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Securitizing the Green Transition? Renewable Energy Discourses and Critical Mineral Control in Xi Jinping's New Era of China

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Master's in International Relations

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Declaration

I, Emma Louise Meistad Hattrem, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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Abstract

With increasing geopolitical tensions between China, the EU, and the USA, the green transition in the energy industry has become highly competitive. Access to critical minerals is crucial for a sustainable and affordable transition. As China leads in renewable energy (RE) installations and controls significant supply chains, a deeper understanding of its strategic and political discourse is necessary. This thesis provides insights into China's renewable energy discourse and examines its strategies, policies, and framing on ensuring supply chains for critical minerals in manufacturing renewable energy applications. The thesis performs a discourse analysis of over 80 key Chinese government documents (between 2002-2024), revealing RE transition is constituted in three main discourses: green transition and ecological China, energy security, and innovation and high-tech economy. The securitization framework highlights specific security grammar and opens the discussion of how security is constituted through words over time. China's political discourse reflects goals and initiatives to enhance China into becoming a green, low-carbon and harmonious society. However, this thesis main argument is that the discourse for China's green transition of energy has been framed as something not to be rushed, and RE applications are rather prioritized within discourses for China's goals to of becoming a high-tech innovative distributor. China's discourse from 2023-2024 give clear goals of prioritizing self-reliance initiatives to face future protectionist advancements from the west. The overall conclusion is that critical minerals have had an increase of securitizing language, specifically in support of new exploration of minerals and export controls.

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Introduction

In the face of escalating geopolitical tensions between China, the European Union (EU), and the USA, the competition surrounding the green transition in the energy industry has intensified. The increasing need to ensure pollution mitigating initiatives and the economic opportunities to lead a market monopoly of renewable energy applications, leads to the question if the green transition is being securitized?

This thesis argues that Xi Jinping's increasing focus on transforming their economic model to be innovative and having a high-technological focus, leads to minerals necessary for renewable energy manufacturing being framed within national security. For this purpose, China's discourse on transitioning to greener practices are de-prioritized to ensure that economic standards are stable and legitimize usage of fossil fuels as key energy provider. As such, the securitizing aspect does not lie within China achieving a sustainable green transition of energy, but rather constitute their position as a leading quality producer in the global market framed as a climate activist.

Delving into the question of securitization, the thesis will investigate the Chinese political discourse and find to what degree renewable energy has been framed to promote the green transition, ensuring China's energy supply, or China's innovative competitiveness. With the EU and US advancing mineral catalogues to define critical minerals to succeed the green transition, it is interesting to see if the increase of security language is reflected in Chinese framing. Essentially, the green transition of energy sources may mirror geopolitical conflicts of fossil fuels rather than diffusing such risks.

China's rapid economic development and global governance has attracted extensive research interest across international relations, political, economic, and environmental literature. The economic growth is characterized by high energy consumption, resulting in substantial greenhouse gas emissions.¹ Given global initiatives like the Paris Agreement aiming to reduce environmental footprints, China's position and actions are critical. As such, the Chinese government has increasingly focused on developing the energy sector and implementing environmental and sustainable targets to manage the high energy intensity and emission rates.² Access to critical minerals is pivotal for achieving a sustainable and affordable shift to renewable energy. As China leads the world in renewable energy installations and controls

¹ Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012, p. 85

² Guilhot, 2022; Wang, et al., 2018; Zhu, et al., 2019

significant supply chains, a deeper understanding of its strategic and political discourse becomes imperative. Especially in light of the Chinese government having centralized the power distribution in Beijing under Xi Jinping and institutionalizing national security in all aspects of China's governance.³

In line with this theme, the following research question (RQ) has been formulated: **How is renewable energy framed in the official discourse of Xi Jinping's government 2012-2024?** With the sub-question: **to what extent has renewable energy been subjugated to securitization moves?** To answer the first RQ, I have done an extensive analysis of Xi Jinping's personal and governmental discourses. The research and analysis process showcased a need to provide additional context, and thus includes speeches and documents from Hu Jintao's president period too (2002-2012). In order to answer the sub-RQ, I have designed a critical case study for the most likely securitizing factor within renewable energy, which is the access for critical minerals for the production of renewable energy applications.

For the green transition of energy to be meaningful, state actors need to ensure the green transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy to either enhance or maintain current energy demand. This creates dilemmas for Xi Jinping's government, where sectors of the economy, energy, environment, and social development need to be considered and prioritized. Securitization theory, through discourse analysis, allows for insight into state actors' constructions and responses to such challenges. Discourse analysis examines how language constructs social reality and identities, highlighting the power dynamics embedded in communication. The Copenhagen School's theory of securitization, developed by Buzan et al.,⁴ opens for analysis of how state actors frame an issue as an existential threat, and legitimize extraordinary measures outside normal political procedures. Most importantly, it opens a discussion to the scale of how issues move from being a political matter, defined as politicized, to becoming non-politicized through securitization. This approach helps us understand the broader implications of how states perceive and respond to threats, and how these perceptions shape international relations and global security dynamics.

To answer the RQ and sub-RQ, the thesis is structured as follows. After the introduction, the thesis will discuss literature and its contributions to relevant topics. Followed by an overview of existing literature within energy security and its development towards including renewable

³ Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022

⁴ Buzan, et al., 1998

resources, as well as the increasing academic discussions on critical minerals creating geopolitical tensions. The thesis then draws from the Copenhagen School's securitization theory and utilize it alongside discourse analysis. The section on research design will explain the chosen primary sources and set the stage for the subsequent analysis and discussion of discourse. Before the analysis and findings chapter, a background section will give an overview of the global green transition initiative and the growing demand for renewable energy sources. The setting of China's political context and some historical background on energy development will provide necessary insight to concepts in the analysis. The section will also provide an examination of the role of critical minerals in the international arena and its development in the Chinese context and showcase China's control of these critical value chains. Then, the empirical analysis is structured according to the findings. Beginning with examination of the pre-Xi period efforts under Hu Jintao. Thereafter the sub-chapter about Xi's government 2012-2024 will cover the three main discourses identified in the analysis: renewable energy as a tool for pollution reduction, the rising discourse on ensuring energy supply, and China's position as a high-quality producer. This part aims to answer the main RQ. The case of critical minerals will be provided afterwards to answer the sub-RQ. Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications, tying together the insights gained from the research.

Above all, the thesis aims to give insight into how China's renewable energy policies and goals are framed through a security discourse. China as a research topic will continue to be relevant, both within foreign research institutions but also in the growing Chinese academia. The thesis contributes to existing literature on securitization framework application to the Chinese context and the inclusion of RE sources in energy security. However, there is a lack of conceptualized and empirical studies involving critical minerals within the manufacturing of RE application. While the topic is of increasing interest, especially with critical minerals being securitized within the EU and US mineral catalogues, there is currently more speculation than in-depth studies. With published reports such as Merics arguing that the Chinese Government develops their national security involvement but misunderstand the securitization framework, demonstrate how securitization is relevant in the current academic discussions. In addition, showcases the necessity to contextualize and dig deeper into the Chinese political framings.⁵ As such, by analyzing over 80 official Chinese government documents and speeches, this thesis

⁵ Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022

contributes to existing literature on China's RE, but most significant China's critical mineral discourse which has otherwise been more speculation.

The findings indicate that renewable energy has not been securitized to the extent of immediate emergency actions. Rather, RE has been framed as an important tool in politicizing ecological protection, and as a tool for economic growth through discourse on innovation and manufacturing. Additionally, the Chinese policy development and discourse around critical minerals expand towards securitizing language, justifying new incentives for exploration of valuable resources. Understanding China's strategic framing for renewable energy and critical minerals offers valuable insights for researchers, policymakers and industry stakeholders. This balance between economic growth and environmental goals has broader implications, as critical minerals may mirror the same conflict risks that fossil fuels play for global energy security and international relations today. All in all, the thesis topics of Chinese Domestic policy priorities, analyses the motivations of a key player in the ongoing green transition, and sheds light on RE sources and critical minerals importance as an emerging field in an era of increasing protectionism.

Literature Review

Energy is an integral part of life. It's the calories in our food, warmth in the cold winter or how one commutes to work. Humans throughout history have been fully dependent on its consumption. With increasing populace, modernization and industry, most complex societies consumption transgresses its domestic resources, and states are dependent on the international energy market for supply.⁶ This literature review explores the conceptualization and study of energy security, with a focus on RE and the critical minerals required for its development. The review aims to balance the extensive focus on energy security with a deeper discussion on discourse studies relevance to renewable energy literature.

Energy security across literature has been discussed and conceptualized in variations, visualized by Valdes providing extensive overview of energy security definition development.⁷ Historically, energy issues rely on the "singular importance" of energy in modern society and life, and security revolved around ensuring fossil supplies, particularly petroleum.⁸ However,

⁶ Williams and McDonald, 2018

⁷ Valdés, 2018, p. 271

⁸ Onamics, 2005; Williams and McDonald, 2018, p. 499; Yergin, 2006, p. 78

modern definitions have expanded to include non-traditional energy sources like renewables.⁹ Sovacool introduced a framework with five dimensions of energy security: availability, affordability, technology development, sustainability, and regulation.¹⁰ Ren and Sovacool expanded it to include low-carbon energy sources enhancing energy security.¹¹ Ang et al. emphasized the emergence of environmental stability and energy efficiency as critical dimensions.¹² Despite the broadening scope, definitions of energy security still vary due to differing policy goals.¹³

With this context, the literature, which largely focus on fossil fuels showcases that the transition to RE sources is not yet mature. Meaning research within RE is yet lacking as most societies are not capable of solely relying on its power generation.¹⁴ However, RE literature within the context of ensuring security is increasing and becoming relatively important due to its links to economic, societal, and environmental security. Still RE development has generally been studied in two main ways. Most studies review RE to diffuse the traditional security risks fossil fuels provide today.¹⁵ Others draw a more critical analysis of RE due to its reliance on critical minerals and predict it will mirror conflicts attached to oil and gas.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the broad consensus agree that implementing more renewable energy sources is an overall positive development for both energy, environment, and economic security. This thesis will however not measure if RE sources improve energy security, rather investigate if RE is framed to increase energy security through speech acts.

