ABSTRACT

The recent literature on Gulf-China relations often mentions that China is increasingly considered to be a new model of development for Gulf states as an alternative to Western ones. Meanwhile, the debate about a ‘China model’ and the ‘Beijing Consensus’ has also recently intensified in media and studies on Chinese political economy. This paper attempts to connect these two academic trends and explore whether there is a substantive ‘China model’ from which Gulf states can learn. It will make use of both discursive and empirical approaches. In the discursive part, it will discuss why the discourse of a ‘China model’ has emerged in recent years in both Gulf societies and elsewhere in the world by bringing this discourse into wider historical context. On the other hand, the empirical part will make systematic comparisons between China and Gulf states from the perspective of political economy (the combination of authoritarianism and capitalism) and of economy (the state’s role in the market). It will attempt to answer the question of whether a ‘China model’ is replicable in the Gulf, and if it is, whether its adoption would make a GCC political economy more viable. Lastly, it will ask whether seeking a China model, or any other model, for Gulf states can be a progressive and meaningful research programme.