

## **A case study on Journalistic Coverage for Chinese issues in Saudi Newspapers**

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**Abstract:** As Journalism could instinctively exert some effects on international relationships; the importance is how to effectively journalism captures attention. This paper, from the perspective of Saudi-China relationship, chose two renowned Saudi newspapers 'AL RIYADH' and 'AL WATAN', as objective samples. Deductive and descriptive methodologies have been applied to a detailed study on the coverage of Chinese issues in Saudi newspapers before & after the visit of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz to China.

**Keywords:** Journalism; Coverage; Saudi-China relationship.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

People's thirst for knowledge has been the main driver for understanding and exchanging information, ideas or suggestions amongst dissimilar groups of people representing different cultures, policies or issues. Various mediums of exchange were developed to facilitate this exchange. The purpose of Journalism is to utilize them effectively, reflect, and convey relationships and policies amongst countries. If used in an effective manner, journalism could induce infinite numbers of quality relationships; although if incorrectly used, it could impede overseas relationships, and possibly even create conflicts or wars. How is the Saudi-China relationship reported or possibly guided through Saudi journalism? Or what is Saudi's journalistic attitude towards the Saudi-China relationship?

I did not come across any previous studies that had addressed East Asia and China affairs of this sort, however similar methodologies were used. For example, Dawood Al-Dalou<sup>[1]</sup> studied how the Arab media helped the Muslim minorities solve their problems. Hassan Ibrahim Al-Shareef<sup>[2]</sup> by sampled some Saudi papers and magazines within a four-month period, by employing comparative and descriptive methods, studied the extent of readers' interests in religious topics. Entman<sup>[3]</sup> studied America's media coverage of two planes, Korean and Iranian, addressed by the Soviets in September 1983 and by Americans in July 1988. Through the means of analyzing the contents in Time and Newsweek magazines, evening news in CBS network, as well as New York Times and Washington Post over a two week period, showed the United States' opinions and views about the issue. Sandra Dickson's

<sup>[4]</sup> study dealt with the New York Times' coverage of the American invasion of Panama between December 1979 and March 1990 and presented the paper from the American side towards the crisis. Ahmed Al-Jumaia<sup>[5]</sup> detected the coverage of the events of September 11, 2001 in Saudi papers and corresponding repercussions through content analysis.

Thus, in order to better solve the problem, this study initiated the first step. After briefly reviewing the development of Saudi-Chinese relationship, the situation of previous press coverage of the Chinese Issues in the Saudi Newspapers will be presented. Then by choosing two renowned Saudi newspapers 'AL RIYADH' and 'AL WATAN', as objective samples and applying deductive and descriptive methodologies, the current coverage of Chinese Issues in Saudi Newspapers has been studied in detail.

### **A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE SAUDI-CHINESE RELATION DEVELOPMENT**

The relationship between China and Saudi Arabia can be traced back until the year 651 AD. The first diplomatic mission dispatched from Medina by Caliph Othman Ibn Affaan to the capital of the Xi'an Empire, as Prophet Mohammed –peace be upon him- was aware of the prosperity of the Chinese civilization at the time and encouraged his nation to seek knowledge in China <sup>[6]</sup>.

But there had been no official diplomatic relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the time of China's establishment due to Saudi Arabia's position towards the global communism or the interference by PRC and the Soviet Union in the internal affairs of the Arab Gulf

states. Hence, saw the worst period in the Saudi-China relationship in the 1960's. Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the recession of the communist expansion, and with the PRC adopting a liberal economic policy, the Chinese relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have been developing steadily in politics, security, and economic areas<sup>[7]</sup>.

Since late 1990s, King Abudllah has given special attention to the PRC. Although the two countries resumed commercial relations in 1988 and establishing diplomatic relations in 1990, the dynamic push in their relationship came upon the visit of King Abdullah, crown prince at the time, to PRC in October 1998. Since then, the relationship between the two countries has strengthened considerably, and the visit to the PRC in 1998 had big economic impacts. The trade between China and Saudi Arabia has seen a fast growth in the recent years as the volume of trade increased by 95% per annum reaching 14.5 billion US dollars in 2005. A 90-day period is not only too short for concluding a substantial agreement between two countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the PRC, but it is also considerably short for two summits between two big world leaders, King Abdulalh Ben Abdulaziz and the Chinese President Hu Jintao. Based on the long history of the Saudi-China relationship, the management and development of the strategic interests, in addition to the deepening of the common values in understanding different aspects of the international climate on various levels politically, economically, and socially, and more importantly understanding such aspects as the conscious initiative for transforming the bilateral relations into a reality that will have positive results on the peoples of both countries.