With the thesis to focus on China, it is also relevant to include Chinese academia and contributions. Studies like Wu et al. and Wang et al. have shown that China's energy-saving and emission reduction policies have been successful in reducing emissions while securing energy supply.¹⁷ These studies provide a historical context for understanding the evolution of China's RE policies and their impacts. Liu and Feng highlight the positive impact of energy laws on promoting RE development, particularly for wind and solar energy.¹⁸ They emphasize the effectiveness of legislative acts over executive measures. Shen and Luo discuss the challenges

⁹ Ang, et al., 2015; Liu, et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2018; Yao and Chang, 2014

¹⁰ Sovacool and Mukherjee, 2011

¹¹ Ren and Sovacool, 2014; Ren and Sovacool, 2015

¹² Ang, et al., 2015

¹³ A. Paravantis and Kontoulis, 2020

¹⁴ Bekkevold and Tunsjø, 2018

¹⁵ A. Paravantis and Kontoulis, 2020; Dent, 2015; Wang, et al., 2018

¹⁶ Hache, 2018

¹⁷ Wang, et al., 2018; Wu, et al., 2012

¹⁸ Liu and Feng, 2023

of RE subsidies in China, noting issues like overcapacity and high competition among small-medium enterprises due to vague policy formulations.¹⁹ Such challenges are also highlighted with the energy transition being complicated by local government's reluctance to change,²⁰ or the central governments struggle to balance between state and market control.²¹ Lastly, to highlight specific political terms that will be relevant for further analysis, the difference between self-sufficiency and self-reliance is critical. Jian defines self-sufficiency as meeting domestic demand with China's supply of resources, while self-reliance includes relying on its own resources, including domestic human, physical, and natural resources²². Thus, indicating even if China is able to store up enough resources to become self-sufficient, it is the goals of self-reliance that is favorable.

As seen above, studies on China's energy development are becoming vast, including, policy analysis, historical analysis, and several technology specific studies, but discourse studies are few. Discourse studies including aspects of RE development, have a major focus on climate discourses and in general China's increasing climate governance role.²³ Studies such as Hongyi discusses China's role in leading international efforts to enhance global governance, reflecting its strategic narrative of peaceful rise and international cooperation.²⁴ Song and Hagestrom and Gustafsson explore the role of narratives in shaping national and international perceptions, emphasizing the construction of the "Other" in Chinese and Western discourses.²⁵ In Chinese academia, there are a few discourse studies of the Chinese government and presidents,²⁶ granting insight into formation of strategic discourses such as 'harmonious society' (和谐社会),²⁷ climate governance,²⁸ or renewable energy.²⁹ However, it is the specification of an energy security related to RE and a deep-dive into critical minerals which is lacking.

Narrowing down the literature to energy security related to critical minerals for renewable energy manufacturing, reveals a lack of conceptualized studies. Still, recent studies show an

¹⁹ Shen and Luo, 2015

²⁰ Guilhot, 2022

²¹ Bekkevold and Tunsjø, 2018, p. 275

²² Jian, 2011

²³ Moore, 2011; Trombetta, 2019; Zhang and Orbie, 2021

²⁴ Hongyi, 2021

²⁵ Hagström and Gustafsson, 2019; Song, 2022

²⁶ Zhuang and Li, 2022

²⁷ Zheng and Tok, 2007

²⁸ Zhang and Orbie, 2021

²⁹ Wang and Liu, 2018

overwhelming consensus of the geopolitical risks of accessing critical minerals.³⁰ The literature also has a clear divide based on geographic area, as western studies will promote China as a security risk, and studies such as Zhou et al. criticizes the West's "de-risking" strategy as undermining China's position.³¹ This divide is centered around China's political strategy in the early 2000s, involving China's strategic discourse on critical minerals and "going out" (走出去)³² strategies to secure foreign investments.³³ The most significant overview study, providing linguistic and historic background on critical minerals is by Andersson.³⁴ They traced the term "strategic minerals" in Chinese media back to 1951 and found its political prominence started in 2000 when Vice Premier Wen Jiabao emphasized exploring "strategic minerals" domestically. Its contribution is well aligned with this thesis own research and analysis process, supporting the findings of broad usage of minerals within the high-political discourse and the difficulty in pinpointing which minerals are prioritized. Most importantly, Andersson notes that within the Chinese context, categorizing a mineral as strategic does not necessarily indicate low abundance or criticality, suggesting the need for broader contextualization with security logic framing.

When moving to academic discussions involving applying the securitization framework in China, there is still a need to emphasize its applicability. Specifically, when seeing studies such as the Merics report from Drinhausen and Legarda, though contributing to the escalating of security discourse in China, misunderstands the conceptualizing of securitization.³⁵ The report concludes climate change has not been securitized within the state due to the military strategies not involving precautions to ensure safety from climate risks. The statement has thus not included the sectoral interdisciplinarity the Copenhagen School incorporated within the framework. The report relies on the traditional sector of the military to assure safety, then concludes that there is no securitization because the military has not "changed" the strategies to include climate risks. It then misses the security language escalation through sectors such as economy to involve climate related issues as target. Nevertheless, major contributors such as Vuori, establishes the securitization framework applicable in the Chinese context.³⁶ Since then,

³⁰ Leruth, et al., 2022; Nygaard, 2023; Wang, 2022; Wang, et al., 2023a; Zhou, et al., 2023

³¹ Zhou, et al., 2023

³² While the Chinese wording is directly translated to "go out" and thus used in most literature, specifically in western literature. In the official translation of government documents, it is translated to "go global". However, I have chosen to use the 'going out' throughout due to its formulation in the literature.

³³ Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012; IEA, 2022c; Vuori, 2023

³⁴ Andersson, 2020

³⁵ Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022

³⁶ Vuori, 2008

Leung et al. have discussed China's securitization of oil supply in connection to a historical dependency on energy resources.³⁷ Trombetta and Nyman and Zeng, tested to what extent climate and energy synthesized and were securitized.³⁸ Hernandez and Sahu later builds on these contributions and suggest that China's securitization of climate change is primarily a narrative tool for centralization and economic protection.³⁹ Addressing climate change is not an end goal but a means for CCP to reassert control, particularly under Xi Jinping's leadership. Studies such as Wuthnow's, argue that China's broadening of security terms to support various agendas reflect mounting domestic and external challenges.⁴⁰ The party's need to control discourses and manage challenges encompassing various sectors beyond the traditional military concerns, aligns with the principal ideas of securitization.⁴¹

In summary, the literature review has provided an insight and overview of the conceptualizations and studies within energy security with a particular focus on RE and critical minerals. With a broad range of literature, the review targets specific frameworks to showcase how energy studies are broadening from just a focus on fossil fuels to including low-carbon sources. Despite these advances, the transition towards RE sources are still maturing, but are expected to become more prominent over the years. The review also showcase literature within the Chinese academia, encompassing successful political policies to reduce energy consumption, but also central state challenges with top-down fragmentation. Discourse studies relevant to RE development were reviewed, focusing on China's increasing role in climate governance and the strategic narratives shaping national and international perceptions. However, the literature lacks a deep dive into the discourse on energy security related to RE and critical minerals. Studies within critical minerals are essential for the thesis, helping to provide background which will be further built upon in the analysis chapter. Finally, the review addresses the securitization framework within the Chinese context, discussing key studies that have applied this framework to China's energy and climate policies. The framework's relevance is noted, and as such assure its applicability to answer the RQ and sub-RQ.

³⁷ Leung, et al., 2014

³⁸ Nyman and Zeng, 2016; Trombetta, 2019

³⁹ Hernandez and Misalucha-Willoughby, 2020; Sahu, 2021

⁴⁰ Wuthnow, 2022

⁴¹ Buzan, et al., 1998

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Study of Discourse

Discourse analysis (DA) serves as a theoretical concept and as a method for examining language and its role in constructing discourses that reflect self-perceived identities. Rooted in the understanding that language both shapes and reflects social reality, discourse analysis examines how specific linguistic codes and practices produce meaning, establish identities, and shape social relations.⁴² The study of discourses are usually traced back to Foucault's contribution, where language is understood as not only descriptive but also constitutive.⁴³ Most importantly, DA stands on the idea of having two distinctive epistemological and ontological effects.⁴⁴ As such, discourses have an intertextual attribute that produces and reproduces its own legitimacy over time,⁴⁵ and echoes post-structuralist ideas about the performative power of language in shaping our understanding of the world.⁴⁶

With Hansen's conception of usage of discourse within security, central to DA is the recognition that discourse is not merely a neutral vehicle for conveying information, but rather a site of power where certain meanings and identities are privileged over others.⁴⁷ It aligns closely with post-structuralist perspectives, which emphasize the constructed nature of reality and the ways in which language serves to perpetuate and reinforce dominant power structures.⁴⁸

Moreover, discourse analysis explores what is said and what is left unsaid, and how this can reveal underlying power dynamics and hierarchies.⁴⁹ By analyzing various forms of text and media, such as speeches, policy documents, and newspapers, discourse analysis uncovers the ways in which language constructs and reinforces particular social realities. This critical examination of language and discourse not only sheds light on the workings of power within society but also opens up possibilities for challenging and subverting dominant discourses.⁵⁰ Hence, DA is an important tool for the thesis goal of analyzing the political framing of China's policies and speeches regarding their position within the green transition.

⁴² Clark, et al., 2021, p. 484; Hansen, 2006

⁴³ Foucault, 1970

⁴⁴ Clark et al, 2021, p.484; Potter 1997

⁴⁵ Campbell, 2009, p.166; Hansen, 2006, p.21

⁴⁶ Hansen, 2006

⁴⁷ Hansen, 2006, p.22

⁴⁸ Campbell, 1992; Hansen, 2006, p. 19

⁴⁹ Clark, et al., 2021, p. 486; Gill, 1996

⁵⁰ Neumann, 2001, p. 62

Securitization

The concept of security within the Copenhagen School, notably articulated by Buzan et al., broadens the traditional understanding of security beyond military and political realms to encompass economic, societal, and environmental sectors.⁵¹ The expanded view acknowledges security as a multifaceted concept evolving beyond the traditional realist notion of survival, emphasizing the role of power dynamics when shaping security discourse.⁵² I builds upon Campbell's conceptualization of security as a performative discourse and its constitutive role in political order, shaping perceptions of threats and the prospects for international cooperation.⁵³ The accumulating interpretations and contributions of security as a performance and identity forming tool within policymaking, is relative to the Copenhagen School's eventual central theoretical framework of 'securitization'. Wherein state representatives invoke emergency conditions and legitimizing actions outside the conventional political processes.⁵⁴

With this, the differentiation between securitization and politicization is significant. Any public issue works within a scale of non-politicized, thorough politicized and to securitized. The scale referring to an issue not being a part of the political debate, to becoming institutionalized through policies and requiring resource allocations, to the extreme measure of emergency setting and being moved out of the public and normal bounds of political debate.⁵⁵ As such, Buzan et al. conceptualizes securitization as the extreme and opposing function to politicization, hence creating a depoliticizing effect.⁵⁶ As moving issues out of the public spheres goes against the democratic values of openness and choice through debates.⁵⁷

