductive understanding of Arab identities (Karniel & Lavie-Dinur, 2011).

Apart from TV, Alaswad (2000) examined Arab images in cinema, finding that Arabs are portrayed as backward, wild, cruel, bloodthirsty, crude, stupid, dishonest in films. In a similar vein, Picherit-Duthler and Yunis (2011) observed that in Hollywood movies, Arab males are frequently depicted as either stupid or violent. In contrast, Arab women are portrayed within a larger political or sociopolitical narrative, typically depicted as a “terrorist” or a voiceless mother, sister, daughter, or wife of a terrorist. Küçükcan (2010) found that, in Turkish media, Arab identities are often constructed through reductive stereotypes and nationalist narratives, focusing on the anti-democratic nature of some Arab political systems, religious practices and sociocultural status of Arab women. This portrayal relies on a homogenizing framework that inaccurately erases the diversity within Arab communities, reinforcing essentialist stereotypes and ignoring the complexity of Arab identities. Weisz (2015) examined how Arab Muslims were portrayed in the Spanish newspaper ABC and found a significantly negative shift in the Spanish newspaper's portrayal of the Arab image after the terrorist attack in Madrid on March 11, 2004, which resulted in 291 deaths.

In the field of literature, Saad (1993) examined the Arab images in Persian literature and found that the negative representation of Arabs has persisted since the time of the great Persian poet Ferdowsi. Arabs have historically been depicted as barbaric

“lizard-eaters,” uncivilized as drinkers of camel’s milk, reinforcing long-standing stereotypes that dehumanize and marginalize Arab identities. Rimon and Schleifer (2019) compared this image to the enemy image in the Soviet literature and found that “the Arab, in contrast to the Jews, is mute, helpless, and dumb.”

In the digital age, scholars resort to users’ comments and interactions on social media to investigate their perceptions towards other countries and cultures. Mostafa and Nebo (2020) investigated emotions expressed towards the Arab images in Spanish social media by analyzing tweets in Twitter, finding that Spanish social media shows a generally positive sentiment towards the Arab world.

As of now, scarce studies focus on the perception of Arab images among Chinese Gen Z. Therefore, this study aims to examine how Chinese youth perceive the images of Arab countries via a structured survey questionnaire. The study regards the Arab world as nations where the majority of the population speaks Arabic and identifies with Arab culture, history and heritage.

Arab Images in Chinese Media:

The media in China operates under the surveillance of the Chinese government. Traditional media organizations include Xinhua News Agency, and People’s Daily, China Media Group, all of which serve as key channels for disseminating Chinese narratives. These mainstream media in China fall into three categories: central, provincial or municipal and local (city or county). Among them, only central-level media have the authority to report on international affairs with overseas bureaus.

The rise of internet and smartphones has led to the popularity of platforms such as Weibo, Douyin (TikTok's Chinese version) and Xiaohongshu (Rednote), which combine entertainment, commerce and citizen interactions.

Previous studies show that an Islamophobia trend exists in China. Miao examined online narratives in China, identifying a rise in Islamophobic contents that constructs a “victims and villains” narrative. This narrative implies that non-Sinicized Muslims are under Arab fundamentalist influences, framing religious autonomy as political betrayal and legitimizing Islamophobia within the context of ethnic loyalty to the Chinese nation (Miao, 2020).

Islamophobia among Chinese public may be related with the negative narratives framed by Chinese media. Over the centuries, Chinese narratives concerning Muslims have frequently demonstrated a negative tone, often emphasizing themes of aggression and portraying Chinese Muslims as unruly and threatening figures (Lipman, 2011). Similarly, Luqiu and Yang (2018) revealed an overall negative portrayal of Muslims in CCTV, with non-Muslim Chinese populations holding negative stereotypes. The primary reason is that Chinese media often align their coverages with agendas from western news outlets (Cui & Wu, 2017). A study on Xinhua News Agency reveals that The New York Times functions as a key intermediary linking Chinese and American news agendas (Cheng, Golan, & Kiousis, 2016).

However, Chinese media have shifted towards more nuanced or positive portrayals of Arab countries in recent years, driven by several factors, including China's expanding diplomatic and economic ties with Arab nations, strategic soft power initiatives to counterbalance western narratives. Hu, Hou and Xu (2021) highlight that different Chinese media outlets align their narratives with official perspectives or adopt more nuanced positions. Specifically, People's Daily shifted its framing from depicting uprisings as disasters to offering criticism, maintaining a negative stance. In contrast, Caixin Net evolved from a disaster-oriented framing to a more contextual approach, inclining towards neutrality. A changing trend also emerges in China Daily, a national English Daily, which framed China in the Arab Spring as a stable alternative to western hegemony, emphasizing China's growing influence in the Middle East (Ha, J. S., & Shin, D., 2019). In response to the evolving international landscape, it is essential to re-examine how Chinese media have portrayed the Arab world over the recent years.

