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## Securitization Politics: A Critical Appraisal of China's Energy and Climate Politics

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### Abstract

This article unfolds recent academic debates encircling securitization of energy and climate in China. There have been heated debates about the benefits and implications of securitization of energy and climate in non-western settings. Potential issues of linking environmental problems with 'security' have been identified as the immediate concern, and the focus has turned in particular to energy and climate in securitization debate. However, it is not long ago that China has become the epicenter of this debate. In spite of conventional deadlock over climate change as a driver of national security, its security implications have been significantly acknowledged in Chinese official discourse in the last couple of years. The Chinese understanding of climate issue has undergone significant transformation from climate as a development issue to security issue primarily because of its economic shift towards a 'new normal.' Why did China change its approach invites research inquiry. This paper is designed to explore how the securitization of energy and climate in China has served various objectives of Chinese government including socioeconomic development and the legitimacy of reestablishing control by the Chinese

Communist Party (CCP). China's experience presents a unique case from the usual practices of securitization as climate and energy security is linked to political objectives. It is evident from Chinese case that though majority of political phenomenon do not require audience approval, energy and climate security encourage latent types of participation both by the citizens and experts. So, non-democratic nations are equally open and feasible for securitization.

**Keywords:** Securitization, Energy, Climate Change, Official Discourse, National Security, China.

### **Introduction**

The securitization has been high in academic debates at the global level since early 1990s. Since then, scholars have been extensively debating the pros and cons of framing various issues as 'security' issues (Arnall, 2023). Potential issues of linking environmental problems with 'security' have been identified as the immediate concern, and the focus has turned in particular to climate (Podesta & Ogden, 2007) (Trombetta, 2008) (Hayes & Knox-Hayes, 2014) and energy (Simpson, 2007) (Ciută, 2010) (Nyman, 2014) in securitization debate. The early breakthrough was made by The Copenhagen School in the development of 'securitization' concept which contemplates the consequences when a specific issue is treated as 'security issue' by the policy-makers (Hampson et al., 1998a). If a particular issue is securitized successfully, that particular issue gets into 'high politics' from 'regular politics' necessitating special measures (Weaver, 1995). Thus, securitization entails both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it can be advantageous to address an issue by attracting special focus from the elite actor and also by utilizing extra resources. On the other hand, it can have very harmful impacts and because of this special emphasis has been placed on the politics of energy and climate by growing number of scholars. However, it is not long ago that China has become the epicenter of this debate. Being the largest energy importer and greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter, China has been placing special focus on energy and climate issues and its policy choices are very crucial to shape worldwide climate and energy dynamics (Albert, 2023). Therefore, it is of immense significance to see how Chinese frame policies regarding energy and climate issues.

One of the particular aspects of the debates over securitization studies is to widen the security concept by incorporating 'non-conventional security matters.' Energy and climate are two such fields where 'security' has been extensively probed in several manners. Energy is mostly deemed

as a conventional security matter as it is tended to be associated with national security(Mulligan, 2010). Resultantly, securitization of energy became an important research subject in which key contribution was made by Nyman and Leung et al(Leung et al., 2014). While the literature on climate and security has ranged from treating climate as a potential source that can lead to conflict to an issue that should be deemed as a non-conventional security matter(Vogler, 2023b). In spite of conventional deadlock over climate change as a driver of national security, its security implications have been significantly acknowledged in Chinese official discourse in the last couple of years. Despite global agreement on climate being considered as a ‘threat multiplier,’ Chinese have been resistant to acknowledge climate as a national security matter(Trombetta, 2019). In the very first discussion over climate and security held at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) back in 2007, climate change was presented as a development issue with certain security implications by Chinese ambassador Liu Zhemin. This stance was further reiterated at the second UNSC summit over climate and security in 2011. However, a strong linkage between climate and security has been emphasized both in academic debates and official discourse in China since then(Nyman & Zeng, 2016)(Bo, 2016)(Vogler, 2023a). Consequently, China changed its stance by labeling climate as a threat to ‘peace and stability’ at the third UNSC gathering in 2019.