At its core, securitization occurs in the 'speech act', referring to the relative actors, defined as securitizer, utilizing language to frame an issue as a security threat. The Copenhagen school conceptualized the act as it is by words and use of language something is done.⁵⁸ By using specific words that function as argumentative language, it will frame the real world into a picture that grants the securitizer the role of protector against the future threat.⁵⁹ As Williams

⁵¹ Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 1

⁵² Vuori, 2011, p. 100

⁵³ Campbell, 1992, p. 199

⁵⁴ Buzan, et al., 1998, p.21

⁵⁵ Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 24

⁵⁶ Vuori, 2023, p. 13

⁵⁷ Buzan, et al., 29

⁵⁸ Buzan, et al., 26

⁵⁹ Buzan, et al., 23

and McDonald also point out, "The most important factor here is not the uttering of the word security but the use of a particular type of political logic that defines security".⁶⁰ This deliberate linguistic framing constitutes the 'securitization move,' seeking acceptance from the audience to elevate the issue above politics.⁶¹ Essentially, securitization has three components to be successful: "existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules".⁶² Vuori's contribution utilized the term 'security grammar' when assessing the vocabulary and framing logic of securitization. The term helps this thesis to elevate and identify discourse samples and deem them framed as security or non-security issues.⁶³

Hansen's work on discourse analysis, particularly within the realm of security, identity, and foreign policy, has significantly influenced the field.⁶⁴ While drawing from a post-structuralist perspective, Hansen builds upon Campbell on discourse in foreign policies while illuminating the symbiotic relationship between discourse and policy legitimacy.⁶⁵ Securitization not only constructs threats to national security but also serves as an identity-forming practice, reinforcing notions of sovereignty and justifying exceptional measures by those in power.⁶⁶ The strategic framing of threats as matters of national security heightens political urgency and enables favorable resource allocation, underscoring securitization's utility as a political tool for navigating contentious issues outside conventional political scrutiny.⁶⁷ Hansen further outlines the dual political dynamics inherent in security discourse, "the legitimate power to change policy and take actions, and creating actors who are responsible for such actions".⁶⁸ This discourse-centered analysis offers valuable insights into the construction and contestation of security discourses in contemporary politics.

However, the Copenhagen school has been critiqued for only contextualizing securitization in western democracies, as the institutionalization of state and the relation to the audience are different in an authoritarian setting.⁶⁹ While the distinction has been under discussion over the last 15 years, several studies have argued that securitization theory is still viable when studying autocratic states, as securitization moves still occurs without the traditional democratic source

⁶⁰ Williams and McDonald, 2018, p. 102

⁶¹ Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 25; Nyman & Zeng, 2016, p. 302

⁶² Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 26

⁶³ Vuori, 2008; Vuori, 2023

⁶⁴ Hansen, 2006

⁶⁵ Campbell, 1992

⁶⁶ Hansen, 2006, p.34

⁶⁷ Buzan, et al., 1998, p. 25; Hansen, 2006, p.35

⁶⁸ Hansen, 2006, p. 35

⁶⁹ Hernandez and Misalucha-Willoughby, 2020; Nyman and Zeng, 2016; Trombetta, 2019; Vuori, 2011

of linkage between the securitizer and society.⁷⁰ Specifically, Vuori gives a monumental historic contextualization and empirical security discourse analysis, providing evidence of securitization and de-securitization in the Chinese context.⁷¹ The study provides the logic of institutionalized thought of national security connected to the security of the state, and hence the language use of Chinese official resonating with the security ‘grammar’ of the Copenhagen’s school framework.⁷² This showcase the government’s discourse to appeal to the masses, as the party needs support for their campaigns, thus securitization moves acquire acceptance from audiences.⁷³ The audiences are other political elites rather than the average citizen.⁷⁴ Other securitization focused studies with China as context, such as Trombetta, conceptualizes the notion of securitization in China working as a transformation of governance.⁷⁵ The adaptation of the theory emphasizes that it’s not the truth of a statement that is under investigation but the “truth effect”,⁷⁶ and consequently the legitimized resource allocation of which the statement required.⁷⁷

In conclusion the securitization framework is a good theoretical tool for analyzing to what extent RE development has been framed within speech acts. With the critical case of minerals to include securitization moves from Xi Jinping’s government and how the language has been used to link minerals to national security.

Methodological approach

Discourse study serves both as a theoretical framework with constructivist and post-structuralist attributes, and as a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for research that aims to collect and analyze textual and visual data.⁷⁸ This method is applicable to the study because the thesis seeks to analyze and gain insight into specific documents and statements that shape the discourse on renewable energy and critical minerals. The next section will build on the conceptualization of a discourse approach to interpret the social and political picture drawn by language.⁷⁹ The research design will explain the collection

⁷⁰ Nyman and Zeng, 2016; Trombetta, 2019; Vuori, 2011; Wilkinson, 2007

⁷¹ Vuori, 2011

⁷² Vuori, 2023, p. 373

⁷³ Vuori, 2023, p. 243

⁷⁴ Nyman and Zeng, 2016, p.303

⁷⁵ Trombetta, 2019

⁷⁶ Trombetta, 2019, p.101

⁷⁷ Trombetta, 2019, p. 116

⁷⁸ Clark, et al., 2021, p. 350

⁷⁹ Clark, et al., 2021, p. 353

and categorization of key primary sources and introduce the criteria for data collection, which includes over 80 primary sources. Then I discuss the practical implications of conducting discourse studies, particularly within the context of China.

Research Design

A discourse and document analysis of the Chinese government requires establishing the data sources that will be collected. The collected primary sources need to satisfy specific criteria to ensure their relevance and reliability. Firstly, the text selection follows Hansen's three criterium for choosing material from a temporal location and time of study: (1) texts with 'clear articulations', (2) 'widely read and attended to' and (3) texts with 'formal authority'.⁸⁰ Secondly, within the Chinese context, the texts follow Doshi's hierarchy of primary sources within the governmental sources to rank from least to most authoritative.⁸¹ To gain the most reliable discourse, texts such as Xi Jinping's speeches at CPC National Congress, the vice premier's Governmental Work Report (GWR) at Two Sessions and Five-year Plans (FYP) will score 3/3 on Hansen's criteria and be atop of Doshi's hierarchy.

To provide context, the GWR, FYPs and White Papers's (WP) are key planning documents due to their overarching and policy setting status. The GWRs are presented annually during 'Two Sessions', led by Li Keqiang since 2013, with Wen Jiabao 2002-2012 and Li Qiang taking the position in 2024. The GWRs provide overarching goals and strategies for the year, building on the five-year plans and other relevant strategies. These reports review the previous year's plan before presenting major goals for the upcoming year, making them a valuable source for understanding the government's strategic priorities and policy directions. Furthermore, the FYPs are the most important political governing documents of the People's Republic of China, setting strategic goals and political guidelines for the next five years.⁸² Most substantially is the FYPs on economic and social development as it's the major overseeing planning document, though over the years more specific FYPs which involve specific departments and ministries have emerged. White Papers are also crucial as they represent the 'external-facing foreign policy documents,' allowing for a comparison between domestic policy goals and how the government wishes to be perceived by foreign audiences⁸³.

⁸⁰ Hansen, 2006, p. 83

⁸¹ Doshi, 2021, p. 42

⁸² Doshi, 2021, p. 42

⁸³ Doshi, 2021, p.44

Further primary sources have been picked based on criteria from Hansen and Doshi: President Hu Jintao's public speeches in international and public forums, found through intertextual research and literature contributions.⁸⁴ Xi Jinping's documented speeches in 'Xi Jinping: The Governance of China',⁸⁵ referring to various speeches in internal governmental meetings, international meetings and public statements. All GWR and the relevant FYPs and WPs from 2012-2024, with some inclusion of earlier FYPs such as 12th (2011-2015) and WP (2003-2011) are used to gain a substantial comparative view. In selecting policies as part of the analysis, Hansen notes that "the more formal the texts and their institutional contexts, the more implicit and restricted the constructions of identities tend to be".⁸⁶ Legal texts, such as the Mineral Resource Law are coupled with ministry statements and research debates to produce a "full discourse".⁸⁷ Essentially, the texts selected are based on their research significance, frequency of citations, and representations in other works, aiming to reference the primary sources of key ideas and major events.⁸⁸ The selection of texts is grounded in the epistemological knowledge I have acquired through extensive reading of academic debates, newspaper articles, and thematic studies.⁸⁹ Secondary sources have been instrumental in orienting myself within the literature and mapping source material for the analysis of primary documents.

With the significance of primary and secondary sources established, the main chapter analysis will present the analysis and findings of the official Chinese discourse. The significance of involving primary documents from Hu Jintao's era will illustrate how the party-leader and its influence on the governmental language can make certain discourses change. Meaning, there will be a framing development based on the language used to present topics, while the topics and long-term goals themselves will follow a mainly continuous path.⁹⁰

With the object of interest being the discourse creation and framing of RE development within the context of securitizing language, a case study of critical minerals will enhance and clarify their unique role in the green energy value chain. The in-depth study of critical minerals serves as a critical case, supplementing the well-established theory of securitization and examining

⁸⁴ Tang, 2006; Zheng and Tok, 2007

⁸⁵ Xi, 2014; Xi, 2017a; Xi, 2020; Xi, 2022c;

⁸⁶ Hansen, 2006, p. 85

⁸⁷ Hansen, 2006, p. 85; NPC, 2023

⁸⁸ Hansen, 2006, p.82

⁸⁹ Hansen,2006, p.83

⁹⁰ Lams, 2018; Leutert and Eaton, 2021

whether RE development is prioritized in this framework.⁹¹ A research design that gives focus to comparative moments also satisfy Hansen’s criteria,⁹² as the case will help generate knowledge if the discourse is deemed to change or be repetitive.

At last, the thesis had two research and analysis stages. The first stage was used to read the three key planning documents GWR, FYPs and WPs. The method for reading through the Chinese documents was to systematically search for specific words connected to the theme and highlight the words and the paragraphs they were used in (see appendix 1). This was done for every document and then they were lined up and compared to each other at the end. With this method, I was able to see the development of how the words were used in context and their framed importance in the documents. Specifically, the analysis follows the logic of Hansen and Vuori to focus on linguistic codes such as “urgent”, “vital”, “ensure”, and in general reveal statements that emphasize the ability discourse have to transform social understanding of an issue.⁹³ For instance, the annual work reports followed mostly the same structure and has clear references to other planning documents or strategies. The themes and topics correspond to which sections they were given each year in the reports, as such, they were comparable. I decided to begin with the government reports from 2024 and go backwards in time. That way I could check out the picked words and test their importance in today’s context and test them immediately when going back in time. The second stage evolved to include a broader search for primary documents to see the larger involvement and connections. Such as readings of Xi Jinping’s personal speeches and documents through Hu Jintao’s era. Although the same method was applied to these documents, the precision increased due to greater insight. However, due to restrictions on time and relevance, the tables structured in appendix 1 only involve the findings from the first round of data collecting and research process. The table has been included in the final product due to interesting findings and to visualize certain points in the argumentation.

