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CHINA'S ENERGY SECURITY AND RELATIONS WITH PETROSTATES

OIL AS AN IDEA

Anna Kuteleva



China's Energy Security and Relations with Petrostates

This book examines the development of bilateral energy relations between China and the two oil-rich countries, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Challenging conventional assumptions about energy politics and China's global quest for oil, this book examines the interplay of politics and sociocultural contexts. It shows how energy resources become ideas and how these ideas are mobilized in the realm of international relations. China's relations with Kazakhstan and Russia are simultaneously enabled and constrained by the discursive politics of oil. It is argued that to build collaborative and constructive energy relations with China, its partners in Kazakhstan, Russia, and elsewhere must consider not only the material realities of China's energy industry and the institutional settings of China's energy policy but also the multiple symbolic meanings that energy resources and, particularly, oil acquire in China.

China's Energy Security and Relations with Petrostates offers a nuanced understanding of China's bilateral energy relations with Kazakhstan and Russia, raising essential questions about the social logic of international energy politics. It will appeal to students and scholars of international relations, energy security, Chinese and post-Soviet studies, along with researchers working in the fields of energy policy and environmental sustainability.

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Anna Kuteleva

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I dedicate my work to my grandfather, Vadim Filippov, and the memory of my grandmother, Antonina Filippova. Ultimately nothing could have been possible without the unwavering support of my mother, Olga Kuteleva.



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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	ix
<i>List of tables</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xv
1 What do you imagine when you think about oil?	1
2 Discursive politics of energy and energy paradigms: Theoretical framework and methodology	8
<i>Realism vs. liberalism: The dichotomy of conflict and cooperation in the study of international energy politics</i>	8
<i>An alternative: Critical constructivism</i>	11
<i>Discourse analysis and texts: “From poststructuralist islands to the faraway shores of constructivism”</i>	17
3 China’s energy security and discursive politics of energy	24
<i>Evolution of China’s energy strategy from the 1950s to the 2000s: “Self-reliance,” “going out,” and “scientific development”</i>	27
<i>China’s discursive politics of energy</i>	38
<i>China’s energy paradigm: Chasing Daqing</i>	50
4 China–Russia energy relations	61
<i>Russia’s discursive politics of energy</i>	62
<i>Russia’s energy paradigm: A discursive bipolar disorder</i>	74
<i>China–Russia energy relations</i>	75
<i>Xi’s “China dream” and Putin’s “energy superpower”</i>	84

5	China–Kazakhstan energy relations	96
	<i>Kazakhstan's discursive politics of oil</i>	97
	<i>Kazakhstan's oil: A blessing and a threat</i>	99
	<i>Constructing Kazakhstan as a petrostate: Oil rent and Nazarbayevism</i>	103
	<i>“We” and “they” in Kazakhstan's discursive politics of energy</i>	113
	<i>Kazakhstan's energy paradigm: Nazarbayev's petrostate</i>	116
	<i>China–Kazakhstan energy dialogue</i>	116
	<i>Energy cooperation between Xi Jinping's China and the post-Nazarbayev Kazakhstan</i>	127
6	Conclusions: Examining oil as a discourse	139
	<i>Energy (in)securities and discursive politics of oil</i>	139
	<i>China's quest for oil</i>	140
	<i>Limitations and directions for future research</i>	142
	<i>Index</i>	145