Are there any developments in China that reflect on climate securitization? And if there are any, what are their impacts on the Chinese energy and climate politics? Keeping the existing scholarship on securitization in consideration(Balzacq, 2019)(Trombetta, 2008)(Oels, 2012), this article aims to explore how energy and climate are conceptualized as topics of security in China, which matter is given more priority in securitization, and which political goals are secured through securitization of energy and climate? This study is segregated into various parts. The first part reviews the existing scholarship on securitization theory and its applicability in non-western settings to find out if securitization occurs in non-western countries. It is followed by Chinese concerns for energy and climate security before turning its focus on Chinese official discourse in securitization of energy and climate. The last part concludes the discussion with few reflections on implications. It is further observed that an increasing interest and emphasis has been shown by the Chinese government in securitization of energy and climate, and it is

recommended that it is quite valuable and vital, and does not carry any negative connotations necessarily.

### **Debating Securitization Theory and China**

The Cold War closure witnessed the emergence of ‘securitization’ debate on the global horizon emphasizing the widening of security agenda beyond military(Weaver, 1995)(Hampson et al., 1998b). The theory of ‘securitization’ was developed as an analytical tool to assess the mechanism through which problems assume security connotations and their implications. It, perhaps, provides a comprehensive and precise account of security. The argument presented by the “Copenhagen School” labels security as a ‘speech act.’ Hence, it is a procedure by which a problem is dramatized and dealt with utmost priority to eventually convert it into a security issue(Hampson et al., 1998b).Going by Austin’s view on securitization; it is performative which means speaking it is an act. Moreover, it has a particular political tradition which legitimizes exceptional kinds of politics linked with ‘threat-defence’ logic(Hampson et al., 1998a). To attach security connotation to an issue is usually a political decision, while the emphasis is placed on speech acts in the original formulation(Weaver, 1995). This political choice is not free from consequences. So, it is usually best avoided as per the recommendations of the Copenhagen School.

An immense rise has been witnessed in the application of securitization theory as an analytical framework to study growing number of problems which have been associated with ‘security’(Floyd, 2010)(Elbe, 2006)(Huysmans, 2000). In security studies, it is considered quite innovative yet highly debated topic<sup>8</sup>. Building on the insights from various paradigms including realism, constructivism and post-structuralism, the theory of securitization emphasizes the need to take prompt action against the threats that are yet to be discovered and counteracted and a matter of ‘normal’ politics can be converted into ‘high’ politics if there is an overwhelming consensus among the political community to do so. This change necessitates adoption of particular practices which are justified by existential threats. As a result, issues are elevated beyond political debate and special measures are legitimized(Hampson et al., 1998b). Keeping this perspective in consideration, security is neither a value nor a condition but a particular kind of social practice linked with the logic of ‘threat-defence.’ There is growing literature which debates the transformation of an ordinary matter into a security matter. Securitization is viewed

as a mean to mobilize action on the one hand, while it is deemed as a counterproductive measure on the other hand which hinders cooperation.

The securitization theory has become highly important approach for analyzing social construction of threats. Though some of its aspects have been challenged consistently for the last many years(Trombetta, 2008)(Oels, 2012), it still enjoys key position in security discourse analysis of energy and climate because of two major elements. The first major element is the ‘construction of threats.’ The proponents of securitization theory argue that there is a long list of issues which can be converted into security issues. By doing this, the paradigm helps shifting the emphasis from the “truth of the statement” to its “truth effect”. The consequences are quite relevant for not only to prioritize threats, but also to make them accepted as well. This is very crucial in the case of climate in particular. In spite of emphasizing whether the climate change is a myth or real, the theory of securitization hints at the political nature of developing the linkage between climate and security. It also questions the kinds of threats that are to be undertaken, and whose security is at risk. So, it is important to ponder over what is being considered as “climate security,” how they are linked with each other is a particular context, what makes these actions legitimate and illegitimate, and how the actors are empowered and disempowered.

