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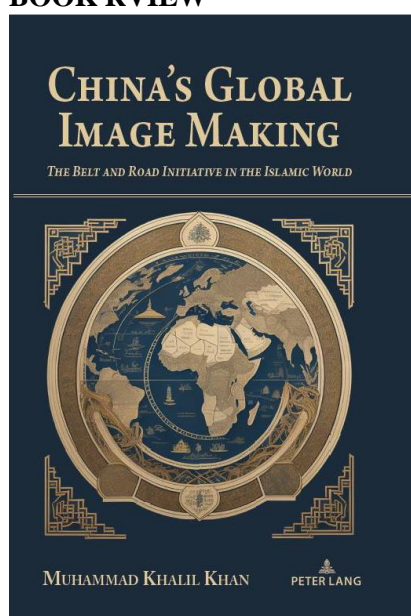
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China's Global Image Making: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Islamic World

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BOOK REVIEW



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1. Introduction

In "China's Global Image Making: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Islamic World," the author Muhammad Khalil Khan provide an insightful examination of how China seeks to shape its international image through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in predominantly Islamic regions. This scholarly work composes of eight well written chapters, each of with elaborate the different aspect of the study. The book's foundation rests on established theories of soft power and media framing, which elucidate the pivotal role of media in shaping national identities and influencing global relations. The authors argue that China's involvement in Islamic nations is not solely driven by economic motives but is intricately linked to the narratives crafted by regional media. This theoretical framework is essential for grasping the complexities surrounding China's efforts to elevate its global standing amid diverse cultural and political landscapes.

Employing a rigorous methodological approach, the authors conduct an extensive longitudinal content analysis of six major Islamic countries: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt and Qatar and analyze over 43,000 articles from Islamic English-language news media, spanning from 2009 to 2018. This comprehensive dataset facilitates a detailed exploration of trends in China's media portrayal, particularly following the BRI's introduction. The meticulous nature of this analysis yields compelling empirical evidence, demonstrating a significant uptick in China's visibility within Islamic media narratives, reflecting broader geopolitical shifts and evolving international dynamics.

The findings reveal a diverse array of perceptions regarding China across various Islamic nations. While countries like Pakistan and Iran often present a favorable image of China, skepticism is prevalent in the media of Turkey and Egypt. These variations can be traced back to historical ties, economic dependencies, and differing political contexts, underscoring the complex nature of international communication. Such insights are vital for understanding how local narratives influence perceptions of foreign powers, especially in regions rich in historical and cultural significance.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the authors' work is the identified correlation between China's

economic initiatives and its media representation. The book illustrates that positive media coverage often aligns with economic cooperation and infrastructural investments linked to the BRI. However, it also confronts the challenges China faces regarding human rights and governance issues, which provoke critical responses in certain Islamic contexts. This balanced perspective enriches the discourse on the interplay between economic relations and cultural-political narratives, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in international relations.

The authors effectively situate China's current strategies within a broader historical context of Sino-Islamic relations, tracing historical connections that inform contemporary perceptions. This contextualization is crucial for appreciating the long-term implications of China's investments and diplomatic efforts, framing them as part of an ongoing historical narrative that shapes current geopolitical dynamics. By examining the historical foundations of Sino-Islamic relations, the authors offer readers a deeper understanding of how past interactions continue to influence present diplomatic engagements.

Moreover, the book explores the impact of domestic political factors within Islamic countries—such as governance challenges, public sentiment, and historical grievances—on media portrayals of China. This analysis highlights the importance of considering local political contexts when evaluating international relations, particularly in regions where historical narratives play a significant role in shaping diplomatic engagements. The authors adeptly illustrate how internal political dynamics can influence external perceptions, underscoring the necessity for a comprehensive approach to understanding international relations.

From the standpoint of international communication, the authors emphasize the intricate relationship between media narratives and diplomatic strategies. They argue that effective public diplomacy requires a nuanced understanding of local contexts and cultural sensitivities. Their findings suggest that while China's policies shape its image, this image is profoundly influenced by media perceptions and reporting. This insight is particularly relevant in today's interconnected

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world, where narratives can significantly impact public opinion and diplomatic relations.

The authors also address the challenges China encounters in its quest to build a favorable global image. Issues such as governance, allegations of "debt trap diplomacy," and human rights concerns are critically examined, revealing how these factors can impede China's efforts to promote a positive image, especially in regions sensitive to such issues. They contend that while the BRI presents opportunities for cooperation and development, it simultaneously raises concerns about debt dependency and local dissatisfaction, particularly in areas where Chinese investment is perceived as exploitative. This duality highlights the necessity for China to adopt a nuanced public diplomacy approach that acknowledges both the opportunities and challenges inherent in international communication.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of China's portrayal in Western versus Islamic media is particularly enlightening.

The authors emphasize the significant disparities between these narratives, stressing the need for China to engage in effective public diplomacy to bridge these gaps and foster mutual understanding. By examining how different media outlets frame China's initiatives, the authors underscore the vital role of narrative management in shaping international perceptions and enhancing diplomatic relations.

In conclusion, "China's Global Image Making: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Islamic World" stands as an essential resource for scholars and practitioners in international communication, history, and political science. The authors' meticulous analysis and insightful observations provide a comprehensive understanding of China's evolving image within the Islamic world. This work not only deepens our comprehension of China's role in global affairs but also serves as a crucial reminder of the profound impact of media narratives on shaping international perceptions. The book is timely and relevant, adeptly navigating the complexities of global image construction within the framework of the BRI.