Illustrations

3.1	Daqing Iron Man Wang Jinxi Memorial. Daqing, China, November 2016	31
3.2	The Museum of Daqing Oilfield, November 2016. An oil worker studies the “two theories” of Chairman Mao after a shift	32
3.3	The Museum of Daqing Oilfield, November 2016. Zheng Zhenhe (1977). The Iron Man Wang Jinxi studies the “two theories” of Chairman Mao	32
3.4	The Museum of Daqing Oilfield, November 2016. Yu Daokai (1989). The birth of Daqing: Greeting the National Day with new and outstanding success	33
4.1	Multimedia art installation <i>Energy of the Great Victory</i> . May 2015. Gorky Central Park of Culture and Leisure, Moscow, Russia	64
4.2	Outline of the multimedia art installation <i>Energy of the Great Victory</i> . © Museon.ru. Courtesy of Museon.ru	64
4.3	Molodkin, A. (2013). <i>Democracy</i> [mixed media installation, crude oil, neon]. © Andrei Molodkin. Courtesy of Gregory R. Staley, American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center	68
4.4	Vasya Lozhkin (2012). <i>The Pagan Deities</i> [acrylic on paper]. © Vasya Lozhkin. Courtesy of the artist. Inscriptions on the painting: “Father-Gas” (left) and “Mother-Oil” (right)	68
4.5	Vasya Lozhkin (2012). <i>The Black Vodka</i> [acrylic on paper]. © Vasya Lozhkin. Courtesy of the artist	69
5.1	The headquarters of KMG in Nur-Sultan. © Peter Korolev. Courtesy of the photographer	107
5.2	Map of Nur-Sultan. The main urban axis of Nur-Sultan: the Khan Shatyr Entertainment Center (1), the KMG’s headquarters and the Round Square (2), the Bayterek Tower (3), and the Ak Orda Presidential Palace (4)	107
5.3	The headquarters of KMG, the view on the Baiterek Tower from the Round Square (North). © Peter Korolev. Courtesy of the photographer	108
5.4	The Baiterek Tower and the Ak Orda Presidential Palace. © Peter Korolev. Courtesy of the photographer	108

5.5	The Ak Orda Presidential Palace, the view from the Baiterek Tower. © Peter Korolev. Courtesy of the photographer	109
5.6	The headquarters of KMG, the view on the entertainment center Khan Shatyr from the Round Square (South). © Peter Korolev. Courtesy of the photographer	109
5.7	The entertainment center Khan Shatyr. © Peter Korolev. Courtesy of the photographer	110

Tables

2.1	Intertextual Research Models	18
3.1	China’s Oil Production, Consumption, and Trade: 1993–2016	34
5.1	Kazakhstan’s Largest Oil Producing Companies (With More Than 1,000 Employees, April 2017)	120

Preface

At the heart of this book is the interplay between politics and sociocultural contexts in international energy politics. I explore this interplay by examining the development of bilateral energy relations between China and two oil-rich countries, Kazakhstan and Russia, from 2005 to 2017. The goal is to challenge conventional assumptions about energy politics and, particularly, about China's global quest for oil by showing how energy resources become ideas and how these ideas are mobilized in the realm of international relations.

Building my analysis on constructivist and poststructuralist insights, I demonstrate that China's energy relations with Kazakhstan and Russia are simultaneously enabled and constrained by the discursive politics of energy. I also reveal that China's external energy strategy is crucially dependent on its domestic discursive politics of energy. Hence, to build collaborative and constructive energy relations with China, its partners in Kazakhstan, Russia, and elsewhere must consider not only the material realities of China's energy industry (e.g., energy resources available in China, its mining, refining, and storage capacity, and the existing and planned transportation routes) and the institutional settings of China's energy policy (e.g., China's legal frameworks and the structure of China's energy government) but also the multiple symbolic meanings that energy resources acquire in China.

Overall, this book not only provides a nuanced understanding of China's bilateral energy relations with Kazakhstan and Russia but also raises and brings to the fore questions about the social logic of international energy politics in general. Thus, it offers an important addition to the literature critical of mainstream approaches to international relations and helping to promote discourse analysis within the discipline further.

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Abbreviations

BP	British Petroleum
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CPC	Communist Party of China
EIA	Energy Information Administration
ESPO	Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IWEP ACSS	Institute World Economics and Politics Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
KMG	KazMunayGas
KCP LLP	Kazakhstan-China Pipeline Limited liability partnerships
NBSC	National Bureau of Statistics of China
NFRK	National Fund of the Republic of Kazakhstan
NOC	National oil company
MFA of the PRC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples’ Republic of China
Mtoe	Million Tons of Oil Equivalent
PLA	People’s Liberation Army of China
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



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1 What do you imagine when you think about oil?

Oil.

What do you imagine when you think about oil?

What is the first thing that comes to your mind?

Do you imagine highways full of fast cars? Do you think about climate change and imagine pipeline protests in North Dakota? Do you think about a small toy factory in China's Guangdong? Maybe, you think about the 2003 invasion of Iraq? I was born and raised in post-Soviet Russia, and when I think about oil, the first thing that comes to my mind is corruption. When I think about oil, I imagine Vladimir Putin being the president of my country for yet another decade.