The second major element involves securitization’s consequences. Talking about the performative dimension of turning an issue into a security topic, securitization focuses on the “exceptionalism of speaking security,” the “threat-defence” approach, and the “inscription of enemies” in a context. Considering how securitization makes room for measures that might not have been taken otherwise is rather more effective approach. The ‘politics of the extraordinary’ is thoroughly discussed by Michal Williams(Williams, 2015) and Thierry Balzacq(Balzacq, 2019) which considers political dimensions of securitization. It further suggests that it is possible to mobilize actions through securitization with a constitutive power beyond the inscription of friend/enemy distinction in a given context. This very approach contends that “securitization is about transforming governance and introducing measures and policies that would not have been undertaken otherwise”(Trombetta, 2010).

The securitization debate involves the context in which it may or may not be applied. A huge body of scholarship drawing on securitization theory places emphasis on the liberal-democratic system of the West and it is mostly considered that this framework is not workable in other

contexts. The securitization process is primarily defined by the Copenhagen School in which “an issue is moved from regular democratic politics to fast-tracked national security politics.” A variety of issues arise when securitization is applied in Chinese context primarily because of the nature of political system in China and the chemistry of ties between state and society. There is hardly any comprehensive scholarship on securitization theory in Chinese context except Vuori’s work(Vuori, 2008)(Vuori, 2011). He argued that though authority and legitimacy work in a different way, but securitization still takes place and its moves have to be acknowledged by the audience as leaders do need masses for support(Vuori, 2008). The theory of securitization relies on the masses which need to be satisfied of action’s legitimacy and necessity. In Chinese case, it can be the common citizens, but considering the problem alongside the context the citizens can be the elite too “who have to be convinced of the necessity of security action changes with the cultural and political.....context”(Vuori, 2008). It has been recommended by critiques that non-democratic states have no need for securitization, as it is not imperative for such states to satisfy the masses of the need for special measures. However, Vuori suggests that the employment and construction of security problems “can be utilized for a range of political purposes, from raising an issue on the agenda of decision-making to legitimizing policies, deterring threats, and controlling subordinates”(Vuori, 2008). He further argues that it is very useful for maintaining Chinese political system as well. It is also of immense significance to note here that security is strongly linked with national security and state security in China. This makes it quite in line with the concept of security presented by the Copenhagen school.

It is imperative to recognize a broader security logic in Chinese context as it is crucial for the debate regarding contextualization of securitization(Stritzel, 2011). Critiques have already observed and identified the challenges to apply securitization in a non-Western context(Barthwal-Datta, 2009)(Wilkinson, 2007)(Vuori, 2008)(Trombetta, 2018), which mostly reflects a particular liberal custom of lifting problems above politics to legitimize actions undertaken beyond political discussion. In Chinese case, critiques have also noticed that perhaps it is not necessary to employ security language for mobilizing actions on climate and energy as policies are, nonetheless, centrally made and controlled(Nyman & Zeng, 2016). However, securitization can be one of the effective ways for justifying politically costly measures(Vuori, 2008). More importantly, there is dire need to consider the “coexistence and overlapping of

different logic and practices of security in the Chinese context and how that reflects the resilience of national security discourse while dealing with non-traditional threats”(Trombetta, 2019).

This article briefs about methodology before it gets into comparative analysis of securitization of energy and climate in China through recent academic debates and Chinese official discourse. It is a qualitative study which primarily focuses on secondary material. Prime focus was placed on the articles published in the largest journal database of China known as “China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)”. The scholarships which explicitly deal either with securitization or with energy and climate as security topics have been reviewed. This database is not only a comprehensive articles’ repository for Chinese scholars, but also an all-important tool for surveying the data for this study as it is widely read both by the international and local researchers. Majority of the articles surveyed indicate significant interest by the Chinese academia in this area. The Chinese literature is supplemented with articles written by international researchers in English language where they are deemed relevant.