Chinese Gen Z and Uses of Social Media:

Generation Z, often abbreviated as Gen Z, refers to the demographic group born approximately between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s. This generation is characterized by its familiarity with digital technology, social media and the internet, having grown up in a highly connected, information-driven world (Pew, 2020). China has roughly 285 million Gen-Z Internet users as of 2024, basically 1/3 of China's internet user population (China Internet Network Information Center,

2025). Social media platforms in China, such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin and Weibo, play a significant role in influencing their perceptions towards life and society. Previous studies have discussed from multiple perspectives on Chinese Gen Z youth in social media, such as consumption behaviors, social media usage, political participation and self-expressions (e.g. Chen, & Madni, 2023; Hu, 2022; Li, Park, & Park, 2016; Bi, 2021; Zhou, 2024). Studies show that social media can significantly influence China's Gen Z's green consumption behaviors and intentions, leading to increased intentions towards a sustainable environment and reduced carbon emissions (Chen & Madni, G., 2023). Moreover, Chinese Gen Z's engagement with social media extends beyond consumption behaviors. Platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu have become central in their daily lives, shaping not only their purchasing decisions but also affecting their cultural and social identities.

Social platforms have distinct cultures and user bases and shape their representations in unique ways. Studies highlight that there is a growing trend in Weibo toward progressive representations of gender and social relations in youth-driven spaces. Weibo has served as a symbolic space for diverse viewpoints, influencing reproduction, gender and social relations in China (Wu, 2021). In conclusion, Generation Z in China represents a digitally native and socially conscious demographic that is deeply influenced by media representations they encounter on social media platforms in China.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and media representation theory (Hall, 1997; Dyer, 2002), this study assumes that individuals' perceptions of other country are shaped through both mediated and social experiences. Repeated exposure to certain representations in media and intergroup contacts can reinforce or reshape cognitive schemas about specific groups. Specifically, the paper addresses four research questions and related hypotheses.

RQ1: How have the Chinese media portrayed the Arab images between 2022 and 2025?

RQ2: How do Chinese Gen Z youth perceive the image of Arab world?

RQ3: What factors influence Chinese youth's perceptions of Arab world?

RQ4: Are perceptions of Chinese Gen Z youth towards Arabs stereotyped? If so, are these stereotypes affected by media uses or intergroup contacts?

Methodology

Research Design:

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, which is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and media representation theory (Hall, 1997), integrating content analysis and a survey analysis to examine both the representations of the Arab world in Chinese media and the perceptions of Chinese Gen Z.

Data Collection:

The media corpus was drawn from 11 central-level mainstream media outlets¹ and major social media platforms (Weibo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, Baijiahao and Jinri Toutiao). The data cover the period from January 1, 2022 to March 31, 2025, aligning with the post-pandemic and Belt and Road cooperation era.

To ensure comprehensive and representative data coverage, the media texts were retrieved using a combination of different keywords in Chinese: "Arab", "China-Arab relations", "UAE / Saudi Arabia / Dubai / Egypt / Qatar", "tourism / food / culture / technology". The core and country-specific terms ensure effective retrieval of media texts referring to Arab regions that are most visible in Chinese public discourse. Cultural and lifestyle combinations capture soft power and everyday cultural narratives beyond political and economic topics, and technology reflect growing Chinese media interest in Arab innovation and social modernization.

For RQ1, this paper has conducted an AI assisted online search from 11 media outlets, yielding over 3 million samples from their digital accounts or media platforms. After a preliminary screening process, items featuring irrelevant contents, absence of evaluative stances, generic or purely geographical references, or duplicated and meaningless entries were removed from the dataset. A total of 600,000 valid samples were obtained. Stratified sampling was applied to derive a

¹ They include Xinhua News Agency, *People's Daily*, CCTV.com, *Workers' Daily*, *PLA Daily*, *Economic Daily*, *Science and Technology Daily*, *China Youth Daily*, *People's Political Consultative Daily*, *China Women's News and Farmers' Daily*.

foundational dataset of 60,000 entries, from which 7,000 texts with explicit opinion expressions were selected as the units of analysis for this paper. To ensure inter-coding validity, two researchers independently coded 10% of the samples (n=700) using systematic random sampling. Krippendorff's Alpha was employed to test inter-rater reliability, yielding a result of $\alpha=0.88$ (95% CI [0.78, 0.90]), indicating a reliable coding procedure. Specific coding dimensions used are outlined in previous studies (Luqiu and Yang, 2018). The variables and categories are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Coding Book

Code	Category	Description
Theme	International Affairs	Coverage of diplomatic activities, official visits, multilateral forums, and cooperation between China and Arab countries.
	Domestic Information	News about Arab countries (politics, economy, society, governance).
	Cultural Exchange and Lifestyle	Reports on festivals, dress, religion, tourism, education, or human-interest stories highlighting daily life and cultural practices.
	Social Conflict	Coverage of protests, wars, riots, political unrest, or ethnic tensions within or involving Arab countries.
	Antiterrorism	Reports on government actions, security cooperation, or counter-terrorism policies addressing extremist threats.
	Extremism	Coverage of terrorism, extremist organizations, radical ideologies, or violent incidents related to Arab countries or people.