Practical limitations

Due to the nature of discourse analysis being context-dependent of language, several epistemological and ontological challenges may arise. The challenges can affect the validity and the replicability of the study, as traditional precautions to ensure validity, reliability and

⁹¹ Clark et al., 2021, p. 60

⁹² Hansen, 2006, p.79

⁹³ Hansen, 2006; Vuori, 2023, p.82-83

objectivity become less applicable. However, the utilization of the securitization framework and the post-structuralist perspective of discourse analysis necessitates language to be studied. By acknowledging that language constructs versions of reality and is a precondition of action, then studying it gives sense to the meaning-making process. Especially, as the method reveals valuable insight into how ideas are structured over time.⁹⁴ For instance, coupled with securitization, discourse analysis allows us to study how security is expressed without necessarily saying security, and how an issues subject relevance is processed over time to becoming acknowledged as something to protect.

The discourse study of the Chinese government seeks to delve beyond surface-level policy measures to uncover deeper discourse patterns and the motivations behind their formulations. This involves scrutinizing how issues are framed and constructed within official government documents and policies, which reflect the regime's desired image. Direct access to government meetings and speeches is limited, so the analysis relies on published meeting summaries. These summaries often reveal recurring structural patterns, such as the introduction of key figures, alignment with CPC motives, and the articulation of national or international goals. Given these constraints and limited time and resources, drawing upon previous research is essential for identifying existing knowledge and discourse patterns, thereby enhancing the thesis external validity and credibility within the topic.⁹⁵

As touched upon in the research design, the selection of texts has also been influenced by language considerations. To provide a more accurate observation of Chinese discourse, I have chosen to focus on texts written in Chinese as much as possible, then comparatively using official translations if needed. To avoid overextending the analysis, only certain quotes have been directly translated from Chinese sources, as translating numerous texts for a thesis is impractical. This approach addresses the potential loss of epistemological nuances and linguistic context in translations.⁹⁶ On the other hand, incorporating texts not available in English allows for a broader range of sources and mitigates a Eurocentric perspective. Other considerations involve Chinese websites and documents being heavily edited and manipulated. Though, it is still necessary to study the documents and take their statements seriously, as it is substantial to coordinate party strategy over a longer period of time.⁹⁷ As Fewsmith emphasizes,

⁹⁴ Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2019; Wilhelmsen, 2013

⁹⁵ Clark, et al., 2021, p. 363

⁹⁶ Hansen, 2006, p. 84

⁹⁷ Doshi, 2021, p.44; Fewsmith, 2021

the official political communication websites are our best sources for what happens within the Chinese political systems.⁹⁸

Lastly, as a Western researcher, certain biases and a lack of insider perspective into the Chinese government is unavoidable. Acknowledging these challenges increases reflexivity and fosters a nuanced understanding of the discourse dynamics shaping China's political landscape.⁹⁹ This approach sheds light on both intended messages and potential interpretations, both domestically and internationally.

Background

The green transition of energy

The setting of the thesis lies in the current phenomenon of the global society moving towards green technology to achieve a net-zero carbon emitting goal and a sustainable world. As the Paris Agreement was agreed upon by its 196 attendants, states have legally bound themselves to the goal: “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”.¹⁰⁰ In line with the agreement, states have devised their own strategies to achieve the goals through national plans and frameworks. Such as USA’s economic and industry initiative, Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), but also multilateral entities such as the EU has developed their own framework, such as the EU Green Deal¹⁰¹. Understanding these frameworks is crucial for analyzing how different nations, including China, frame their renewable energy policies and strategies within their official discourse, which is central to answering the research questions. As a result of this green development, both state institutions and firms are moving towards creating stricter standards of qualifications and improving reporting on Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. The event of investing towards greener products and innovation, with the intent to transform unsustainable and destructive practices, are what has been defined as a ‘green transition’.¹⁰² Thus, there is a higher demand for green applications, such as renewable energy sources like hydropower, wind, solar photovoltaic (PV),

⁹⁸ Fewsmith; 2021

⁹⁹ Clark et al., 2021, p. 367

¹⁰⁰ UNFCCC, 2015

¹⁰¹ Commission,

¹⁰² OECD - When additionally given focus on social sustainability, such as increasing equity and supporting vulnerable communities, the UN has established the concept of ‘just green transition’ UN, 2022.

and battery technology to support RE sources, which are pivotal for societal and economic development. This context provides a foundation for understanding the importance of renewable energy in the political and strategic discourse analyzed in this thesis.

Renewable energy (RE) refers to energy deriving from natural resources that are replenishable faster than their consumption, such as wind and sunlight. Comparatively, fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas form over millions of years and emits harmful gases such as carbon dioxide when burned.¹⁰³ With a vast amount of studies predicting and providing government policy suggestions to achieve the 1.5 degree goal, the amount of electricity to be supported by renewable energy sources are set to be 59-97% of the total energy mix.¹⁰⁴ Highlighting the greater demand for innovation and state actors to support industrial enterprises to gain an encouraging advantage to transition.

Within the Chinese context, the most significant commitment to reaching net-zero targets and green energy transition was announced by General Secretary Xi Jinping during the United Nations' 75th assembly session: “We aim to have CO2 emissions peak before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060”.¹⁰⁵ This ambitious goal has been further articulated in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2026), which includes reducing carbon emissions by 13.5-18% per GDP unit. To achieve these targets, the government has laid out a comprehensive strategy to “promote the clean and efficient use of coal, vigorously develop new energy, and actively and orderly develop nuclear power while ensuring safety”.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, policies and measures have been introduced to accelerate the development of national energy rights, a carbon emission market, and a control system for energy consumption.¹⁰⁷ The promotion of ‘new energy’ that is presented in the quotation belongs to an umbrella strategy the Chinese government calls ‘Strategic Emerging Industries’ (SEI), which will be relevant when analyzing further planning documents and policy measures from the government. ‘New Energy’ includes renewable energy sources such as solar PV, wind power, biomass and hydropower. China's goals are presented to install substantial capacities of renewable energy sources to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. By 2025, China aims to increase the share of non-fossil energy in total energy consumption to

¹⁰³ UN,

¹⁰⁴ Rogelj, et al., 2018; Yang, et al., 2023

¹⁰⁵ UN, 2020

¹⁰⁶ State Council, 2021a

¹⁰⁷ Xinhua, 2021b

around 20%, requiring significant investments and infrastructure development in renewable energy technologies.¹⁰⁸

The context above outlines the motivations for commitment and strategies for various states, particularly China, in achieving net-zero carbon emissions and transitioning the energy sector to renewable energy sources as a part of the green transition. This background is pivotal to set the stage for why states perform on the international and domestic stage to include green strategies. By connecting to overarching frameworks, we can see the significant discourses change from before to after such commitments. Then further how the actors position themselves within the performance through discourses. For the RQ, this framing is pivotal to understand how RE development is framed within Xi Jinping's government.

Chinese political context

When studying the Chinese state, it is crucial to understand the interplay between the state and the Communist Party, especially for outside observers. Since Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012, the party-state of China has undergone significant changes. Xi's policies of centralization and anti-corruption have shifted China towards a more authoritarian leadership style compared to his predecessors.¹⁰⁹ Fewsmith and Shirk argue that Xi Jinping has reintroduced a cult of personality within the Chinese Communist Party, reminiscent of Mao Zedong's era, where the leader wielded personal control over political decisions.¹¹⁰ To not go too deep into the dynamic shifting between decentralized authority and collective governance mechanics introduced after Mao and from Deng Xiaoping. Most importantly, Xi Jinping's government is studied in light of his power consolidating through establishing new formal institutions and bodies which he leads. Essentially, the bodies increase Xi's influence on the economy, military, police, propaganda, and internet. Creating a top-down power structure that allows him to bypass traditional party and state mechanisms.¹¹¹

Going back to the thesis theme of security, one of the significant developments analysts attribute to Xi's China's 'New Era'¹¹² is the broadened and increased integration of national security

¹⁰⁸ Xinhua, 2021b

¹⁰⁹ Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022; Fewsmith, 2021; Leutert and Eaton, 2021

¹¹⁰ Fewsmith, 2021; Shirk, 2018

¹¹¹ Zheng and Weng, 2016

¹¹² Technically refer to Xi Jinping's thoughts on 新时代中国特色社会主义思想, which translates to 'Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era Xi Jinping Thought'. But can be shortened to 'New Era'. 习近平思想

definitions.¹¹³ A definition that becomes blurry due to the low separation of power between party and state. In the Chinese context, the words for ‘national security’ and ‘state security’ are interchangeable and are both translated from 国家安全.¹¹⁴ The CPC has consolidated their position as the only ruling party for the Chinese nation’s survival. As seen in the opening of their constitution, Article 1:

The socialist system is the fundamental system of the People's Republic of China. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Any organization or individual is prohibited from undermining the socialist system.¹¹⁵

As such, the party’s security is also interchangeable with the national and state security. This is the legitimization used to undermine any statements against the party leadership as a threat to national security.¹¹⁶ While all earlier Chinese leaders have integrated and developed new types of security concepts, Xi is still remarked as the actor who drives a “securitization of everything”, including cybersecurity, security of overseas interests, biosecurity, space security, polar security and deep-sea security.¹¹⁷ National security remains a core element of the governmental model and a leading thought in policymaking on both the domestic and international stages. CPC is setting up groundwork to protect their legitimacy and stability from oppositions both from within and outside. As China’s economic growth slows, Beijing is increasing efforts to ensure self-reliance in technology and resources, thereby enhancing the party's influence and power.¹¹⁸ This background establishes how Xi Jinping's centralization of power and expansive security framework is essential for analyzing securitization moves within the official discourse. While providing an understanding of how several political sectors have been formally introduced through security grammar, the energy sector within RE development is yet to be touched upon within the literature. The RQ will thus address the broader implications of China’s RE discourse and give insight into the development.

¹¹³ Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022, p. 4

¹¹⁴ Hellström; Vuori, 2023

¹¹⁵ NPC, 2018

¹¹⁶ Vuori, 2011

¹¹⁷ Doshi, 2021; Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022; Merics, 2023

¹¹⁸ Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022, p.14

Short historic development of the energy sector in China

To gain a full picture of China's significant development within energy, with a specific focus on renewable energy, there is a need to establish some historic developments. The historical perspective provides insight into essential policy shifts and strategic decision making that have shaped China's current energy landscape, and is necessary to understand prioritizing verdicts later in the analysis.