The primary data surveyed in the section which deals with official discourse, has been assessed through focused sampling providing survey of crucial documents and statements. This study utilizes the selection criteria of Neumann which emphasizes crucial texts as ‘monuments.’ It plays a pivotal role in the policy debate and has an extensive reception(Neumann, 2008). Interviews of some key strategists and thinkers about the energy security of China have helped informing the framing of this study. It is observed that the Chinese scholars’ views and research focus often varies by various factors including their institutions, geographical location, and sources of funding(Zeng, 2014). It is worth mentioning here that there is some linkage between scholars focusing on unconventional security and relevant academic institutes such as the article on ecological security authored by Wang Jiangli of the “Center for Non-traditional Security and Peaceful Development.” However, because of the small sample size and opaqueness about authors’ connections, it is somewhat difficult to conclude that the ideas are framed by the institution.

### **The Academic Discourse over Security in Chinese Climate and Energy Policy**

This part of the study is designed to analyze the academic debate encircling securitization in the energy and climate policies of China through the existing academic literature. Though there is

plenty of literature available on security topic, but the application of securitization theory is hardly seen in literature. The use of securitization theory has been witnessed recently in the energy and climate security of China in both Chinese and English language literature. This academic debate not only incorporates the articles which explicitly employ securitization theory, but also considers those which treat energy and climate as security problems.

### **China's Energy Security in Academic Debates**

As there are plenty of concepts that are received from the West by the developing world, energy security is no exception and it is very much in its evolution phase. As there is a lack of consensus over a single definition of energy security, it is utilized in various ways by the state officials and policy-makers. Considering the Chinese case, it is argued by few that 'energy supply' has always been deemed a "security issue," but the survey of Chinese academic journals conducted in this study reveals a bit different story. It finds out that the term (energy security) first appeared in 1989 in the Chinese academic journals and became a topic of overwhelming interest in the early 2000s in China. It is not usually meant that it was not framed as "security issue" before that, rather it is meant to describe an increasing interest and growing acknowledgement of the issue in China.

Keeping the significance/focus of the subject in consideration, Chinese academic articles can be segregated into two. Energy security of China and its policy analysis is the most important aspect for our discussion which emerged in 1998. It also pays considerable focus on the way other countries define and ensure their energy security and their impacts on China. The debate over energy security in China is not limited to academia, rather state officials, and military strategists have been showing great interest and pontificating on the issue of energy security publicly since the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kennedy, 2010). However, the growing focus in how energy is conceived as a matter of security is quite a recent phenomenon. Oil in general and its uninterrupted supplies in particular carry immense importance in majority of the high-profile meetings on energy as a matter of national security in China. It also holds state and the principle of self-reliance supreme, and security is meant to preserve and ensure the survival of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC).

In order to study China's politics, the use of securitization theory is not much visible though some glimpses of its utilization are found in energy security discussions. For instance, a



translated version of an article authored by Ystein Tunsj touches upon securitization theory in the energy security of China, mentioning that the oil dependency of China is framed as security issue by Hu Jintao time and again. However, he is also found suggesting that China is marketizing energy in parallel as well. An entirely different view is presented by Leung et al in which energy security is sub-divided into relevant supply chains of energy in China(Leung et al., 2014). They argue that the supply of oil is framed as national security issue contrary to other issues associated with energy security. This argument is further strengthened by the remarks of an official who was one of the major architects behind the drafting of 2012 China's Energy White Paper, noting that supply of oil is a matter of security as it can threaten China's self-reliance in energy terms. State security again remains pivotal here(Leung et al., 2014). There are instances where national security is heavily emphasized in the energy securitization of China(Phillips, 2013). Leung et al. further argues that though energy security approach of China has involved seeking enhanced engagements with international oil market by its "going out" strategy, protecting its supplies by diversification of routes and energy sites has remained crucial to energy security of China. Resultantly, it is rightfully concluded that threats to national energy security directly affects China's national security. Therefore, supply of oil is more likely to be constructed as a security issue(Leung et al., 2014).