Code	Category	Description
	Prejudice and Stereotypes	Content showing cultural/religious “othering,” negative generalizations (e.g., barbaric, backward, anti-female).
Sentiment	Positive	Expresses favorable evaluations, appreciation, cooperation, admiration of culture, or positive attitudes toward Arab countries or people.
	Ambivalent	Contains both positive and negative sentiments, or presents a nuanced/contradictory tone (e.g., “economic cooperation increases, yet women’s rights remain limited”).
	Neutral	Reports factual information without clear evaluative language; typically seen in institutional or news-agency coverage.
	Negative	Expresses criticism, fear, insecurity, conflict, extremism, or reinforces stereotypes and negative portrayals.

Authors also designed a structured survey with Likert-scale items, semantic differential scales and questions. It was distributed online on Wenjuanxing, a popular online survey platform in China. A total of 1,971 valid participants aged between 14 to 28 in mainland China were collected via random sampling. The paper used SPSS 26.0 to conduct descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha=.938$), correlation analysis, and inferential tests including t-tests and one-way ANOVA.

To address RQ2, authors assessed participants' overall perception of Arab world through a country image scale (Martin, 1993), including a series of bipolar adjective

pairs (economically developed- economically underdeveloped, democratic system–dictatorial system), emotional evaluations (feeling thermometer), and acceptability of Arabs as neighbors (Bogardus, 1933). For RQ3, the paper collected detailed demographic information and measured media use frequency of mainstream and digital media, frequency and depth of intergroup contact (Velasco, 2008) with Arab individuals, to assess how they correlate with perception outcomes. For RQ4, authors included stereotype-related descriptors to capture both positive and negative attributions toward Arabs, which serve as indicators of latent bias (Velasco, 2008). These survey components align closely with theoretical frameworks of media representation and perception; media uses and intergroup contacts.

Results

Arab Themes and Attitudes in Chinese Media:

As shown in Figure 1, among the selected 7000 media texts about the Arab world, only 738 (10.5%) are from Chinese mainstream media while majority of them (90%) are posted in social media in China. This means Chinese social media have shown a higher degree interest in discussing Arabic issues. The dominance of Chinese social media for the Arab world is supported by the fact that Chinese Gen Z constitutes 1/3 of China's internet user population.

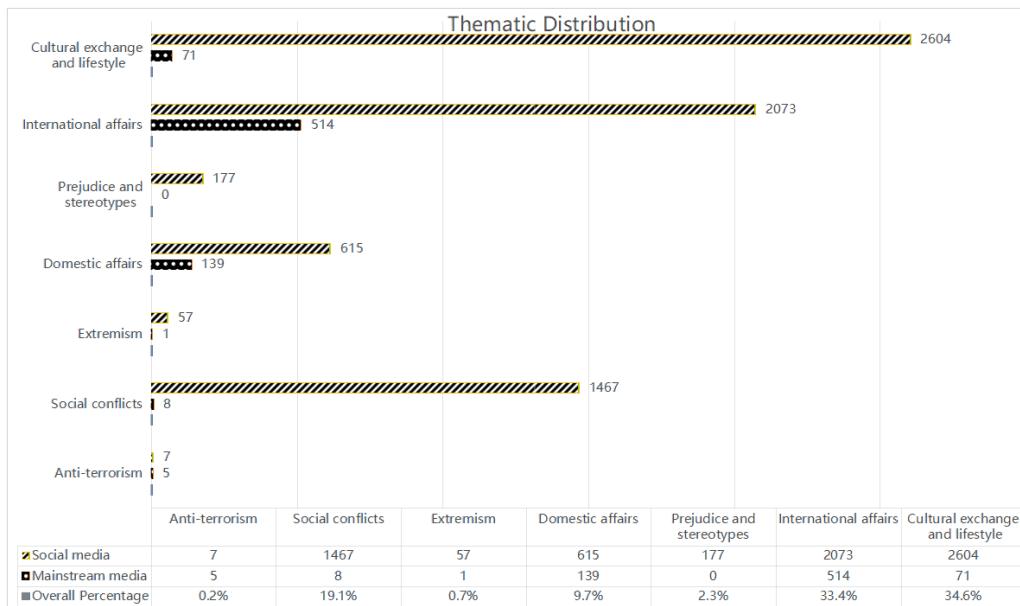


Figure 1 Thematic Distribution Overall

The thematic distribution of issues about the Arab world indicates that media representations of the Arab world in Chinese media are predominantly associated with cultural exchanges and lifestyles (34.6%), followed by international affairs (33.4%), social conflicts (19.1%) and domestic affairs (9.7%). Issues related with prejudices and stereotypes, extremism and anti-terrorism only amount to a total of 3.2%, way lower than others. Sample cases are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Sample Cases