China's energy policy development can be divided into three eras. In the 1980s, energy policies and reforms were mostly passive reactions to the government's more valued economic reforms.¹¹⁹ Although access to energy was a major factor in elevating economic growth and modernizing industrial capacities, the focus was on improving energy efficiency.¹²⁰ Since the 1990s, the gap between self-sufficiency in energy supply and reliance on fuel imports widened alongside increased production in heavy industry.¹²¹ The Hu Jintao administration (2002-2012) broadened China's energy diplomacy in foreign policy,¹²² and marked the securitization of fossil energy supply resources with the 'Malacca Dilemma' in 2003.¹²³ Hu's leadership expanded China's influence from just focusing on East-Asia to the rest of the world.¹²⁴ Specifically, based on the fear and risk of market dependency, China expanded trade and projects in Latin America, Africa and Central Asia to diversify equity positions within oil fields and mines.¹²⁵ Hu's 'Thought on economic security' expanded the use of economic leverage to be used in political operations, via tools such as trade, energy, resource and finance.¹²⁶ Understanding these developments frames the contextualizing of securitizing energy resources, which in the case of RE is securing critical minerals. The third development is signified by the inclusion of environmental degradation and "war on climate change" discourse from 2011-2024, the era studied in this thesis.¹²⁷

For the development of RE, the early 2000s signifies whereon RE technologies significantly grew commercially, specifically applications such as wind, solar and bioenergy.¹²⁸ From 2005-

¹¹⁹ Yao and Chang, 2015, p. 138

¹²⁰ Guilhot, 2022, p. 7

¹²¹ Guilhot, 2022, p. 2

¹²² Doshi, 2021; Nyman and Zeng, 2016; Tang, 2006; Tunsjo, 2013

¹²³ Doshi, 2021, p. 143

¹²⁴ Tang, 2006, p.11

¹²⁵ Doshi, 2021, p. 143

¹²⁶ Doshi, 2023, p. 143-144

¹²⁷ Guilhot, 2022, p. 9

¹²⁸ Dent, 2015, p. 3

2012, China tripled their RE power generation capacity from 122GW to 341GW.¹²⁹ By 2012, renewable power capacity was at 20% of the overall electricity generation, and in 2022 reached 30%¹³⁰ These milestones highlight the rapid development and prioritization of renewable energy. Furthermore, energy enterprises within the equipment manufacturing sector, both upstream and downstream, have largely been driven by the private sector.¹³¹ The combination of entrepreneurial opportunities for private businesses and substantial government subsidies has been a significant factor in China's renewable energy success from 2004-2013. However, structural changes allowing small-medium enterprises (SMEs) going bankrupt or being taken over by larger state-owned enterprises (SOEs),¹³² reflect Xi's government's ambition for stricter business control.¹³³ This shift is relevant to the thesis as it mirrors broader trends in Xi's centralization of power and control over key sectors, including renewable energy. Effects such as China leading with strong competitive low-prices on international markets, has led to the geopolitical tension between China and the EU and US.

Historically, China has two main reasons for ensuring energy supply. Firstly, with China's large consumption of energy, they are fully dependent on coal and oil generation, thus import of oil supply. Therefore, strategies to invest and ensure non-fossil fuel energy sources have been seen as a solution to diversify energy reliance and power generation. Secondly, as China's economic and industrial economy grows, they require higher energy intensity, hence their main policy goals to decrease the energy consumption rates. High-tech industries, such as aluminum and chip manufacturing, are particularly energy-intensive, necessitating control over power generation. Ideally, as cheap as possible. As predicted by Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, China's exceptional economic growth will surpass their goals on energy efficiency efforts.¹³⁴ Their imports of coal, oil, and gas are expected to continue to rise, even with expansive installations of solar PVs and wind power. With this in mind, it is interesting to examine how the government frames renewable energy within its strategic and security discourse.

¹²⁹ Dent, 2015, p. 3

¹³⁰ IEA, 2022b

¹³¹ Dent, 2015, p. 11

¹³² Dent, 2015, p.14

¹³³ Zenglein and Gunter, 2023

¹³⁴ Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012, p. 273

The Role of Critical Minerals

As the next step to study the societal and economic necessity for energy supply to transition towards green energy sources, the questions of how and who makes these RE applications needs to be assessed. RE technologies are highly metal-intensive. For the green transition of the energy sector to be successful, key minerals for the products are needed.¹³⁵ Key minerals for batteries, wind turbines, and solar PV are lithium, nickel, cobalt, copper and rare earths.¹³⁶ IEA Critical Minerals Market Review showcases the increasing demand for certain minerals, which hereafter will be referred to as critical minerals, and the lacking supply line security and policies needed to provide sustainable and equal access.¹³⁷ Due to the nature of renewable resources and their dependency on nature or weather-related elements, innovating and installing battery solutions to save the raw energy is highly valued.¹³⁸ IEA believe the demand for clean energy minerals are set to double,¹³⁹ and Nygaard estimates the demand to increase to more than 450% by 2050.¹⁴⁰ Standing out, the demand for lithium is predicted to grow 13-51 times higher, and 6-31 times higher for cobalt and graphite, which are all minerals essential for manufacturing batteries.¹⁴¹ The unequal distribution of the mineral sources contributes to the criticality through access, especially when smaller amounts but larger companies as main suppliers create power dynamics with the potential of exploiting their bargaining positions.¹⁴² Exposing the vulnerability to geopolitical tension and necessity for securitization.

China's role in the value chain is pointed out to be critical for two key reasons. Firstly, since the 1980s, the Chinese state has invested in mining enterprises, both domestic and international to gain control of key minerals for their economic and industrial development. Minerals most relevant to the thesis topic, such as gallium, tungsten, germanium, and over the years have become the largest operator for nickel, lithium, copper and cobalt minerals.¹⁴³ Leading to China

¹³⁵ Wang, et al., 2023b

¹³⁶ O'Sullivan, et al., 2017; Wang, et al., 2023b, p. 147

¹³⁷ IEA, 2023, p. 6

¹³⁸ IEA, 2023, p. 47

¹³⁹ IEA, 2022c, p. 287

¹⁴⁰ Nygaard, 2023, p. 1099

¹⁴¹ IEA, 2023, p.53 - The uncertainty in the prediction is projected towards companies' investment willingness to invest, specifically committing large-scale investments due to the uncertain and large demands. Promoting governments to lead the charge and support with "strong and consistent signals" (p.53).

¹⁴² Nygaard, 2023, p. 1100

¹⁴³ Castillo and Purdy, 2022

becoming “the world’s largest metal refining hub”,¹⁴⁴ which grants a significant role in the value chain as all minerals and metals will go through Chinese actors.¹⁴⁵

Secondly, it is an established idea that the Chinese government are highly involved and advancing control through SOEs and economic mechanisms.¹⁴⁶ Most significantly, China has developed in depth industrial strategies called Strategic Emerging Industries (SEI). The industrial initiative gives SOEs opportunities to invest and buy smaller companies that work within mining, manufacturing, refining sectors to have control over the key stations in the value chain. A large amount of governmental subsidies grants the industry to impose low prices on production.¹⁴⁷ The low-cost has been pointed to as the major factor for the expansive growth of solar PV and wind.¹⁴⁸

With these factors, the geopolitical tensions between China and western actors have risen. Several studies point out China’s strong incentives towards solar PV manufacturing was well established by 2011,¹⁴⁹ causing alarm with European manufacturers.¹⁵⁰ As such, The EU implemented their first catalogue of critical minerals in 2011.¹⁵¹ The US followed in 2017 with a federal report defining which minerals are critical for their economic prosperity and developing strategies to enhance supply chains.¹⁵² Made explicit in both reports, the US and EU are highly dependent on certain mineral imports from China.¹⁵³ Specific geopolitical risk factors include Chinese government export restrictions, which occurred in 2011 and again in 2023. The specific case of export restrictions in 2023 will be relevant for the case chapter of critical minerals, as it's an integral part to China’s reaction to geopolitical tensions and the development of security moves. The restrictions were caused by the US ramping up initiatives to “de-couple” and exclude China from markets within battery manufacturing, such as restricting semi-conductors.¹⁵⁴ Firstly, the US closed a deal with Japan and the Netherlands in January 2023, with the intent to stop selling semiconductor nodes to China. The deal stands as

¹⁴⁴ IEA, 2023, p.8; Castillo & Purdy, 2022

¹⁴⁵ Nygaard, 2023; O’Sullivan, et al., 2017

¹⁴⁶ Leutert and Eaton, 2021

¹⁴⁷ Castillo and Purdy, 2022; Davidson, et al., 2022; Zhu, et al., 2019

¹⁴⁸ Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012, p. 279; Zhu, et al., 2019, p. 132

¹⁴⁹ Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012; Zhou et al, 2017

¹⁵⁰ Zenglein and Gunter, 2023

¹⁵¹ EU, 2011 – find full overview over later developments at https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/critical-raw-materials_en

¹⁵² Executive Order 13817, 2017

¹⁵³ EU, 2011, p. 31; Executive Order 13817, 2017, p. 25

¹⁵⁴ Allen, et al., 2023

a reaction to China's growing semiconducting manufacturing market and prowess.¹⁵⁵ In response, the Chinese government implemented export controls on gallium and germanium.¹⁵⁶ Essentially cutting off the critical minerals in the supply chain. Secondly, the US tried to hinder Chinese companies to invest in battery industries in the US in October 2023. Beijing reacted similarly and issued a temporary graphite export control.¹⁵⁷ The discourse and security framing of these events will be further discussed in the analysis chapter.

Other factors contributing to tensions from the west is the high influx of cheap Chinese RE products in the western markets. This has led to a competitive challenge between western companies and the Chinese. The high-valued risk factor is illustrated with stricter frameworks and investment initiatives, such as Inflation Reduction Act (IRA),¹⁵⁸ and Carbon Border Adjustment Act Mechanism (CBAM),¹⁵⁹ to close off China's cheap products from their markets and promote local western investment.¹⁶⁰ The initiatives are framed as a caution against Chinese dependency and specifically CBAM, as an EU framework, has a stricter regulation for industries to produce products with clean energy sources to ensure the green transition. Examples such as CBAM and IRA showcase the background of the growing geopolitical tensions.