The data surveyed for Chinese literature on energy security indicates growing interest in the topic and emphasizes what should be focused. It is observed from the survey of Chinese studies on the subject of energy that oil and its uninterrupted supplies hold pivotal position in the academic debates(Cheng, 2008). To support this view, one author argues that oil supply is considered very crucial as it has been major source of China's energy insecurity(Leung, 2011). In debates encircling the issue of supply of oil, the global dimension is focused as a key element which poses a potential threat(Zhang, 2011). Another significant factor that is emphasized in the debates over energy security and climate change is sustainability. The concept of energy security is evolving as it is argued by Wang Tao that this concept has gone through massive transformations, from security from supplies and price volatility to sustainable social and environmental development(Wang, 2014). He is of the opinion that climate change should be given due weightage in the energy system of China. Chen Guohua supports Wang Tao argument by noting that the issue of energy security falls in the premises of unconventional security,

although he agrees with Leung et al. that it is linked with oil supply and demand(Cheng, 2008). It is interesting to mention here that an article by the energy consumers of China highlights that though supply of fossil fuels holds key place in energy security, concerns over its environmental impacts are gaining grounds, hence, becoming important factor in the discussions of energy security in China(Hayes & Knox-Hayes, 2014).

The academic debate also involves why different countries adopt different strategies for energy security. It tends to highlight two contrary policy-tracks: market-oriented or strategic(Andrews-Speed & Dannreuther, 2011). In China's case, strategic dimension is mostly focused as the mainstream approach to energy security issue is state-centric. This approach is reflected further in the Chinese energy system which is not massively marketized and heavily based on self-sufficiency(Downs, 2008). Strategic dimension is emphasized to a great extent because energy is deemed as a matter of "high politics,"(Meidan et al., 2009) which makes it understood in securitization context necessitating special measures. Commenting on the internal thinking over energy security in China, Lee states that it is overwhelmingly understood as security issue(Lee, 2005). While others argue that the principle of sustainability is also being incorporated into energy security(Constantin, 2007). Quite recently, the debate over Chinese energy security is widening up to incorporate huge variety of perspectives including placing huge emphasis on energy marketizing, and energy cooperation(Zha, 2006). Last but not the least perspective argues that Beijing "hedges" by utilizing both approaches to minimize risk and maximize opportunities of long-lasting existence and survival. Concluding this academic debate over energy security, it is worth mentioning to highlight the media coverage which is given to energy security in China(Wang et al., 2010). From 2005 onwards, it is covered on an extensive scale not only by business and trade entities but also by People's Daily.

### **China's Climate Change in Academic Debates**

The survey of Chinese academic literature demonstrates that securitization theory has been used more in climate related scholarship than energy, which points out that this theory has been the majority choice to study climate change in China. However, the adoption of securitization theory to study climate change is only found in recent literature, where unconventional security connotations are usually emphasized. A clear distinction is found between the scholarship that focuses on climate change and negotiations at global and national level. The scholarship which

treats securitization in climate change at the global level tends to focus geopolitics and raises suspicions that it may work in China's containment. Contrary to that, the scholarship dealing with the climate issue domestically tends to see it more likely as a "security threat" in a broader sense, placing emphasis on its implications for environment, human, and food security. Chinese official discourse is also not free from this distinction. It is also crucial to highlight here that while majority of Chinese scholarship on climate change takes energy security into consideration, scholarship about security of energy usually ignores climate concerns (Nyman & Zeng, 2016). Awareness about the Chinese vulnerability to climate has been growing rapidly, which is demonstrated from the growing Chinese scholarship on the subject. The academic debate revolves around conceptualizing climate change threat and to find out where the emerging scholarship about security and securitization best fits in. There is overwhelming consensus that it is mandatory to balance out climate concerns with economic growth. It is required to maintain a certain level of economic and social development, and this makes it very difficult to deal with climate issue.