Last April, during a visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Chinese President Hu Jintao delivered a speech at the Saudi Shura Council titled "Enhancing Peace in the Middle East & Building A Harmonious World" was well received with high respect and esteem by the Saudi side. The People's Republic of China and Saudi Arabia have become such close friends and sincere partners that they have identical or almost similar positions towards the international and regional issues. They have further maintained mutual and intensive coordination and consultation, and also understanding and support on the affairs related to more significant interests such as the state sovereignty and land unity<sup>[8]</sup>. The exchange of visits between the two countries has increased on various levels day by day.

### **PREVIOUS PRESS COVERAGE OF THE CHINESE ISSUES IN THE SAUDI NEWSPAPERS**

The importance of the press in the Saudi community has emerged during the past three decades through the administration of the various changes in the Saudi community. The press has also addressed a number of social problems and issues in the kingdom by enhancing the positive sides of these changes and providing remedies for the negative sides of the social issues.

There are still shortfalls limited to the extent of variety and access of the press coverage. News still comes from a small number of places leaving an extensive portion of the world ignored to a big extent hiding behind the short-lived headlines. The Saudis do not look upon the press for sake of policy only, but they also review, through the press reports, the cultures of other societies and their day-to-day lifestyle. The phases of the press media can be broken down into three parts: random coverage, organized mobilization by a single media in covering an event, and finally the stage in which media gets along with the post-event environment<sup>[9]</sup>.

However, the coverage of societies' cultures has the advantage of credibility. The Saudi people are interested in reports that affect the peoples' lifestyle and the humorous<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, some press coverage of Chinese affairs has found favor with readers, and have also received much participation through a variety forums provided on press websites. Many press editors in chief tend to provide larger space for Chinese affairs in the Saudi papers. This is to allow Saudi people to get more acquainted with the Chinese people through their own media.

The press coverage of the Chinese community, although quite insufficient, still found favor with a large segment of the Saudis, which helped in raising the number of the Saudi tourists in China. A lot of Saudis visited China before they had access through the press releases published about China.

### **THE FIELDS AND ANALYTICAL STUDIES**

Two renowned newspapers named 'AL RIYADH' and 'AL WATAN' have been chosen for detailed study on the current coverage of Chinese issues in Saudi newspapers. The results are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs with 'AL RIYAD' paper being discussed first.

**Al Riyadh Newspaper:** Table 1 shows that a significant portion of Chinese issues found in the Al Riyadh Newspaper is in the form of reports, 97% in the September-October of 2005 and 94% in April-May of 2006. Repetition of the reports has also more than doubled. Attention of Chinese reports has also increased in 2006, with 3% found as news items. Investigative reports have remained unchanged.

Table 1: Categories of Coverage

Statement	Sept.-Oct. 2005		April-May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
News item	----	----	1	3
Article	----	----	----	----
Report	16	97	35	94
Investigative reports	1	3	1	3
opinion	----	----	----	----
Interview	----	----	----	----
Readers mail	----	----	----	----
Caricature	----	----	----	----
Total:	17	100%	17	100%

A large proportion of the sources regarding Chinese issues are from the news agencies (76%) in September-October of 2005. Although news agency sources have dropped to 59% in April-May 2006, the overall sources of Chinese issues have become more diversified by including first-person accounts, more correspondents, and other media. Also, none of the sources have decreased which helps the credibility of reporting over all.

Table 2: Source for the Chinese Issues

Source	Sept.-Oct. 2005		April-May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Writer	----	----	1	3
Correspondent	1	6	9	24
News agency	13	76	22	59
Other media	----	----	1	3
None	3	18	4	11
Subscriber	----	----	----	----
Total:	17	100%	37	100%

Most of the Chinese issues being reported in September-October of 2005 are regarding politics, social issues, disasters and crimes, sports, and cultural background. In April-May of 2006, there is a strong focus on political issues, jumping from 24% to 54% and repetition of these issues quadrupling. There also seems to be a more overall interest in other Chinese issues, such as economic, health, military issues.

