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Cultural Cooperation: Saudi Arabia and China

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As the Kingdom's cultural scene continues to expand, the Saudi Ministry of Culture has focused on promoting international exchange and dialogue as part of its strategic goals under Vision 2030 and as a means of promoting the Kingdom's cultural heritage, values, and soft power on the global stage. Most recently, Saudi Arabia and China have increasingly fostered cultural cooperation, leveraging their rich historical legacies and contemporary cultural expressions to deepen bilateral ties. Both nations recognize the significance of cultural exchange in strengthening diplomatic relations and promoting mutual understanding. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy initiatives have been reinforced by economic partnerships, with Saudi Arabia and China increasingly engaging in trade, investment, and infrastructure projects. Through this multifaceted approach, Saudi Arabia and China are increasing cultural understanding and cooperation that will, in return, improve bilateral relations.

This is evident following the visit by the Kingdom's Minister of Culture, HH Prince Badr bin Abdullah to Beijing on March 27, 2024. The two countries signed an [agreement](#) to enhance cooperation across multiple cultural sectors and seek to increase collaboration in libraries, cultural institutions, visual arts, performing arts, theater, architecture, design, and traditional arts and crafts. The agreement calls for the organization of cultural events, knowledge-sharing, and artistic residency programs between public and private organizations. "With the support of the leadership of the two friendly countries, Saudi-Chinese cultural cooperation begins a new chapter with several agreements," HH Prince Badr said on X.

On the same day that the agreement was signed, the Saudi Ministry of Culture announced the launch of the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Award for Cultural Cooperation between Saudi Arabia and China at the King Abdulaziz Public Library branch in Beijing. The award includes several [categories](#): "cultural research and studies, artistic and creative works, translations, and a cultural personality of the year from each country, recognizing significant contributions to culture." According to [HH Prince Badr](#), the award is a critical component in bridging cultural divides and strengthening ties between China and Saudi Arabia through art, literature, and academic research. The Saudi Minister of Culture and Governor of the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) also visited the "AlUla, Wonder of Arabia" exhibition at Beijing's Forbidden City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As part of the visit, on March 29th, the Saudi Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission and the China National Publications Import and Export Group Corporation signed an [agreement](#) to host Saudi Arabia as the guest of honor at the Beijing International Book Fair. The Book Fair, to be held this year between June 19 and 23, will also enhance cultural exchange, increase collaboration in literature, art, and culture, fostering communication and increased friendship and cooperation between the two nations.

All of these agreements come against the backdrop of the Kingdom expanding its relations with the East, recognizing the region's strategic importance both economically and diplomatically. The Kingdom was also the [guest of honor](#) at the New Delhi International Book Fair, held between February 10 and 18, and will be the guest of honor after Beijing at the upcoming Seoul International Book Fair from June 26 to 30, 2024.



This concerted effort is driven by Saudi Arabia's vision for implementing changes that would enhance its citizens' and residents' quality of life through the lens of the Saudi Vision 2030, launched in April 2018. The document [outlines](#) culture as one of the critical pillars of the Quality of Life Program, stating that: "enhancing a wide variety of sectors, the Program focuses on the empowerment of arts and culture, promotion of sports and leading a healthy life, and the development of more livable urban areas. As well as creating exciting new sectors and diversifying economic activity, the Program is bolstering local employment opportunities and beautifying cities across the Kingdom."

By showcasing its cultural heritage and contemporary achievements, the Kingdom has sought to foster a deeper understanding of its society and values among global audiences. This, in turn, has contributed to building bridges of mutual respect and cooperation with other nations, such as China. This is evidenced by the rise in tourism in the Kingdom in general, and from Chinese citizens specifically. According to [Vision 2030](#), "since the launch of the tourist visa in 2019, there have been more than 94 million visits from across the globe, resulting in a plethora of opportunities in the fields of tourism, hospitality, and entertainment." Moreover, in 2023, Saudi Arabia welcomed over 100,000 Chinese visitors and the [Kingdom](#) is now aiming to welcome five million travelers annually by 2030.

This goal has been supplemented with the Saudi Tourism Authority holding its first international promotional campaign in Shanghai from November 17-23, 2023. According to the [Saudi Press Agency](#), "the festival was attended by 80,000 people, the campaign reached out to 500 million Chinese people, and bookings to the Kingdom increased by 277 percent." Saudi Tourism Authority CEO Fahd Hamidaddin [echoed](#) this, stating that "we are pleased to launch the largest promotional campaign ever to welcome tourists from China and invite them to enjoy unique destinations, inspiring tourist experiences, Saudi hospitality, and rich and authentic culture" and "we hope...to inspire more Chinese tourists to visit Saudi Arabia, especially after the facilities provided for issuing the new electronic tourist visa and visa on arrival, and China's adoption of Saudi Arabia as a major destination." One result of these efforts is the launching of direct flights between Saudi Arabia and China, which will act as a link between the Kingdom, Asia, and Europe.

In sum, Saudi Arabia's cultural diplomacy is a dynamic and multifaceted aspect of its foreign policy, rooted in its rich heritage, and has enabled Saudi Arabia to counter stereotypes and misconceptions. Through artistic expressions, literature, and cultural exchanges, Saudi Arabia has sought to engage in meaningful dialogue with the global community, transcending political differences and fostering a shared appreciation for the arts and humanities. Through these initiatives, the Kingdom has sought to promote dialogue, understanding, and collaboration with the global community, as demonstrated by increasing Saudi-China relations. The impact of cultural diplomacy on international relations underscores the importance of cultural exchange in building bridges of mutual respect and cooperation and will continue to play an essential role in the coming years.

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