To securitize climate change in global negotiations over climate concerns is a prime focus of the academic debate. Here the Chinese scholarship on the subject emphasizes the potential implications for the Chinese economic security. For instance, the securitization of climate change at the global level is described as "double-edged" sword by Jianying and Yunlei (Ma & Jiang, 2010). On the one hand, it tends to prioritize the issue by promoting international cooperation. While on the other hand, it can be utilized as an excuse for interference in the affairs of weak states by the strong states. In the Chinese scholarship on the topic of climate change, it is viewed as an instrument to make climate a political issue by the West (Ma, 2012). This argument is seconded by Chen Guohua who believes that global climate related negotiations have posed enormous challenges for China, positing that it might result in enhancing the cost of Chinese GHGs emission reductions. The control of international energy market is influenced by the way global negotiations are potentially utilized by the states in the West, as Chen argues that these negotiations pose a serious threat to state's economic security in the developing world including China. So, keeping this very perspective in view, climate change securitization at the global level can potentially threaten China's own security. Pan presents a bit different argument by stating that though securitization can help facilitating global cooperation and transform values, it has the

potential to harm cooperation by presenting other states as threats. Thus, he recommends China to oppose climate change securitization at the global level.

The scholarship which treats climate issue domestically is quite positive towards climate securitization(Zhang, 2010). Zhang is found favoring China's stance to adopt an extensive national security framework that includes climate change. It is recommended by Wang Tao that a development perspective should be utilized by China(Wang, 2014). In his opinion, energy security is meant to provide sustainable and reliable energy which should keep climate in consideration, while climate security is meant to address climate risks to ensure human society's sustainable development, which contains energy security's major elements. Supporting this perspective, Liu Yin contends that while climate change poses threats for energy security of China, it also presents opportunities for China to adopt more sustainable energy system(Liu, 2010). The scholarship also focuses on the threats posed by climate change to China's overall security in general and food security in particular along with its threat to energy security.

Climate as an unconventional security issue is one of the most common themes in academic debates inside China. Wang presents an analysis of how climate change, like other ecological issues, is securitized(Wang, 2010). She keenly observes that unconventional issues, such as climate, are rising in significance and thus are deemed security issues in China. Climate change is framed as a potential threat to both conventional and unconventional security by Na Li and Yang Nan(Na & Yang, 2010). Wang et al contends that "climate change is closely related with national security, and that China in fact uses a new concept of security which includes paying attention to increasing interaction between climate change, energy security, food and water security, as well as other emerging security concerns"(Wang et al., 2014).

The survey of Chinese scholarship finds that security and securitization are given immense importance in climate change debates in China and has presented an extensive range of perspectives. Either the scholarship that focuses on climate change at the international level or national level, increasing focus is placed on unconventional security.

### **Energy and Climate Change Debate in Official Discourse**

This part reviews how energy and climate is discussed in Chinese official discourse and the role security plays there. Both energy and climate are portrayed highly interlinked in Chinese official discourse. Air pollution in China is directly caused by the burning of fossil fuels(Chai & Xu,

2014). Back in 2014, Xi Jinping announced to establish a new “Overall Security Outlook” in his opening remarks of a meeting about National Security Council. Both conventional and non-conventional security issues were included in this new “Overall Security Outlook.” While national security remained pivotal throughout, complex web of security challenges in China were also focused. He listed eleven major dimensions of security. Resource and ecological security are increasingly emphasized alongside other aspects which are immensely relevant in this debate. It is also reflective of the evolutionary and extensive nature of the notion of security. Speaking of energy in particular, increasing popularity of the notion of “energy security” has been witnessed in China. In the official discourse, energy has been deemed as a security issue since the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century and is continuously evolving. Energy security was officially introduced as a concept in the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan(Cheng, 2008). The 2007 and 2012 energy documents (White Papers) explicitly linked energy security to energy supplies, particularly oil. However, energy demand shock which was experienced by China back in 2004 brought massive changes in energy security thinking in China. Resultantly, a significant break was observed between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. The consumption patterns of energy and reduction in energy intensity were emphasized in the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. This trend is followed in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan but with real quantitative targets.

