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ABSTRACT

The Rise of China in the Gulf: Opportunities and Challenges

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This research investigates the multifaceted dimensions of China's rising influence in the Gulf region, encompassing economic, political, strategic, and environmental considerations.

Through a systematic analysis, it explores the economic opportunities arising from China's expanding investment and trade ventures in the Gulf, alongside the attendant challenges related to sovereignty, dependency, and market dynamics. Moreover, it delves into the geopolitical ramifications of China's growing presence, examining its impact on regional power dynamics and traditional alliances. Importantly, this study also addresses the environmental implications of China's ascendancy in the Gulf, including its effects on ecosystems, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation efforts. By integrating these diverse perspectives, this research contributes to a holistic understanding of Sino-Gulf relations, offering valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders navigating the complexities of China's ascendancy in the Gulf while also addressing environmental sustainability concerns.

Background: In recent years, China's growing political and economic presence has significantly reshaped the Gulf region's strategic landscape. Traditionally aligned with Western powers, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have begun to pivot toward China, driven by economic needs, diversification goals, and shifting global power dynamics. China's increasing investments, infrastructure projects, and diplomatic engagements—particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—present both immense opportunities and complex challenges for the Gulf. These

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dynamics also bring environmental considerations and questions of sovereignty to the forefront, especially for states like Oman.

Study Purpose/Objectives: This study aims to examine the multifaceted nature of China's rising influence in the Gulf region, focusing on four key dimensions: political and economic development, geopolitical motivations, environmental impacts, and the implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The main objectives are to:

- Analyze the strategic and economic incentives behind China-GCC relations.
- Explore local perceptions, particularly among Omani youth, regarding China's role in the region.
- Identify the opportunities and risks associated with deeper engagement with China, especially in terms of sustainability and sovereignty.

Methods: A mixed-method approach was adopted. Quantitatively, the research analyzed secondary data from academic and institutional sources related to China-Gulf relations. Qualitatively, a structured online survey was distributed to students at Sultan Qaboos University aged 18–25. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, covering political, economic, geopolitical, and environmental aspects of China's engagement in the Gulf. Ethical considerations such as honesty, transparency, and respondent anonymity were strictly observed.

Results: The findings indicate a diverse range of perceptions toward China's presence in the Gulf. While many respondents acknowledged the benefits of economic cooperation, such as infrastructure development and trade opportunities, significant concerns were raised about environmental degradation, loss of local industry competitiveness, and economic dependency. Participants recognized China's geopolitical goals—particularly its energy security needs and regional influence—as central to its Gulf strategy. While awareness of the Belt and Road Initiative was mixed, respondents generally viewed Oman's participation as an opportunity, albeit with caution regarding long-term impacts on national sovereignty and environmental standards.



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Conclusions: China's rise in the Gulf represents a complex and evolving relationship characterized by both strategic cooperation and potential friction. For Gulf states like Oman, engaging with China offers pathways for economic diversification and regional connectivity but also demands careful navigation of issues related to sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical alignment. The study highlights the importance of balanced policymaking, transparent agreements, and sustainable development practices to maximize the benefits of China-Gulf relations while minimizing associated risks. Insights from the younger generation underscore the need for inclusive dialogue and future-oriented strategies in managing bilateral cooperation with China.

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