Platform	Content (Excerpt)	Content Theme	Sentiment
Weibo	“Saudi Arabia is truly stunning — every corner looks like a movie scene! Come enjoy the scenery and taste the local food with me!”	Cultural Exchange and Lifestyle	Positive
Douyin	“Saudi Arabia and Syria have agreed to reopen their embassies; the Foreign Ministry responded.”	International Affairs	Neutral

Platform	Content (Excerpt)	Content Theme	Sentiment
Xiaohongshu	"U.S. airstrike on Houthi targets in Yemen kills 53 people, sharply escalating regional tensions."	Social Conflicts	Negative
CCTV.com	"Qatar strongly condemns the mosque bombing in Afghanistan."	Antiterrorism	Neutral
CCTV.com	"UAE strongly condemns 'extremists' entering Al-Aqsa Mosque under protection of Israeli security forces."	Extremism	Neutral
People's Daily	"Egypt strengthens the construction and operation of the Suez Canal."	Domestic Affairs	Positive

The analysis revealed notable thematic differences between Chinese social media and mainstream media despite their commonality. Over 37% themes in Chinese social media focus on cultural exchanges and lifestyles while it is only 9.6% for the Chinese mainstream media. Mainstream media concentrate more on international affairs (69.6%), far more than 29.6% of social media. Besides, Chinese social media

play up social conflicts (21%), with 1.1% for mainstream media.

However, one common trend for mainstream and social media in China is that they both play down prejudices, stereotypes, anti-terrorism and extremism, meaning that Chinese media have demonstrated a more friendly perception towards the Arab world, though they have different focuses.

Table 4 Thematic Distribution (Percentage)

Themes	Mainstream media	Social media
International affairs	69.6%	29.6%
Domestic affairs	18.8%	8.8%
Cultural exchange and lifestyle	9.6%	37.2%
Social conflicts	1.1%	21.0%
Anti-terrorism	0.7%	0.1%
Extremism	0.1%	0.8%
Prejudices and stereotypes	0%	2.5%

This trend is also echoed in Table 4 of sentiment analysis of the Chinese media towards the Arab world. Nearly 33% selected media texts have presented neutral attitudes with 55% for positive attitudes and only 13 % for negative attitudes. Meanwhile, Chinese social media are more neutral (58.4%) while mainstream media are more positive, but their average negative levels are both low, 12% to 13%. In response to RQ1, Chinese media have demonstrated a neutral and positive image about the Arab world between 2022 and 2025. This finding partly supports previous research showing a transition from negative to more balanced portrayals of the Arab world in Chinese media and positive emotions expressed towards the Arab images in Spanish social media by Mostafa and Nebo (2020). In contrast to Luqiu and Yang (2018), who highlighted enduring negative stereotypes in CCTV's reporting on Islam, this study has identified a more neutral framing. This suggests an evolving discursive trend consistent with China's expanding role in the Middle East.

Table 5 Attitudes Expressed in Media

	Mainstream media	Social media
Positive	54.6%	27.0%
Neutral	32.2%	58.4%
Negative	13.0%	12.3%
Composite	0.1%	2.3%

Perceptions of Chinese Gen Z about the Arab World:

The paper measured 16 variables of Chinese Gen Z' s perceptions of Arab countries, that fall into four key dimensions: political, economic, technological, and social desirability. This is a multi-dimensional country image scale developed by Martin and Eroglu (1993), which has been widely employed to examine how consumers evaluate the image of foreign countries. The political dimension includes democracy and state openness, reflecting perceptions of governance transparency and civic freedom. The economic dimension encompasses economy, mass production, industrialization, product quality, labor cost, highlighting respondents' views on industrial strength and competitiveness of Arab countries. The technological dimension was represented by literacy, technical research level, digitization, indicating perceived development level in education and innovation. Finally, social desirability dimension consists of welfare, standard of living, planned system and environmental sustainability, reflecting perceived quality of life, institutional management and effectiveness.

Over these dimensions, Chinese participants' evaluations were generally neutral to slightly positive. Political dimension received the highest average rating ($M=4.29$), followed closely by economic dimension ($M=4.27$), suggesting that Chinese Gen Z hold relatively favorable perceptions of Arabic institutional openness and economic development. Technological and social desirability dimensions both received slightly lower but still positive evaluations ($M = 4.26$), indicating moderate recognition of Arabic progress in education, digital innovation, social welfare and environmental sustainability. These findings demonstrate that Chinese Gen Z views Arab countries via a balanced and multidimensional lens, showing nuanced perspectives towards the Arab world.

Table 6 Perception Dimensions of the Arab World

	Mean	N
1. Political	4.29	1971
2. Economic	4.27	1971
3. Technological	4.26	1971
4. Social Desirability	4.26	1971

In addition, this paper asked Chinese respondents to select key words and features that can best describe their perceptions about Arab countries. In Table 7, majority of Chinese respondents chose “traditional culture” (52.31%), “religious belief” (51.7%), and “travel and historic cites” (51.29%), followed by “modernization” (49.42%) and “business and wealth” (49.16%). Only one percent chose “war and conflict.” In Table 8, this paper has found that the main key features are “strong

traditional religious beliefs" (60.88%), "strong family values" (52.31%), and "rich and diverse history and culture" (48.76%). This means that Chinese Gen Z youth associate Arab countries with positive features rather than negative or hostile prejudices and stereotypes and a mixture of respectful admiration and cultural distancing.