A direct linkage has been established between energy and national security by Xi and his predecessor Hu Jintao. A shift, however, has been observed from conventional security approach to the one focusing on unconventional security issues emphasizing the growing linkages between energy security and climate change. They go hand in hand in numerous ways working together to propel China to ensure sustainable supplies of energy, as this could help easing emissions and import dependency. Consequently, sustainability is also constructed as security issue in official discourse. Oil and its supply still remain pivotal, with emphasis on protecting supply as key to energy security maintenance beside energy marketization(NDRC., 2007). The stability of global energy market is considered a matter of huge concern in the energy security of China. The Chinese White Paper 2007 notes that it is of immense importance to China to make sure of uninterrupted energy supplies and gradual increase in production of domestic energy. Grave concerns to Chinese energy security have been reported through 2012 White Paper in the shape of growing dependency on overseas energy, particularly oil.

It is undeniable fact that “the development and use of energy is one of the main causes of ecological destruction and environmental pollution”(NDRC., 2007). A clear transformation is reflected by the open acknowledgement that “climate change is interrelated with energy and should be addressed in integrated manner”(Jingping, 2014). Energy security is further highlighted as a “permanent concern” by the head of NEA as its population, natural wealth, and environment cannot afford to allow wanton utilization of energy resources(Xinhua, 2011). Environment and sustainability have been heavily emphasized in the Chinese White Paper on energy for 2012 noting that the state “encourages fostering the concept of environment-friendly and low-carbon development, coordinates the development and use of energy resources with the protection of the eco-environment while paying equal attention to both, and actively fosters an energy development pattern that meets the requirements of ecological civilization”(PRC, 2012). It further places emphasis on the demand to minimize consumption of energy and pollution to ensure “economical, clean, and secure development.” Sustainability is framed as strategically important task by China. Thus, it can be convincingly argued that energy still remains and deemed an issue of security in the official discourse of China, but the notion of security is continuously evolving.

As far as climate change is concerned, it is quite a recent concern for the Chinese and the need to balance it with the demand of economic growth is heavily emphasized. Unlike energy as a clear security issue, China’s official position on climate change is not that clear. During the first round of discussions on climate and conflict back in 2007 at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), securitization of climate was opposed by China. Chinese rather framed it as a development issue and its implications for security were also recognized by China. China has adopted this position of climate as a development issue at global forums, though this position is increasingly transforming with every passing day. China has been reluctant to label climate as a security issue, though various terminologies like “sustainable security,” “environmental security,” and “ecological security” are commonly employed by the Chinese that include climate problems.

To tackle the treat of climate change, China took the initiative to formulate its first “National Climate Change Program” domestically in 2007. Later on, it was followed and incorporated in Chinese White Paper in 2008, which treated climate change as a development issue rather than

explicitly security issue. Climate change impacts on human security were also acknowledged which resonates with the understanding of Copenhagen School about security or grammar of security. The official documents on climate issue which are published every year now avoid employing the word security. However, 2014 White Paper on climate change renders “great importance” to it by noting that the government is “acutely aware of the problem of climate change and that China faces a grave ecological situation and must undertake the arduous task of addressing climate change”(NDRC, 2015).