Since the early 20th century, we have lived in “the world of oil” (e.g., Yeomans 2004; Heinberg 2003; Shiva 2008; Yergin 2011a; Bridge and Le Billon 2012). With the rapid development of the natural gas industry, electricity, biofuels, and non-traditional energy sources over the past decades, oil has been losing ground. In the past decades, oil also has been pushed politically to defensive positions in many parts of the world by environmental activists and the international politics of climate change mitigation. However, we still largely depend on oil, and in the near future it will stay entrenched in literally all systems of our societies. Oil is *the* energy of our civilization.

Crude oil is a form of bitumen composed principally of hydrocarbons. It is extracted from natural reservoirs and transported through pipelines to a refinery or to a port, where it is loaded into a tanker and continues its journey to a refinery by water. More than half of all the crude oil used in the world crosses an international border, which makes oil one of the most internationally traded commodities in the world (Yergin 2011a).

Oil powers over 90 percent of the world's transportation that underpins modern economies and lifestyles. Our industrial food supply systems also consume a lot of oil. Petrochemicals from oil are used to make everything from clothes to mobile phones to perfumes to vitamins. Nothing moves without oil in the modern world. This makes oil a globally sought-after commodity (Wenar 2016; Yergin 2011b). Nonetheless, oil is concentrated only in a few geographic areas, and concerns about its scarcity are widespread and strong. The temporal aspect and

2 What do you imagine when you think about oil?

declining availability of oil that reflect technological and geological constraints of oil extraction add another dimension to its scarcity.

From economic, geological, and technological perspectives, oil is a concrete and real thing, yet it animates such abstract ideas as freedom, mobility, and independence. When we think about oil, we think not only about pumpjacks, pipelines, tankers, price charts, and long supply chains but also about capitalism, security, development, environment, democracy, and modernity. Importantly, both material and imagined constructions of oil are socially and culturally specific. In other words, while we all live in the world of oil, we all think about oil and imagine it differently.

These ideas have inspired the central question of this book: *How do different states understand oil, and how do these understandings influence relations between them?* At its heart is a general interest in the nexus between politics and sociocultural contexts in international energy politics, and the book explores this nexus by drawing on the analysis of the development of bilateral energy relations between China and two oil-rich countries – Kazakhstan and Russia.

The book centers on China because its case is unique. In the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, economically dilapidated and politically unstable, China posed a potential threat to some states and served as a space for geopolitical invasion for others. Despite that, by the beginning of the 21st century, China has successfully lifted a record number of people out of poverty and achieved a rapid increase in living standards, and reached a sustained level of economic growth, gaining stature and influence in world affairs. To quote Giovanni Arrighi (2007, 95), at the end of the 20th century China pioneered “the social and economic empowerment of the peoples of the global South.” Given China’s size and scale, it is evident that its rapid and powerful rise is bringing about a new age in economic and political history (e.g., Arrighi 2007; Jacques 2009; Harvey 2005). China’s extreme transformation from energy self-sufficient to energy-dependent development over the past three decades is one of the driving factors of these changes.

Since the early 1990s, China has emerged as “the world’s factory floor.” Around half of all energy consumed in China is absorbed by the industrial sector and can be attributed to international trade (Du and Lin 2015). The increased output of China’s industrial sector drives the high demand for electricity, refined petroleum products, and materials that are energy-intensive to produce, such as chemicals, steel, and aluminum (Ma et al. 2009; Fu et al. 2014; Du and Lin 2015). The industry has also contributed to the total energy demand by boosting energy consumption in the transport sector (Leung 2010; Meidan et al. 2015). Socioeconomic changes, such as the marketization of the economy, rapid urbanization, and rising incomes, have added additional pressure to China’s demand for energy. The dynamic consumer culture emerging in China promotes lifestyles that are fundamentally dependent on ecologically destructive and non-renewable sources of energy. High fossil-fuel use and carbon-intensive behavior are now the major consumer patterns of China’s households (Liu et al. 2009; Feng et al. 2011; Dai et al. 2012).