Table 7 Key Words Perceived on Arab World

Options	Amount	Percentage
Traditional Culture	1031	52.31%
Religious Beliefs	1019	51.7%
Tourism and Historic Sites	1011	51.29%
Modernization	974	49.42%
Business and Wealth	969	49.16%
War and Conflict	21	1.07%

Table 8 Key Features Perceived on the Arab World

Options	Amount	Percentage
Strong traditional religious beliefs	1200	60.88%
Strong family values	1031	52.31%
Rich and diverse history and culture	961	48.76%
Arab countries are leading in the new energy	668	33.89%
Lagging behind in science, technology and education	196	9.94%
Relatively conservative societies	60	3.04%
Uneven economic development	20	1.01%
Countries are in turmoil and terrorism is a serious problem	15	0.76%

This paper employed “feeling thermometer,” a rating scale to measure Chinese respondents’ attitudes, which typically ranges from 0° (very cold/negative) to 100° (very warm/positive), allowing respondents to indicate their feelings on a continuum. Rooted in the concept of social distance as introduced by Bogardus (1933), “feeling thermometer” conceptualizes the extent of closeness Chinese youth to the Arab world. In Table 9, their average rating of “feeling thermometer” was $M=70.92$ ($SD= 20.54$), indicating a warm and favorable emotional disposition of Chinese Gen Z toward Arabic peoples.

Table 9 Perceptions about Arab Individuals

	Attitude	Feeling thermometer
N	1971	1971
Mean	3.42	70.92
Std. Deviation	1.15	20.54

In Table 10, the paper has asked how Chinese participants perceive an Arab neighbor, a question adapted from Bogardus’s (1933) social distance scale from “very dissatisfied (1)” to “very satisfied (5),” with 51% Chinese respondents selecting “satisfied (4)” or “very satisfied (5),” and 22.4% for “neutral” attitude. In summary, this supports RQ2 that majority of Chinese Gen Z have held generally neutral to positive perceptions of the Arab world.

Table 10 Attitudes towards Arab Individuals

	Frequency	Percent
Very dissatisfied	66	3.3%
Dissatisfied	458	23.2%
Neutral	441	22.4%
Satisfied	594	30.1%
Very satisfied	412	20.9%
Total	1971	100%

Demographic Factors on Chinese Youth Perceptions:

As China is a vast country with 56 ethnic groups, the paper examined how demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and education influence the perceptions of Chinese Gen Z on the Arab world.

The paper employed the ANOVA method and T-test to determine whether demographic factors have effects on Chinese youth perceptions and if significant differences in emotional attitudes exist across different subgroups among survey samples. The ANOVA results showed education level did not significantly affect young Chinese perception on the Arab world, with $F(3, 1967) = 0.61$, $p>0.05$. Similarly, ethnicity and age did not emerge as significant factors either, with ethnicity at $F(2, 1968) = 0.15$, $p>0.05$, and age at $F(2, 1968) = 1.16$, $p>0.05$.

Table 11 Demographic Factors on Chinese Youth Perceptions

Demographic factors	df (between groups)	df (within groups)	F	Sig.
Age	2	1968	1.161	0.313
Ethnicity	2	1968	0.146	0.868
Education level	3	1967	0.608	0.610

Meanwhile, the paper ran a t-test to compare the thermometer ratings between male and female respondents. The results did not show a statistically significant difference, with $t(1969) = 1.03$, $p > 0.05$, which means men and women have similar attitudes toward the Arab world.

Table 12 Gender and Chinese Youth Perceptions

	Levene's Test		t-test		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	2.713	0.1	1.028	1969	0.304
Equal variances not assumed			1.022	1794.39	0.307

Overall, the results show that demographic factors (gender, age, ethnicity, and education) of the surveyed young Chinese do not significantly affect their perceptions toward the Arab world. Regardless of their age, ethnicity and education and gender, Chinese Gen Z have expressed a generally positive emotion and consistent attitude towards the Arab world.

Media Uses, Intergroup Contacts vs Perceptions of Chinese Youth:

The paper has examined the relationship between young Chinese media uses, intergroup contacts and their perceptions towards the Arab world. Authors have used the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) to measure the strength and direction

of the linear relationship between participants' media consumption frequency and their feeling thermometer scores, ranging from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to $+1$ (perfect positive correlation). The results reveal that the correlations between Chinese youth's media uses and their perceptions of Arab world is statistically significant, but weakly positive between several forms of media uses and perception scores. Specifically, television ($r = .235$, $p < .001$), radio ($r = .237$, $p < .001$), publication ($r = .207$, $p < .001$) and digital media uses ($r = .228$, $p < .001$) all demonstrated weak yet significant associations with more favorable attitudes towards Arab countries. While these associations are modest or weak in strength, they suggest a consistent positive trend of Chinese respondents towards the Arab world.