In the official discourse in China, though climate change is not explicitly labeled as national security issue,(Freeman, 2010) yet the language employed to the issue is not much different from the security language. The kind of attention which is paid to the issue can be witnessed through tough emission targets, energy efficiency measures, and energy production and consumption targets. Moreover, though climate change is hardly depicted as explicitly national security issue, the terminology of “ecological security” is increasingly becoming an important concept. This concept of ecological security was part of Xi’s categorization of major security challenges in 2014, and it was also acknowledged in the “National Climate Change Adaptation Plan” of China. This document enlists climate change as a “serious threat” to China’s food, water, environment, and energy security. Climate change is also heavily incorporated into the Chinese Defense White Paper of 2008 as an increasingly prominent threat(Scott, 2012). Thus, security language is increasingly employed in the official discourse, though it is not explicitly linked to climate change. For instance, Premier Li Keqiang’s decision to declare ‘war’ against pollution falls short of securitization as it does not necessitate emergency measures. However, it renders a significant purpose to inform the masses that the problem is handled seriously. China is also taking significant steps to address the issue of pollution. Though such measures may fall short of emergency action as per the standards of Copenhagen School, yet it is a kind of “defense” against an unconventional threat.

Although Chinese official discourse frames climate change as a development issue, it increasingly emphasizes the language of security, emphasizing the threat posed by climate change. As pointed out in the debate on energy, the goal of sustainability is deemed as a “strategic” task. Last but not the least, securitization of climate change is not as badly needed in China as is the case with the states in the West because of its different political system.

Securitization of climate change, indeed, may involve risk as it can cause discontent among masses and thus can trigger instability.

### **Conclusion**

The academic debate affirms that both security and securitization are at play in Chinese politics over energy and climate change. Though energy is more strongly intertwined with national security of China, yet the connections and interplay between energy and climate are being immensely focused. Moreover, the incorporation of and emphasis on unconventional security issues in the debates over energy and climate security in China are increasingly emphasized. In order to explain the complex web of challenges confronted by China, security “with Chinese characteristics” has become a hot agenda of academic debate. The frequency and intensity of academic interest in these issues is reflective of the significance of how energy and climate security is understood and approached by China.

While the application of the theory of securitization is rarely seen in non-western settings, this study has contributed to the existing body of scholarship emphasizing that though securitization dynamics may be different, securitization still takes place in non-western contexts. Employing securitization paradigm to fathom the political aspects of ‘security’ demonstrates how certain problems are prioritized over others. Though the dynamics of securitization vary owing to the interplay between authority and legitimacy, security language yet performs a pivotal task in legitimacy and priority. The paradigm of securitization, on the one hand, is quite helpful to unravel the role and potential impacts of increasing significance of Chinese ‘security politics,’ the widening of the notion of security “with Chinese characteristics” could be highly crucial research topic for further research, on the other hand.

The trends in energy production (heavy reliance on coal) and consumption in China significantly pose a potential threat to the stability of environment both internationally and domestically. To tackle the threats to its energy and climate security, different policies and approaches are being developed. Both energy and climate security are strongly interlinked and considered inseparable. The securitization dynamics vary, and unconventional security problems are increasingly emphasized. All this seem suggesting that ‘securitization’ may not be ignored or avoided. There is overwhelming consensus among experts that a “contextualized” approach is prerequisite especially while employing securitization in a non-western setting. It is beyond doubt that



climate change will threaten Chinese overall security i.e. national, ecological, energy, food, and water security. Among the multiplicity of approaches to deal with it, securitization is one of the potential ways. But it is equally important to balance energy and climate security with other potential security issues such as sustainable development and economic security. Hence, finding a comprehensive and easy solution is very challenging here.

The energy governance in China is one of the many and biggest challenges, which poses challenges for policy implementation. The proportion of renewable energy into primary energy mix is on the rise, but significant hurdles are yet to overcome. Framing ‘energy conservation’ as a topic of security is one alternative as it would help easing energy and climate security. Clearly, the biggest hurdles in Chinese continued development are energy and climate security. Hence, policy decisions taken by the Chinese play a decisive role to shape the worldwide energy and climate dynamics. So, it is rightfully argued that the increasing significance of ‘security’ and ‘securitization’ in Chinese climate and energy discussions is too valuable to be ignored.

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