Table 3: Type of the Chinese issues

Type of issues	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Political	4	24	17	54
Economic	---	---	5	14
Social	4	24	7	19
Technical	---	---	---	---
Sports	2	11	---	---
Health	---	---	1	3
Military	---	---	1	3
Cultural	1	6	3	8
disasters & crimes	5	29	1	3
Scientific	1	%6	2	
Total	17	%100	37	%100

There is a definite change of tone in the issues being reported. In the September-October of 2005, more than half of the articles shine a negative light on China. The negativity has nearly disappeared in April-May of 2006. Positive articles have doubled in percentage from 29% to 62% and repetition has more than quadrupled.

Table 4: Trend of the Chinese issues

Trend	Sept.-Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Positive	5	29	23	62
Negative	9	53	-	-
Neutral	3	18	14	38
Total	59	100%	37	100%

Chinese issues never appeared in the front page during September-October, 2005, demonstrating the lack of interests or importance in Chinese issues. Most articles are found in inside pages (88%) and the last page (12%). Although most Chinese issues are still found in the inside pages in April-May of 2006, we do see some issues being reported on the front page (11%) and issues are being reported less on the last page (3%).

Table 5: Place of the Chinese issues

Place of issue	Sept.-Oct. 2005		April-May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Front page	---	---	4	11
inside page	15	88	32	86
last page	2	12	1	3
Total:	17	100%	17	100%

More attention is being placed on displaying images of Chinese issues and/or events, with figures increasing from 12% in September-October 2005 to 32% in April-May 2006. We also see a decrease of 19% in reporting Chinese issues without visuals. Photos of Chinese figures have remained the same.

Table 6: Material associated with the Chinese issues

Material associated	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Event image	2	12	12	32
Archive image	---	---	---	---
Personal photo	2	12	4	11
Diagrams	---	---	---	---
Colors	---	---	---	---
No image	13	76	21	57
Total	17	100%	95	100%

In the September-October of 2005, most reports did not include a picture of the Saudi government officials involved with the dialogues or cooperation (64%). If a picture was included, it generally was the picture of a Chinese government official (18%) or the general public (18%). In April-May of 2006, there is an increase of pictures of Chinese government official (40%) and repetition has increased to 15. The picture of the general public has decreased to 3%, however increases of pictures of Saudi government officials have increased in its place (19%). Fewer articles are appearing without pictures at all, a drop from 64% in September-October 2005 to 38% in April-May 2006.

Table 7: A Picture of an official associated with the event

An official associated	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Chinese government official	3	18	15	40
Saudi government official	---	---	7	19
Public	3	18	1	3
None	11	64	14	38
Joint government official	---	---	---	---
Total	17	100%	37	100%

There is an increase of prominently displaying Chinese issues from 47% in 2005 to 57% in 2006. Small print articles have also decreased slightly from 53% in 2005 to 43% in 2006.

Table 8: Display method of Chinese issue in Saudi newspaper

Display method	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Prominent	8	47	21	57
Hidden	6	53	16	43
Moderate	3	18	---	---
Total	17	100%	37	100%

Most articles printed in 2005 was not linked to Saudi-China relationship at 88% and articles that was actually linked to the relationship between the two countries was only at 12%. In 2006, the articles relating to Saudi-China relationship increased to 59% and non-related articles decreased to 41%.

Table 9: How far the issue is linked to the Saudi-China relations

Issue and Saudi-China relation	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Linked	2	12	22	59
Not linked	15	88	15	41
Total	17	100%	95	100%

The articles being reported remain largely conforming to the Kingdom's traditions and values with a slight deviation towards non-compliant in 2006.

Table 10: the extent of compliance with the Kingdom's traditions and values

Compliance with the kingdom's traditions and values	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
	Compliant	15	88	31
Non-compliant	2	12	6	16
Total	17	100%	37	100%

**Al Watan Newspaper:** Changes between September-October 2005 and April-May 2006 are small. There is a slight reduction of news items and a slight increase of reports. The only notable change is in the increased number of investigative reporting increasing from 1.7% to 9.5%.