However, the Chinese government stands before certain risks and uncertainties too. Despite China having the majority control over rare earth resources such as graphite, germanium, tungsten, they rely heavily on import of raw materials, specifically copper, cobalt, lithium and nickel.¹⁶¹ With the major extraction of raw minerals for the global renewable power consumption coming from developing countries in Latin America, Africa and Asian countries, studies point to supply chain risks due to inefficient administration or geopolitical tensions.¹⁶² For China, DR Congo is, with the biggest cobalt mining hub, pointed to as the most unreliable producer due to political, economic and military insecurity.¹⁶³ Additionally, the Ukraine-Russia conflict proves how valuable resources and their position within energy security becomes

¹⁵⁵ Zhou, et al., 2023, p. 27

¹⁵⁶ Mofcom, 2023a

¹⁵⁷ Mofcom, 2023b; Trivium China, 2023a

¹⁵⁸ Read more at <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/inflation-reduction-act>

¹⁵⁹ Read more at https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en

¹⁶⁰ Wang, 2022

¹⁶¹ Nygaard, 2023

¹⁶² Fu, et al., 2023

¹⁶³ IEA, 2022c, p. 8; Wang, et al., 2023a

unsecure in geopolitical conflicts. The conflict showed major risks for fossil-fuels supply lines, but also limited the growth of mineral supply and caused soaring prices on metals related to clean energy sources.¹⁶⁴ The conflict stands as a major eye-opener for the vulnerability of supply lines for both China and the west.

By examining these points, it's evident that China's renewable energy policies are deeply intertwined with the need for a stable supply of critical minerals. China's historical investments in mining enterprises, its dominance as a refining hub, and its strategic control through SOEs highlight its proactive stance in securing these essential resources. The export controls and geopolitical tensions underscore the necessity for securitization, as seen in China's responses to Western de-coupling efforts and market restrictions. As the thesis transitions into the empirical analysis, this background illuminates how China's control and dependency on critical minerals shape its renewable energy discourse and policy decisions, directly addressing the research questions on framing and securitization moves within Xi Jinping's government.

Assessing the Green Discourse

The analysis and discussion chapter has been divided into three main parts to contribute to answering the research question and sub-question. As securitization is not an instant event, and the process of politicization can take several years to be established, it is deemed necessary to provide a larger analytical perspective. The first sub-chapter will therefore go in depth into critical policy and linguistic notions of RE from Xi Jinping's predecessor, Hu Jintao. With the given context, the findings of analysis of RE development can be discussed in line with answering the main RQ. In analyzing the written sources, three distinct discourses have become apparent in the Chinese rhetoric relevant to the green transition and development of RE. The first main discourse discussed is how RE sources has been utilized as a tool for the larger politicization of China's framing of mitigating climate change. The second discourse involves how RE sources are perceived as not viable to secure energy, thus, Beijing consolidating their energy security through fossil fuels. Thirdly, the major policy and strategic transition of China towards becoming a high-tech innovator is sparked in the promotion of China leading RE development. Afterwards, going back to the main definition of securitization, the question

¹⁶⁴ Wang, et al., 2023b

stands if the idea of reliable resource supply of critical minerals has been simultaneously established as an existential threat and necessitates political effect to secure.¹⁶⁵ The critical case of critical minerals will be presented to gain the necessary empirical insight to answer the sub-question of securitization of RE.

Pre Xi-period: Hu Jintao efforts within RE development and resource security

The discourse and thematic analysis of the first primary sources between 2012-2024 proved that several thematic ideas and discourses were established before Xi Jinping's presidential period, and therefore requires brief deliberation. Vast literature signifies the governmental shift to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (2002-2012) for China's official discourse on a sustainable economic development to form.¹⁶⁶ Hu's period is characterized to have set energy security to a higher level of importance and implementing the strategic opportunity for China's economic growth potential within modernizing and developing high-end manufacturing. Specifically, through advancing China's role in the international sphere.¹⁶⁷ Such as the 'going out' strategy launched in the 2000s with goals to ensure energy and resources, as well as gaining technological insights for Chinese companies to establish a foothold in new market sectors.¹⁶⁸ The strategy has been pointed out as a major factor for China's exceptional growth and advancement within the 'new energy vehicles' (NEV) sector.¹⁶⁹ These governmental initiatives, including sufficient subsidies given to the prioritized industries, is one way China has established strong economy security ties with their industrial growth. Investments in Africa, Middle-east and Latin America are deemed as a part of a national strategic perspective, as China would not have been able to maintain their economic growth without these investments to obtain energy resources and minerals.¹⁷⁰ The 'going out' strategy has been such an essential strategic necessity that it is still present in the political discourse.¹⁷¹

The topics of China's position of active climate governance and renewable energy transition begins to take a hold in Hu's political discourse. For instance, showcased during Hu's speech

¹⁶⁵ Buzan et al, 1998, p. 25

¹⁶⁶ Fischer, 2016, p. 51; Hernandez and Misalucha-Willoughby, 2020; Moore, 2011; Vuori, 2023, p. 118

¹⁶⁷ Doshi, 2021; Drinhausen & Legarda, 2022; Vuori, 2023, p.53

¹⁶⁸ Leung et al, 2014, p.322 - Closely related to the former "opening up" reforms, but took a new hold as a policy in the 10th FYP (2001)

¹⁶⁹ Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012, p. 177

¹⁷⁰ Bekkevold and Kristofferson, 2012, p. 182

¹⁷¹ Li, 2013; Li, 2014; Li, 2015; State Council, 2016b; State Council, 2021a; Wen, 2012

at the Beijing International Renewable Energy Conference in 2005,¹⁷² and later announcement of the implementation of a ‘Renewable Energy Law’.¹⁷³ Developing RE sources are a necessity to decrease energy consumption and are framed as the goal of ensuring sustainable societies and mitigating environmental issues.¹⁷⁴ Hu’s emerging discourse on ‘harmonious society’ with the inclusion of a scientific outlook on development is integrated to the high-political language which mirror China’s fast-growing society and point to new domestic objectives.¹⁷⁵ Simultaneously, with speeches at the international arena, such as UN conferences, China is increasing discourse on international climate cooperation and to accelerate RE development by promoting advanced energy technologies and diversifying energy supply.¹⁷⁶

Yet there is a contrast between renewable energy sources and strategic energy sources. Paralleling to China’s dependency on oil import the political initiatives for energy security and stable supply lines increased too.¹⁷⁷ As such, the first white paper on energy was published in 2007. Though, while Hu securitized oil supply to ensure national energy access, renewable energy was framed as a solution to climate changes.¹⁷⁸ The white paper on ‘China’s policies and actions on climate change’ published in 2008 established the goal and rhetoric of making China world-class leader on renewable energy manufacturing.¹⁷⁹ The state gives room and funds for enterprises to establish on the market if it provides cheap prices for the state power grid. The discourse gives the impression of the state actively moving forward within industrializing renewable energy sources and through goals of increasing technologies and research. A framing giving a picture of control. The linguistic shift in WP on climate showed China was following the international trend of climate change as a threat rather than impact. Therefore, the concern has been interpreted to be closer to politization rather than securitization, as it’s been expressed as a world threat and concern for humanity, rather than a personal concern that required drastic action.¹⁸⁰

For further engagement and to support the discourse, a governmental stimulus package emerged in 2009. The government established seven “newly emerging industries” (SEI) to promote the

¹⁷² Hu, 2005

¹⁷³ State Council, 2014

¹⁷⁴ Hu, 2006; Leung, et al., 2014; Moore, 2011

¹⁷⁵ Hu, 2007; Vuori, 2023; Zheng and Tok, 2007

¹⁷⁶ Hu, 2009a; Hu, 2009b

¹⁷⁷ Nyman & Zeng, 2016

¹⁷⁸ State Council, 2007

¹⁷⁹ State Council, 2008

¹⁸⁰ Vuori, 2023, p.120

key language of the need to develop sustainable societies by market mechanisms.¹⁸¹ The emerging industries include: Energy efficient and environmental technologies, Next generation information technology, Biotechnology, High-end equipment manufacturing, New energy, New materials, New-energy vehicles.¹⁸² For the thesis RQ and sub-RQ, what is most relevant is the ‘new energy’ initiative which includes nuclear, wind, solar and biomass industry.¹⁸³ The SEI provide the economic initiative thorough market mechanics to connect the future opportunity for China’s growth, additionally as an initiative to improve environmental costs.¹⁸⁴

Furthermore, Hu’s era pointed to China’s unsustainable utility of energy resources as not only polluting, but as economic loss too. Inefficient energy generation leads to an less competitive economy in the international arena.¹⁸⁵ The party’s illustration of these concerns is explicit in the 12th FYP with the launch of conserving energy resources (within optimizing production) to improve the industrial transformation.¹⁸⁶ It is given its own chapter (11) whereas a focus is given to “being domestically based” and diversifying energy sources with clean development.¹⁸⁷ Likewise, the plan increases the features on enterprises being aware of climate concerns and to work towards the low-carbon economy, through RE and NEV industries. Continuing to promote the seven SEIs.¹⁸⁸ Granting an increasing climate awareness throughout the years in Hu’s era.

Lastly, the WP on ‘Situation on Policies of China’s Rare Earth Industry’ illustrates the already growing geopolitical conflicts around China’s control over rare earths.¹⁸⁹ With the opening line of “Rare earths are an important, non-renewable natural resource with increasingly wider applications in economic and social development”, and “For some time now, some countries have been particularly fretful about the situation of China’s rare earth industry and related policies, doing a lot of guesswork and conjuring up many stories.”¹⁹⁰ The documents present a discourse of legitimizing the important role rare earths have to the Chinese society and opportunity for economic and social growth. While responding to foreign critique of unfair export control, it also functions to paint the picture of an environmental toll the sectors have on

¹⁸¹ Fischer, 2016, p.52; State Council, 2010b

¹⁸² US-China Business Council, 2013

¹⁸³ US-China Business Council, 2013

¹⁸⁴ Fisher, 2013, p. 53

¹⁸⁵ Moore, 2011, p. 155

¹⁸⁶ State Council, 2011c, p. 11

¹⁸⁷ Guilhot, 2022; State Council, 2011c, p. 28

¹⁸⁸ Aamodt and Stensdal, 2017

¹⁸⁹ State Council, 2010a

¹⁹⁰ State Council, 2010a

the Chinese society. Emphasizing how their industrial structure is lacking, specifically their lacking enterprises (small-scale market) within high-end products. The international and western technological level is presented at a much higher level than the Chinese. The document explicitly formulated “China opposes politicking the rare earth issue”.¹⁹¹ The responsibility of burdening the high market demand and the environmental problems from mining the resources are discussed, and they call for other countries who also have the abundant resources to burden the demand together. Thus, the WP display how it functions as a framing towards the foreign reader and relying on the discourses of China being a developing country but also aware of nature degradation. Discourses that we see continue and further develop in Xi Jinping’s era.

Empirical analysis - Official discourse of Xi government 2012-2024

1 RE as a tool for pollution reduction and environmental protection

During the discourse and document analysis, the connection between environmental and climate development to the green transition of energy was the most evident throughout. This is showcased with every GWR 2012-2024 listing China’s environmental and climate mitigation goals together with goals of transforming the energy sector to renewable sources. Therefore, this theme required this sub-chapter to showcase its significance to answer the RQ of how RE development is framed by the government. Other than what became repetitive reference to annual and national goals towards climate and environmental development, the main discourse involved promoting SEIs, reduce energy consumption, and increase energy efficiency. The repetitive mentions of these goals remain stable and require no further analyzing discussion. What is then interesting and what this section will present, is a developing discourse with specific examples of how renewable energy sources are framed and stapled as a tool for mitigating climate change.