Table 13 Impact of Media Uses on Chinese Youth Perceptions

	Feeling thermometer		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
TV	.235**	<.001	1971
Radio	.237**	<.001	1971
Publication	.207**	<.001	1971
Digital device	.228**	<.001	1971

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Authors also examined whether interpersonal contacts with the Arab world are associated with more favorable perceptions of Chinese Gen Z. Results have showed statistically significant but also weak positive correlations. In Table 14, all contact types have positively correlated with thermometer ratings, with the number of

Arab friends ($r = .185$, $p < .001$), the frequencies of studying or working with Arabs ($r = .155$, $p < .001$), informal conversations ($r = .161$, $p < .001$), and social activities (watching movies) ($r = .170$, $p < .001$), indicating that increased intergroup contacts, whether formal or informal, may help improve affective young Chinese attitudes toward the Arab world.

Table 14 Impact of Intergroup Contacts on Chinese Youth Perceptions

	Feeling thermometer		
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Arab friends	.185**	<0.001	1971
Study work frequency	.155**	<0.001	1971
Informal conversations frequency	.161**	<0.001	1971
Social activity frequency	.170**	<0.001	1971
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Stereotypes and Impacts on Perceptions of Chinese Youth:

To justify the stereotypes and impacts on perceptions of Chinese youth, this paper invited Chinese respondents to evaluate the social roles of Arabian women and men in Arabian societies by providing multi-dimensional statements that best represent their evaluations. Table 15 shows that more than one-third of Chinese respondents (33.49%-35.77%) agree Arab women have achieved basic equality with Arab men and another 22.22%-24.91% proportion of Chinese respondents held that Arab women still face some restrictions but gradually improving, in terms of five domains for “access to higher education,” “autonomy in marriage,” “participation in the job market,” “political engagement” and “freedom in making personal life choices.”

However, an average of about 13.04%–14.51% Chinese respondents still think Arab women face more restrictions and are disadvantaged in some Arabian societies while a substantial portion of respondents (27%-28%) expressed uncertain views for all the five domains. These findings suggest that Chinese Gen Z recognize a high degree of gender progress in the Arab world but still reflect a stereotypical view of Arab cultures as being traditional toward Arab women in higher education, marriage, job market, participation in political affairs as well as their life choices.

Table 15 Sample's View of Arabian Women's Social Roles

	Access to higher education	Autonomy in marriage and family decision-making	Degree of participation in the job market	Degree of participation in political affairs	Degree of freedom of personal life choices
Basic equality with men	33.49%	34.65%	34.65%	35.77%	34.55%
Some restrictions, but gradually improving	24.91%	23.95%	22.22%	23.85%	23.14%
More restrictions, disadvantaged	14.41%	13.39%	14.51%	13.04%	14.21%
Uncertain / don't know	27.19%	28.01%	28.61%	27.35%	28.11%

In Table 16, Chinese youth's perceptions support the positive social roles of Arabian men. Majority of respondents associated Arab men with strong family responsibility (58.6%) and economic capability or business success (46.27%). 47.29% Chinese respondents viewed Arab men as open and globally adaptive while nearly half (48.2%) acknowledged regional diversity, suggesting a recognition of heterogeneity rather than essentialism. Only a small minority (4.92%) endorsed the stereotype that Arab men are "traditional and conservative, with strict expectations toward women," indicating a general rejection of hostile or patriarchal gender stereotypes.

Table 16 Sample's View of Arabian Men's Social Roles

	Amount	Percentage
Strong sense of family responsibility	1155	58.6%
Diverse image with large variations from country to country or region	950	48.2%
Open and modern, adapting to globalization	932	47.29%
Financially affluent, strong business skills	912	46.27%
Traditional and conservative, demanding of women	97	4.92%
Don't know the image of the Arab male	14	0.71%

These findings reinforce the idea that Chinese Gen Z hold multifaceted but balanced perceptions of Arab masculinity, combining respect for cultural values with modern characteristics. This supports that stereotypes are nuanced and context-dependent, mixing admiration for development with assumptions of social constraint.

The paper also conducted a Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between media uses and stereotype perceptions, both positive and negative. Results in Table 17 have indicated a significant negative correlation between media use and negative stereotypes ($r = -.298$, $p < .001$), and a significant positive correlation between media uses and positive stereotypes ($r = .297$, $p < .001$). This suggests that increased exposure to Arab-related media contents is associated with a reduction in negative stereotypes and an increase of positive ones.

Table 17 Impact of Media Use on Stereotypes

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Positive stereotype	.297**	<0.001	1971
Negative stereotype	-.298**	<0.001	1971

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Authors also explore the relationship between intergroup contacts and positive and negative perceptions. Results in Table 18 have shown a significant negative correlation between intergroup contacts and negative stereotypes ($r = -.403$, $p < .01$), and a significant positive correlation between media uses and positive stereotypes ($r = .405$, $p < .01$). They suggest that increased interpersonal contacts with Arab individuals are associated with a reduction in negative stereotypes and more positive perceptions of Arab individuals, which aligns with the previous study (Ortiz and Harwood, 2007) as cited in this paper.