Table 11: Editing form of the Chinese Issues

Statement	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
News item	34	57.6	42	44.2
Article	----	----	----	----
Report	23	39	44	46.3
Investigative reporting	1	1.7	9	9.5
opinion	----	----	----	----
Interview	----	----	----	----
Readers mail	1	1.7	----	----
Caricature	----	----	----	----
Total	50	100%	95	100%

The most noticeable decrease is in correspondent sources, decreasing from 52.5% in 2005 to 33.7% in 2006. However, there is an increasing in other sources. Most noticeable is from the subscribers and writers;

proportion increasing from 1.7% in 2005 to 9.5% in 2006 from 1.7% in 2005 to 7.4% in 2006 respectively.

Table 12: Source for the Chinese issues

Source	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Writer	1	1.7	7	7.4
Correspondent	31	52.5	32	33.7
News agency	24	40.7	35	36.8
Other media	1	1.7	4	4.2
None	1	1.7	8	8.4
Subscriber	1	1.7	9	9.5
Total	59	100%	95	100%

From the table below, it is revealed that there has been a shift of focus towards political, economic, and social/cultural interest. The most noticeable change (increase) has been in political issues, 11.8% in 2005 to 36.8% in 2006. The most noticeable coverage decline has been in sports articles, drastically reducing from 42% in 2005 to 1.1% in 2006.

Table 13: Type of the Chinese issues

Type of issues	Sep. -Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Political	7	11.8	35	36.8
Economic	19	32	37	38.9
Social	----	----	7	7.4
Technical	----	----	----	----
Sports	25	42	1	1.1
Health	----	----	----	----
Military	----	----	----	----
Cultural	1	1.7	10	10.5
Disasters & Crimes	4	6.7	3	3.2
Scientific	3	5.8	2	2.1
Total	59	100%	95	100%

There is a slight increase of positive tone articles in 2006 (55.9%) than in 2005 (42.4%). On the other hand, there has been a slight decrease of negative tone articles in 2006 than that of 2005.

Table 14: Trend of the Chinese issues

Trend	Sep. –Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Positive	25	42.4	53	55.9
Negative	16	27.1	24	25.2
Neutral	18	30.5	18	18.9
Total	59	100%	95	100%

In September-October 2005 all articles regarding Chinese issues were found on the inside pages. We can see that there is a shift of importance regarding Chinese issues due to more front-page coverage (12% in 2006) followed by some last-page coverage (3.2%).

Table 15: Place of the Chinese issues

Place of issue	Sep. –Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Front page	---	---	12	12
Inside page	59	100%	80	84.2
Last page	---	---	3	3.2
Total	59	100%	95	100%

We can see that the newspaper is trying to add more images to their reports regarding Chinese issues. In April-May 2006, no articles exist without some type of image.

Table 16: Material associated with the Chinese issues

Material Associated	Sep. –Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Event Image	8	13.5	10	10.5
Archive Image	1	1.7	6	6.3
Personal Photo	4	6.8	9	9.5
Diagrams	---	---	3	3.2
Colors	44	74.6	67	70.5
None	2	3.4	---	---
Total	59	100%	95	100%

Chinese issues were given more importance by printing them in a more visible method (30.5% in 2005 to 45.3% in 2006) and fewer articles are printed in less visible manner (29% in 2005 to 9.4% in 2006).

Table 17: Display method of Chinese issue in Saudi newspaper

Display method	Sep. –Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Prominent	18	30.5	43	45.3
Hidden	17	29	9	9.4
Medium	24	41	43	45.3
Total	59	100%	95	100%

There is more emphasis on publishing articles that is actually linked to Saudi-China relations. We can see that there is appreciable rise of figures, 15.3% in 2005 to 41.1% in 2006, in "Linked" articles and consequently a sharp fall of figures, 84.7% in 2005 to 58.9% in 2006, in "Not Linked" articles.

Table 18: How far the issues are linked to the Relations

Issue and Relation	Sep. –Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Linked	18	30.5	43	45.3
Not linked	17	29	9	9.4
Total	59	100%	95	100%

All news still remains in compliance with the Kingdom's traditions and values.