Firstly, President Xi Jinping’s era has seen a significant linguistic and discourse development within addressing state policies. Xi Jinping’s transition to power is well analyzed and characterized to have been a broad personalized development of China’s domestic and international identity.¹⁹² Compared to former president Hu Jintao, Xi has had an extensive discursive and party slogan revitalization.¹⁹³ His mantra of ‘Great Rejuvenation’ and China’s ‘New Era’ are just two of many strategies Xi is utilize in a political reconstruction of the Chinese

¹⁹¹ State Council, 2010a

¹⁹² Brown, 2022; Fewsmith, 2021; Zhuang and Li, 2022

¹⁹³ Fewsmith, 2021; Nasirova, 2020

identity.¹⁹⁴ On the topic of RE development and China's transformation to becoming a green growth advocate, the resurgence of 'Ecological Civilization' (生态文明), 'Harmonious Society' (和谐社会) and 'Common Prosperity' (共同富裕) are three main strategies we see implemented in the official discourse.¹⁹⁵ While the strategies were already established pre Xi-era, for instance the notion of China developing a low-carbon economy in the Hu-era, Xi's personal tactic has rebranded the strategies and expanded them.¹⁹⁶ The strategies favor a political and historical approach for Xi to connect Chinese cultural identity and CPC political motive to an argumentative and convincing discourse for the populace.¹⁹⁷

To illustrate the discursive development, we can compare two GWR reports, one from Hu's era and the other from Xi's. The 2012 GWR has goals on ensuring a sustainable economic development and energy conservation to reduce ecological impacts, under the wide sub-chapter of "Accelerating the transformation of the pattern of economic development".¹⁹⁸ Comparatively, the 2014 GWR sets a new discursive formulation trend on "Building China into a beautiful homeland with a sound ecological environment" as sub-chapter opening.¹⁹⁹ A continued trend which expands on wording for the green expansion to ensure 'beautiful' and creating 'harmonious' societies as goal for the Chinese development in all GWRs. The discourse works as a legitimizing discourse for the party's developmental goals to be and work for the people's and the environment's wellbeing. The linguistic codes are further visualized by being adopted into the constitutional revision in 2018.²⁰⁰

The heavy symbolic and literary language used throughout Xi's term can be pointed to as significant for the construction and stable discourse. Also seen when redirecting goals to promote developing of the countryside and specifically the poorer western China, the same rhetoric pattern is used with RE development as a tool to achieve it. Xi's usage of 'Common Prosperity' and goals to eradicate poverty,²⁰¹ is strongly connected as core goals for the party.²⁰² Developing poorer rural areas are framed to create a "pleasant countryside".²⁰³ With the specific

¹⁹⁴ The correct long title is '习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想' which translates to "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era". Though 'China in a New Era' is a shortened version.

¹⁹⁵ Xi, 2017b; Xi, 2022b; Xi, 2023a; Xi, 2023b

¹⁹⁶ Brown, 2022; Fewsmith, 2021

¹⁹⁷ Brown, 2022, p. 155

¹⁹⁸ Wen, 2012

¹⁹⁹ Li, 2014

²⁰⁰ Guilhot, 2022; NPC, 2018, p. 6

²⁰¹ Xi, 2022a

²⁰² NPC, 2018

²⁰³ Li, 2015; State Council, 2016b; State Council, 2021b; State Council, 2023c

notion to 2015 GWR,²⁰⁴ the renewable energy sources are augmented as necessary for just and equitable social development, and to “enrich the people”.²⁰⁵ The continuous use of “lush mountains”, “clear water”, and “blue skies” imprints a solid rhetoric image of the government’s persistence on green development and gives China a unique political discourse identity.

Secondly, the analysis has revealed several instances of securitization moves towards climate change and pollution mitigation. The official discourse provides sufficient evidence that the Chinese government has firmly established the connection between environmental degradation and pollution being caused by their economic development and heavy industry.²⁰⁶ For instance, with the opening line to the second WP on energy policy “The pressure to protect the ecological environment and cope with climate change is increasing day by day, and there is an urgent need for green energy transformation”.²⁰⁷ This would at first glance be sufficient for an urgent emergency grammar. However, when reading the next sentences, the context diffuses the urgency, “Fossil energy will still occupy a dominant position in China's energy structure for a long time to come.” Hence, while securitizing grammar can emerge, the context is necessary to see to which degree extreme actions will be taken. In this case, the discourse presents itself as being aware of the environmental and climate damage but ensuring that economic growth and safety is prioritized.

Furthermore, there has been prominent acknowledgement and climate advocacy development over the years. The 2014 GWR declared an all-out “war on pollution” (污染宣战), giving the implied weight high officials want to encourage.²⁰⁸ While not explicitly mentioned again, the security affirming language is kept up through the years, “we launched an all-out fight to keep our skies blue, our waters clear, and our land pollution-free”.²⁰⁹ Similar security setting language has been recognized as more frequent and common with Xi’s ‘securitization of everything’. It is mainly observed in passages or themes of corruption, poverty, and climate.

Going back to how the potential securitization of climate change and pollution is related to RE sources, it is clear from the example from 2012 WP that RE sources are not to ensure energy supply. Rather, RE development is presented as a solution to mitigate climate change and a solution to harmonious society. The securitization moves of climate change provides a

²⁰⁴ Li, 2015

²⁰⁵ Li, 2015

²⁰⁶ State Council, 2023c

²⁰⁷ State Council, 2012

²⁰⁸ Li, 2014

²⁰⁹ Li, 2019

governance prioritization and policy measurement development, eventually leading to a politicization of the issue. RE sources function as the politicizing role, as by prioritizing RE development in favor of more sustainable and green energy, it operates as the solution for the emergency action to tackle climate change and pollution. This performance also becomes evident with studies providing insight into the government's action of transitioning from fossil fuel to RE is ineffective as a sustainable practice²¹⁰, it is simply framed as if it is within the official discourse.

Thirdly, the green discourse is legitimized in China's increasing activity in the global climate governance. There has been a significant development from Hu's non-commitment to climate change through discourse that climate was a hindrance to growth,²¹¹ to Chinese representation in 2012 calling for international action.²¹² With a change of discourse framing climate as a problem to be solved. Moving to 2015 Paris agreement and China's staggering attendance and climate positivity push.²¹³ The Paris agreement stands as the first binding commitment China admitted to in a multilateral agreement and with efforts to transition climate policy to benefit economic growth. Changing the perception of green equals a dragging economy.²¹⁴ Furthermore, the 2022 discourse changed to "We will get actively involved in global governance in response to climate change".²¹⁵ China's international commitments and speeches has evolved to become main stages to perform and frame China's exceptional RE development. Such as the 2024 GWR mentioning China installing a new record of renewable energy capacity to surpass thermal power, and "China accounted for over half of newly installed renewable energy capacity worldwide."²¹⁶ By focusing on China's world record breaking RE installment achievements, it gives the image that their installation power and green transition path is also superior. Even though in reality, RE sources in the power mix still only amounts for 2.13 trillion kilowatt-hour (Kwh) (27.1%) out of 7.85 of the total energy production.²¹⁷ Thus again, RE applications and development goals are utilized as a framing tool. China's climate ambitions and drive for green transition has been the "performance", as most studies conclude. The topic has not been subjugated to drastic life or death framing, thus not securitized, but politicized.

²¹⁰ Guilhot, 2022, p. 6

²¹¹ Vuori, 2023, p. 119

²¹² State Council, 2011c; State Council, 2012; Wen, 2012

²¹³ Hernandez and Misalucha-Willoughby, 2020, p. 22

²¹⁴ Vuori, 2023, p. 119

²¹⁵ Xi, 2022e

²¹⁶ Li, 2024

²¹⁷ Statista, 2024

Xi's and Chinese delegations' language on the topic are understood as more ambitious stage setting than actions.²¹⁸

To sum up, the three examples above showcase how climate discourse have been a forefront of the politicization of the green transition motivation in Chinese official discourse. The influence of President Xi Jinping on official discourse to include a larger literary discourse, function as a strong imagery and argumentative approach. An approach that ties CPC closer to their legitimizing purpose of increasing the populace wellbeing, leading to the government utilizing securitization grammar and framing pollution as a fight. However, relating to the sub-RQ, this securitization move does not provide enhanced actions towards RE sources, but rather a politicization to enhance climate activism. The performance of China's activity within RE development is thus also a tool for China's emergence of global climate activism at the international stage. Essentially, without the increasing external threat of climate change and environmental degradation, there would be less initiative to also develop RE sources.

2 Energy security discourse on a rise

Discussed by Nyman and Zeng and Trombetta,²¹⁹ Chinese official discourse has tended to avoid classifying climate issues with security language. Though as discussed over, climate related actions have been politicized through effort to paint climate change discourse in broad terms, such as "Climate change is one of the most serious challenges to humanity".²²⁰ With similar formulations throughout both Hu and Xi's periods.²²¹ Therefore, it is not an urgent case for the Chinese population personally nor in terms of the existential and urgent threat of the security grammar.²²² A similar conclusion can be reached towards RE as an energy source in the period between 2012-2020. Whereas the 2012 GWR and the energy policy WP released the same year pointed to the green transition as urgent and being important for the well-being of the people, it has not developed much since.²²³ It's not yet viewed as a hasty security measure, which is also reflected in WPs such as 2015 'China's Military strategy'.²²⁴ China's security interests

²¹⁸ Nygaard, 2023

²¹⁹ Nyman and Zeng, 2016, p. 309; Trombetta, 2019

²²⁰ Hu, 2009a

²²¹ Hu, 2004; Hu, 2012; State Council, 2008; State Council, 2011a; Xi, 2017a, p. 581; Xi, 2020, p. 503

²²² Buzan, et al., 1998, p.23, Vuori, 2023, p.121

²²³ State Council, 2012; Wen, 2012

²²⁴ State Council, 2015

within energy and resources were mentioned once within sections of national risks, though its most likely linked to access to fossil fuels rather than RE sources.