As a result of these deep and rapid changes, in the first decade of the 21st century, the fluctuations in Chinese energy consumption deviated considerably from global trends. While primary energy consumption has only risen by 13 percent in OECD countries and by 30 percent for the whole world, China increased its primary energy consumption by 70 percent. Rising demand for energy has turned China from a net energy exporter to a net energy importer. China's energy production was 11.6 percent more than consumption in the mid-1980s; since 2005 its consumption has surpassed output by approximately 10 percent. China became a coal importer in 2002 and a natural gas importer in 2007. However, the switch is particularly marked for petroleum products: in the 1980s China's oil production was 35 percent more than its consumption, but since 2003 over one-half of the total oil consumption has been imported. Importantly, there is strong evidence to suggest that the expansion in demand for energy will continue for about another two decades, inasmuch as China's economy is still in the process of "take-off" in industrialization and socio-economic transformation (EIA 2015).

Over the past decade, the productivity of China's oilfields has worsened, and the quality of domestic production has declined steadily because of resource depletion. While in the 1960s the development of internal energy capacity was the principal solution to China's energy security challenges, in the future substantial new fossil-fuel reserves will not likely be discovered. In other words, almost all radical options for the development of domestic energy capacity have already been exhausted; in the near to medium term, China will be unable to overcome its foreign energy dependence on fossil fuels. Currently, Chinese state-owned enterprises are prospecting for and extracting crude oil in 42 states (EIA 2015, 9). Three-fourths of China's crude oil imports come from the Middle East (52 percent) and Africa (23 percent)¹ (EIA 2015, 10). Even so, there is ample evidence to suggest that China aims to broaden the geographical scope of its foreign energy quest.

It is important to recognize and analyze China's emergence as a new influential actor in international energy politics. From the standpoint of enlightened self-interest, mutual vulnerabilities within the global energy system should be a sufficient pragmatic reason for studying the way China understands energy and constructs its relations with energy exporters in different parts of the world. It is also important to inquire what, on a relative basis, makes China an attractive partner for various energy exporters and how their interactions with China transform the way they view their own energy wealth.

To explain how China's quest for energy security transforms the global attitudes toward oil, this book examines China's relations with Russia and Kazakhstan. The China–Russia case is significant because both states play major roles in shaping global trends in energy politics. In contrast, news from Kazakhstan rarely hit international headlines, yet Kazakhstan is a significant oil producer and has become an increasingly important supplier to China over the past 20 years. Importantly, the China–Kazakhstan case provides novel insights into China's approach to South–South cooperation and its strategy in Central Asia.

4 *What do you imagine when you think about oil?*

By examining China's relations with Kazakhstan and Russia, this book not only provides a nuanced understanding of energy relations between these individual states but also raises and brings to the fore questions about the social logic of international energy politics in general. Specifically, it demonstrates that the material and discursive structures of energy politics are complexly interwoven and interdependent through diverse social, cultural, economic, and political encounters with energy, and thus, energy relations are determined not only by material realities but also by discursive politics of energy. In this sense, the analytical focus of this book is not on why a particular outcome was obtained in China–Kazakhstan and China–Russia energy relations but rather on how and with what effect diverse discursive structures of energy politics are socially constructed in the course of these relations.

Two key theoretical propositions anchor my analysis. First, the realities of energy production and consumption (e.g., volume and destinations of oil exports, domestic oil demand) are treated as material referents of identities that are constructed by states in international energy politics. Second, the material realities of energy acquire their meanings and significance only in the process of narrative-making and discursive symbolization. Hence, if we want to understand how an agent constructs its identity and the identities of its counterparts in international energy politics, we need to know what meanings this agent attributes to energy resources. A structured and systematic intertextual discourse analysis based on Lene Hansen's methodology (2006) of a heterogeneous collection of texts allows me to achieve two primary analytical goals:

- to reveal the discourses that dominate China's energy relations with Kazakhstan and Russia; and
- to examine how these dominant discourses support and sustain specific interpretations of China's energy relations with Kazakhstan and Russia while excluding or rendering marginal others.

To map and elucidate the development of discursive politics of energy in China, Kazakhstan, and Russia, I use textual documents and diverse cultural artifacts (e.g., works of fiction, popular song lyrics, paintings, photographs, films, museum exhibits, and architecture). My research is bilingual, with textual documents in Chinese and Russian being the major sources of data. I take language seriously and explore its power to construct social reality. Moreover, I show that diverse competing discourses about extraction, production, and consumption of energy and redistribution of energy revenues emerge and disseminate themselves through different forms of visual art, popular entertainment, architecture and city planning, museums, cultural spaces, and other sociocultural structures and practices. This allows me not only to advance the understanding of official energy discourses but also to unravel critical discourses about the economic, environmental, social, and political impacts associated with the expansion of the energy industry and the increase of energy exports.