Table 18 Impact of Intergroup Contacts on Stereotypes

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Positive stereotype	.405**	<0.001	1971
Negative stereotype	-.403**	<0.001	1971
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

To sum up, nuanced stereotypes exist towards Arab in terms of culture, religion and society and they are influenced by media uses and intergroup contacts.

Discussion

One key contribution of this paper is to explore the roles of Chinese media in constructing the Arab images. The analysis of Chinese mainstream and social media over the past two years demonstrates a trend toward neutral or positive thematic presentations, particularly in themes like cultural exchanges and lifestyles and international affairs. This supports previous studies that indicate Chinese media have reflected the improving China-Arab relations in past years (Hu, Hou, & Xu, 2021; Ha & Shin, 2019). The dominance of social media in addressing Arab-related topics underscores social media platforms' significance in shaping Chinese youth perceptions, as Chinese Gen Z are digitally connected and rely heavily on social channels for updated contents. The thematic focuses on cultural exchanges and lifestyles, rather than conflict or extremism, reinforces a favorable image of the Arab world among Chinese youth, which contrasts with earlier findings that

highlighted negative stereotypes in global media portrayals (Merskin, 2004; Luqiu & Yang, 2018).

The paper has found thematic differences between Chinese social media and mainstream media despite their commonality. Chinese social media focus more on cultural exchanges and lifestyles and social conflicts, while mainstream media concentrate more on serious issues like international affairs. Despite different focuses about the Arab world, both Chinese social and mainstream media have demonstrated a more friendly perception toward the Arab world, aligning with the observed shift in Chinese media's framing of Arab-related contents in recent years (Hu et al., 2021).

This study has also examined how Chinese Gen Z youth perceive the Arab world and shed light on the interplays between media representations, intergroup contacts and demographic factors in shaping their perceptions about the Arab world. This paper has found nuanced and predominantly positive views of the Arab world among Chinese Gen Z, marked by cultural admiration and respect for religious traditions as well as recognition of regional diversity and modernization in the Arab world, which contrasts with the negative stereotypes identified in earlier studies of Chinese public perceptions (Luqiu & Yang, 2018; Miao, 2020).

The paper has discovered generally positive perceptions held by Chinese Gen Z, as evidenced by their responses to the country image scale and feeling thermometer. Chinese respondents associated the Arab world more with rich cultural heritage,

strong family values and economic potential, with a minimal focus on negative stereotypes like political instability or conflict. This indicates a departure from the historically negative framing of Arabs in global media and reflects a more balanced and informed perspective among Chinese youth.

It is noticeable that demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and education have no significant impact on perceptions among Chinese youth, which also contrasts with previous studies where demographic variables like education level showed significant effects on out-group perceptions (e.g. Vogt, 1997; Ogan et al., 2014). This suggests a homogenized view of the Arab world among Chinese Gen Z, that may result from the shared media consumption patterns and cultural influences inside China. However, media uses and intergroup contacts have emerged as significant moderators of perceptions among Chinese youth. Increased exposure to Arab-related contents and interpersonal interactions are correlated with more favorable attitudes and reduced negative stereotypes about the Arab world among Chinese Gen Z. This aligns with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954), that stress the roles of observational learning and direct engagement in shaping cross-cultural understanding about the Arab world.

The paper has confirmed the existence of nuanced stereotypes, with positive stereotypes coexisting alongside negative ones. Media uses and intergroup contacts are discovered to moderate these stereotypes, as higher exposure to

diverse Chinese media and personal interactions correlated with more balanced and less prejudiced views. This underscores the potentials of media and intercultural exchanges to foster mutual understandings and counteract reductive or hostile stereotypes of Chinese youth about the Arab world.

This paper has thus offered valuable insights into the evolving perceptions of the Arab world among Chinese Gen Z, highlighting the reframing power of media narratives and intergroup contacts. As China-Arab relations continue to deepen, media representations are likely to play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion among Chinese youth.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study has found that the Arab perceptions of Chinese youth stand in contrast to earlier studies that highlighted negative stereotypes and Islamophobia in Chinese media and public discourses. This suggests a shift in narrative frameworks that may have been reframed by China's improving diplomatic and economic ties with Arab nations in recent years and be impacted by the alignment of Chinese media with government policies favorable to the Arab world.

Chinese media, mainstream and social media, plays a vital role in disseminating Chinese government policies and promoting Chinese core values. This kind of relationship between the media and government policies explains why Chinese youth keep consistent with Chinese media discourses about the Arab world.

As China and the Arab world continues to seek common paths in economic and social development, the reframing images of the Arab world in Chinese media and Gen Z have important implications.