Table 19: The extent of compliance with the kingdom's traditions and values

Compliance with the kingdom's traditions and values	Sep. –Oct. 2005		April -May 2006	
	Repetition	Proportion	Repetition	Proportion
Compliant	59	100	95	100
Non-compliant	---	---	---	---
Total	59	100%	95	100%

## CONCLUSION

The analytical research has shown that the Chinese issues had received considerable attention following the visit of the Saudi monarch to China, and the Chinese president to Saudi Arabia as follows:

The Chinese topics published by the Saudi newspapers increased by 60% following the visit of the

Saudi monarch to the People's Republic of China when the King was accompanied by his chief editors of the Saudi newspapers.

The news report and the news items was the most common with respect to the Chinese topics on Al Riyadh and Al Watan newspapers. On Al Riyadh newspaper, during the period from September to October 2005, the percentage was 79 %, and during the second period from April and May was 94 %. On Al Watan newspaper, the news item was 57 %, the news report 39 %, and the reportage and readers mail at 2 %. During the second period, the reportage was at 46%, then the news item at 44 % then the reportage at 10 %.

The Saudi newspapers had relied on news agencies during the first period. The rate was 76 % on Al Riyadh newspaper, 40 % on Al Watan , the highest . During the second period , the news agencies rate on Al Riyadh newspaper was 59 % , then the correspondent 24 % , while other sources on Al Watan :news agencies 37 % , press correspondent 34 % which means that the newspapers had assigned collaborating editors following the visit of the Saudi monarch. Some sources indicated that there was an information agreement between the two countries.

The positive trend was very common on Al Watan newspaper. In the first period, the rate came to 42 %, the negative trend 27 %, and the neutral trend was 31 %. In the second period, the positive was 56 %. And the negative was 25 % while the neutral was 19 %. At Al Riyadh newspaper, the negative trend was, the positive was, the neutral were 53 %, 19 %, 29 and 18 % respectively in the first period due to the newspaper focusing on the reports by the news agencies about disasters and events that take place in China.

In the second period, the trend had changed due to a press collaborator writing with the newspaper. The positive trend came on top at the rate of 62 %, the natural at 38 %, and the newspaper never published a negative report on China.

The inside pages of the publication place of the biggest number of issues. In the first period on Al Riyadh 88 % , on Al Watan 100 % .During the second period , on Al Riyadh 86 % , on Al Watan 84 % , While the first pages had seen some materials in the second period which coincided with the Chinese president to the kingdom.

Most of the Chinese related issues included associated materials, while the colors ranked first on Al Watan newspaper at the rate of 74 %, and 71 % during the first and second periods respectively. The even images at 14 % and 32 % during the first and the second period while the personal images at 12 %, and

11 % during the first and second period respectively. While the rest without associated materials.

The area of the most Chinese issues in the study sample was less than quarter page. It was 14% on Al Riyadh newspaper. and quarter page and half page at 6 % each ,while it was less than a page at the rate of 73 % during the second period , then quarter page at 19 % , then a half page at 5% , then a full page at 3 % . It was less than a quarter page of 80 % on Al Watan newspaper, and a quarter page at 17 %, a half page at 3 % . During the second period it was 69% less than a quarter page, and a quarter page at 19 %, then a half page at 12 %.

The way of displaying the Chinese issues was as follows : during the first and second period , the issues that hit headlines were at 30 % and 45% , while the frightening issues among other topics at 29 % and 10 % , then average at 41 % and 45%.On Al Riyadh newspaper , they were as follows : frightening issues among other topics at 53 % , topics that hit headlines 47 % , then 18 % during the first period and in the second period , the topics that hit the headlines ranked first at 57% then 43 %.

Chinese issues on the Saudi newspapers were linked to the relations in some topics . Those published by Al Watan were linked to the relations during the two periods at 15 % and 41 % respectively. On Al Riyadh newspaper at 12 % , and 59 % respectively . While during both periods , we see development of the relations and press coverage of the topics that were linked to the relations between the two countries.

The Chinese topics published on the sample study were linked to the values and traditions of the Saudi community.

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