The rest of the book proceeds in five chapters. In Chapter 2, I explain where the book is located within the major theoretical debates that provide the basis for

the study of energy politics in the realm of International Relations. I start with a broad and diverse but not overly detailed review of the existing mainstream realist and liberal scholarship that is heavily preoccupied with the dichotomy of conflict and cooperation and explains international energy relations through the prism of energy security. Problematizing the concept of energy security, I present constructivism as an alternative that can lead to valuable insights. In the last part of this chapter, I define major concepts and develop a constructivist methodology for studying international energy relations as a product of complex, dynamic, and interdependent social processes.

Chapter 3 focuses on China. I start with China's quest for "self-reliance" in the 1950s and the story of the Daqing oilfield. Further, I discuss the legacy of "self-reliance" and transition to the "going global" energy strategy in the era of "reform and opening-up" in the 1990s and the early 2000s. In the second part of this chapter, I examine the evolution of China's discursive politics of energy in the mid-2000s and the early 2010s. I identify the dominant discursive constructions in China's energy politics and trace how they shifted and changed over the past ten years. Finally, I determine how these discursive constructions support and sustain specific interpretations of China's energy strategy while excluding others or rendering them marginal. This allows me to define norms, meanings, and ideas that constitute China's energy paradigm.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on China's relations with Russian and Kazakhstan, respectively. I start each case study with an analysis of national energy paradigms of China's counterparts and then examine what impact China's emergence as a key energy consumer has on them. These chapters show that while China is redefining global energy politics and conventional approaches to energy security, its understanding of oil has not changed much since the mid-1950s. Hence, China's quest for energy security strengthens the affirmation that there is no alternative for oil. At the same time, the two petrostates see China as striving to control their energy sector and, subsequently, as a threat to their sovereignty in the realm of international energy politics, which is key to their sense of identity. Overall, Russia's and Kazakhstan's energy cooperation with China simultaneously exposes contradictions within their energy paradigms and acts as a conduit through which perceptions of China as a threat find a stronger voice.

Finally, Chapter 6 emphasizes the need to take the constitutive power of language seriously and reflect on how the language we use influences the way we study and practice energy politics. It stresses that the external energy strategies of China and its energy-rich counterparts are crucially dependent on their discursive politics of energy. Hence, the work of building collaborative and constructive energy relations with China, its partners in Kazakhstan, Russia, and elsewhere must consider not only material realities of China's energy industry (e.g., energy resources available in China, its mining, refining, and storage capacity, and the existing and planned transportation routes) and institutional settings of China's energy policy (e.g., China's legal frameworks and the structure of China's energy government), but also multiple symbolic meanings that energy resources acquire in China.

Moving beyond China's relations with petrostates, the chapter returns to the concept of energy security. At the heart of China's energy paradigm is an unhealthy obsession with energy self-sufficiency, and its notion of security centers on avoiding sudden changes in the availability of energy relative to demand in the name of national security and ongoing economic growth. China's quest for oil empowers petrostates, like Russia and Kazakhstan, and reinforces the understanding of oil as a critical sought-after energy source.

We indeed live in the "world of our making," and this world, to a large extent, is talked into being. Hence, to redefine our understandings of energy security, we need to start taking the world of words and ideas as seriously as the world of pumpjacks, pipelines, tankers, price charts, and extended supply chains. The book ends by emphasizing that if we are to imagine the world without oil, we need to rethink our relations with it. Once we start viewing oil as a threat rather than an opportunity for our development and progress, we will be able to develop a new language that denaturalizes the dominant notions of energy (in)security and cooperate to produce sustainable international energy solutions.

Note

- 1 China's oil imports come from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Oman, Angola, and Russia. In 2015, Russia temporarily overtook Saudi Arabia as the biggest crude exporter to China four times. While fluctuations in import numbers over 2015 indicate that Russia is gaining momentum in China's market, it is too early to draw conclusions. As for 2018, Saudi Arabia is still China's major supplier.

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ChinaKazakhstan energy relations

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