First, reframing strategic narratives: Positive reframing of the Arab world in Chinese media reinforces China as a cooperative partner. By avoiding negative stereotypes prevalent in western media, Chinese media offer an alternative narrative reframing that emphasizes mutual respect and shared development goals. This supports China's broader diplomatic strategy of positioning itself as an alternative to western hegemony in the Middle East and its national strategy of challenging western discursive dominance in global affairs.

Second, reducing stereotypes. By downplaying themes like extremism and conflict: Chinese media contribute to reducing prejudiced views about the Arab world, fostering a more nuanced understanding among Chinese Gen Z youth and enhancing the Chinese goal of promoting cross-cultural harmony.

Third, shaping positive public perceptions in advancing trans-national and common goals: This synergy between Chinese media and government ensures that Chinese audiences, particularly Gen Z youth, internalize narratives that support the nation's global objectives. This study underscores a reframing role of media in fostering cross-cultural understanding between China and the Arab world.

Fourth, engaging Chinese youth: Social media platforms like Weibo and Douyin play a pivotal role in disseminating contents about the Arab world among Chinese Gen

Z. This guides Chinese friendly narratives to reach and influence the digitally native generation and are beneficial for long-term bilateral relationship between China and the Arab world in the future.

Fifth, demographic neutrality: The study finds that demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, education) do not significantly influence perceptions of the Arab world among Chinese youth. This suggests a homogenized media and social landscape in China where the nation's narratives dominate across diverse ethnic groups and thus minimize divergent and conflicting views on the Arab world.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, while the survey sample size is substantial, it primarily represents digitally active Chinese Gen Z, potentially overlooking the perceptions of youth in rural areas or with limited internet access, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the content analysis, though extensive, focused on textual data from selected platforms. The growing influence of visual and audio-visual contents (e.g., on Douyin and Bilibili) on Gen Z's perceptions warrants more dedicated analysis in future studies. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the survey data establishes correlation but not causation between media use, intergroup contact and perceptions. It cannot definitively determine whether positive media exposure leads to favorable perceptions or whether those with pre-existing positive attitudes seek out such contents.

These limitations point to space for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of perceptions among Chinese youth over time would be invaluable for establishing causal relationships and understanding long-term trends. Employing experimental designs could isolate the specific effects of different media frames (e.g., cultural vs. conflict-focused) on attitude formation. Furthermore, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide more nuanced insights into the personal experiences and cognitive processes behind the statistical patterns identified here. Finally, expanding the scope of media analysis to include a more systematic examination of user-generated comments and video content would offer a deeper understanding of the interactive and participatory aspects of image-building on social media.

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إعادة تأطير العالم العربي: صورة العرب في الإعلام الصيني وتصورات الجيل الصيني زد

أ.د. كو قوه

أستاذ، كلية الصحافة والاتصال، جامعة الدراسات الدولية بشنغهاي، شنغهاي، الصين

keguo@shisu.edu.cn

هان تشينغينغ

طالبة دراسات عليا، كلية الصحافة والاتصال، جامعة الدراسات الدولية بشنغهاي، شنغهاي، الصين

0243100427@shisu.edu.cn

مستخلص. تكشف هذه الورقة البحثية صورة العالم العربي في وسائل الإعلام الصينية وتصورات الجيل الصيني زد حيالها، وتبحث في كيفية تشكيل التمثيلات الإعلامية والعوامل الديموغرافية لتصوراتهم حول العالم العربي وذلك بالاعتماد على نظرية تمثيل الإعلام والنظرية المعرفية الاجتماعية، تعتمد الورقة منهجاً مختلطاً من خلال تحليل محتوى وسائل الإعلام الصينية وإجراء استطلاع بين شباب الجيل زد من خلال أداة الاستبانة. وقد وجدت الدراسة أن تصوير العالم العربي في الإعلام الصيني (بما في ذلك الإعلام التقليدي والاجتماعي) يتسم في الغالب بالحياد أو الإيجابية. وأن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ركزت على التبادلات الثقافية وأنماط الحياة، بينما ركز الإعلام التقليدي على الشؤون الدولية في العالم العربي. وتشير نتائج الاستبانة إلى أن الشباب الصيني يحملون تصورات دقيقة وإيجابية عموماً عن الدول العربية، ويربطونها بالتراث الثقافي الغني، والتقاليد الدينية، والتحديث، مع التركيز بشكل ضئيل على الصور النمطية السلبية. كما لم تظهر العوامل الديموغرافية تأثيرات واضحة، في حين أن استخدام الإعلام والتواصل بين المجموعات كان مرتبطاً بشكل ضعيف بالمواقف الإيجابية وتقليل الصور النمطية السلبية. وسلطت الدراسة الضوء على دور السردية الإعلامية الصينية في إعادة تأطير وفهم العالم العربي بشكل أكثر دقة، واقترحت وجود اتجاهات وآليات طويلة الأمد للحد من التحيز.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العالم العربي، الصور، الجيل الصيني زد، تمثيل الإعلام، المعرفة الاجتماعية