However, one can argue that RE development has been under a securitization move from Xi's continuation of 'energy revolution' (能源革命) from Hu's thoughts on energy.²²⁵ The 'revolution' is not towards upscaling the industrial energy power, but rather that the technological development within RE is leading to new transformations, mirroring China's industrial revolution to becoming a modern society.²²⁶ It is evident in the official government documents following Hu Jintao's presidential period.²²⁷ Presenting China's need for an 'energy revolution' and China's economic development as 'unsustainable'. It is through this discourse that we see specific securitization moves. By formulating "Revolution in energy generation and consumption is vital to any country's development and to the wellbeing of its people",²²⁸ and "We will make a strong push to advance the energy revolution, (...), a modern energy system is clean, low-carbon, safe, and efficient, and will safeguard the country's energy security",²²⁹ it is clear that high-politics goals frame China as establishing a modern energy system dependent on RE sources. Fulfilling the securitizing prioritization, yet missing the urgency and emergency setting.

Additionally, there are more cases of the 'revolutionize' emphasis lacking the connection to ensure energy supply or security with specific wording for RE sources.²³⁰ This leads to a vague framing as it's clear the government discourse is using the same concept to escalate energy policies, but its frequency of framing is elusive. For foreign readers, the impression of the government utilizing strong language such as "revolution", can give a sense of a large scale and urgent transition. On the other hand, the usage of 'revolution' has a strong link to the communist and socialist history of CPC, thus it works as an identity rhetoric. There is then a slight difference between Xi Jinping's personal speeches compared to governmental documents such as the GWR and the usage of the term. While Xi Jinping has woven the term to most speeches the term was most frequent in GWR 2011-2012, then resurged in 2024 GWR.²³¹ As such, the discourse of energy revolution has a varying degree of increasing securitizing language to

²²⁵ Wang and Yi, 2015

²²⁶ Wang and Yi, 2015

²²⁷ State Council, 2012; Wen, 2012

²²⁸ Li, 2015

²²⁹ Li, 2016; State Council, 2021a

²³⁰ Li, 2022; Xi, 2014; Xi, 2017a

²³¹ Li, 2024

having a politicizing effect to state the Chinese energy mix will be transformed through political efforts.

Continuing this, the period 2020-2024 signifies a shift of increasing energy security framing, but not within RE. With the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, an announcement of a new wave of struggles and uncertainty takes a large focus in the following GWR.²³² The government has changed the framing of ensuring economic stability by excluding focus on ‘growth’. A new initiative has been formulated, ‘three critical battles’, with one ‘battle’ ensuring safety in ‘six areas’. The six areas refer to; job security, basic living needs, operations of market entities, food and energy security, stable industrial and supply chains, and the normal functioning of primary-level governments.²³³ Marking the first-time energy security is explicitly presented in this manner in the GWRs. Energy as something to be secured is again formulated within the strategy to expand domestic demand and accelerate economic development, "Promote the clean and efficient use of coal, develop renewable energy, improve the oil, natural gas, and electricity production, supply and marketing systems, and enhance energy reserve capabilities."²³⁴ The difference here is not the content of the government listing up their targets of development, because the listing is the same as it has been over the years, but the clear linking of energy security to economic safety. Marking a security grammar.²³⁵

Xi’s announcement of the dual carbon goals during the UN 75th assembly in 2020 also showcases the prioritization of ensuring energy for industrial and societal needs over a rushed transition for climate and environment protection.²³⁶ The de-prioritization of environmental protection, from one of the top priorities of the party in the 19th Party Congress to a part of the normal discourse in the 20th,²³⁷ reflects the securitization of energy supply.²³⁸ Also evident in Xi’s construction of ecological civilization in the speech at the National Ecological Environmental Protection Conference, Xi emphasizes the dual carbon goal as “independent actions” and “will never be influenced by others”.²³⁹ Settling the discussion of no “rush” to overextend the green transition, as ensuring energy security is more vital.²⁴⁰ Additionally, the

²³² Li, 2020; Li, 2021; Li, 2022; Li, 2023a

²³³ Li, 2020; Li, 2021; Li, 2022; Li, 2023a; Li, 2024

²³⁴ Li, 2020

²³⁵ Buzan et al., 1998, p. 27

²³⁶ UN, 2020

²³⁷ Xi, 2017b; Xi, 2022e

²³⁸ Choyleva, 2023

²³⁹ Xi, 2023c

²⁴⁰ Xinhua, 2023b

language in formulating the promotion of green and low-carbon development, has been changed from “vigorously” to “steadily” and in an “orderly manner”.²⁴¹

During Xi’s speech at the leader’s summit on climate April 2021, he formulated “China will strictly control coal-fired generation power projects, and strictly limit the increase in coal consumption over the 14th Five-Year Plan period and phase it down in the 15th Five-Year Plan period”.²⁴² An assessment that would later support a National Energy Administration (NEA) policy to further set restrictions on new coal power projects, promoting coal power to become a “supporting role” for RE sources (due to their variable power production).²⁴³ However, the Summer of 2021 and 2022, China experienced energy crisis due to droughts and floods, leading to increasing energy security language in official discourse.²⁴⁴ As a reaction to lacking energy supply, China increased their construction of coal power plants, gaining critique from western news media on China not fulfilling their international promises of building out more coal reactors.²⁴⁵ But for the Chinese discourse, this is legitimized in the setting of securing energy supply in the case of crisis. Signaled later in the GWR, “Give full play to the role of coal as main energy source (...) and ensure normal energy supply.”²⁴⁶ This is supported by Xi’s speech in the 20th National Congress a few months later:

Reaching peak carbon emissions and achieving carbon neutrality will mean a broad and profound systemic socio-economic transformation. Based on China’s energy and resource endowment, we will advance initiatives to reach peak carbon emissions in a well-planned and phased way in line with the principle of building the new before discarding the old.²⁴⁷

The legitimization of these speech acts is also reflected in the in the NEA annual “Guiding opinions on energy work” with the number one priority being energy security since 2022.²⁴⁸ In contrast with 2021 where effective and utilized energy structure was first.²⁴⁹

The reason for prioritizing the construction of coal power plants rather than RE showcase Chinas main struggles of developing low-carbon solutions fast enough. With the main reasoning being low transmission capacity and grid flexibility for northern China’s access to resources,

²⁴¹ Li, 2023a

²⁴² Xinhua, 2021b

²⁴³ Champenois, et al., 2024, p. 14

²⁴⁴ Li, 2022

²⁴⁵ Champenois, et al., 2024, p. 11; Pollard, et al., 2023; The Associated Press, 2023

²⁴⁶ Li, 2023a

²⁴⁷ Xi, 2022e, p. 22

²⁴⁸ NEA, 2022; NEA, 2023; NEA, 2024

²⁴⁹ NEA, 2021; Trivium China, 2024a

incomplete power market reforms and institutional barriers restricting interprovincial power trading, and the grid not being innovated and technical sturdy enough to ensure safe and stable interaction of RE.²⁵⁰ Leading to coal power being the most efficient and quick secure option. This showcase the earlier discourse provided through “strict control” and coal being a “supportive role” losing its meaning and needing to be revamped with stronger security discourse linked to national security to override earlier promises. Essentially, there are clear signs that for the short-term, energy security has gained a priority over the green transition in terms of ensuring energy supply, and it’s legitimized within the political discourse of the dual carbon goals and self-reliance discourse.

Going back to the securitization moves of energy revolution and comparing from 2015-2016 to 2024, the main difference lies in the emphasis on securing energy supply. While the examples given earlier has a diffuse notion that RE sources can be vital to ensure energy supply, the 2024 GWR, “We will advance the energy revolution, (...), We will see that coal and coal-fired power play their crucial role in ensuring energy supply and our energy supply meets the needs of economic and social development.”²⁵¹ Makes it explicit what is essential. Thus, concluding with renewable energy as a source has not been securitized to ensure energy supply and security. Furthermore, the no “rush” emphasis also ties into the larger discourse of China’s goals within the green transition. The statements stresses that the green transition will not slow the society’s growth down, ensuring that providing energy to the industrial economy is more important than future climate and environmental harm. As such, RE applications within manufacturing is still prioritized, as it is an important part of the path in the innovative strategy Xi Jinping is setting for the Chinese economy. This will be discussed in the next sub-chapter.

3 China as high-quality producer

Building on the discussions and analysis from the last two sections, the findings involve RE development connected to the green transition and discussion whether RE has been framed as critical to ensure security access. This section will present the findings of RE applications most significant framing in the industry revolution of China’s new economy model. Co-constituted in Xi Jinping’s ‘new normal’ (新常态) discourse.²⁵² The sub-chapter will point out the significant discourse changes from how China has expressed its development from Hu Jintao’s

²⁵⁰ Champenois, et al., 2024; CREA and Global Energy Monitor, 2024, p. 14; Trivium China, 2023b; Xinhua, 2023b

²⁵¹ Li, 2014

²⁵² Hernandez and Misalucha-Willoughby, 2020, p. 21

period to present day. RE development is presented as a part of the economic goals and innovative economic model and illustrate China's prioritization of industrial growth.

During Hu Jintao's presidency, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) began promoting a shift from quantity to quality products in manufacturing industries. Although China had become a leading distributor and manufacturer of high-end technology products, the focus on mass production did not foster the necessary innovation and service-oriented industrial power.²⁵³ The commitment to achieving these goals is hence visualized in governmental planning documents. Within the energy sector, the 12th FYP (2011-2016) sets the stage of China promoting innovation to secure energy more efficiently, leading to exploration of minerals, and in general developing 'new energy' comprehensively.²⁵⁴ China's insecurity of having low innovative power and underdeveloped industries, is presented further in the energy policy white paper, which states: "The foundation for independent innovation is relatively weak. Core and key technologies lag the world's advanced level, and some key technologies and equipment rely on foreign introductions."²⁵⁵ The bleak framing is paired with China's identity and self-framing as a 'developing country'. The self-identification has been a necessity to justify high energy consumption and high pollution rates to develop.²⁵⁶ While both the 2012 WP and GWR creates a pessimistic foundation of China's historic and current unsustainable economic model, the documents provide a political performance for their willingness and determination for change.²⁵⁷ Additionally, such statements signify the mental shift of growth from quantity rather than quality Xi, and the later years of Hu, has tried to implement into the Chinese government and society. The discourse has established that China wants to move away from being the world factory, and become a stronger economic force, tying into the large-scale strategy of 'Great Rejuvenation'. The framing indicating RE sources used as a tool in these goals.

A significant discourse development has also been observed as China constitutes its peaceful rise, supported by developing soft power mechanisms such as economic power.²⁵⁸ As such, the term "real economy," which refers to a country's ability to produce goods and services (excluding the financial sector), appears consistently in GWR documents.²⁵⁹ However, there is

²⁵³ Bekkevold and Kristofferson, 2012, p. 182

²⁵⁴ State Council, 2011c

²⁵⁵ State Council, 2012

²⁵⁶ Wen, 2012

²⁵⁷ State Council, 2012; Wen, 2012

²⁵⁸ Vuori, 2023, p. 122

²⁵⁹ Li, 2013; Li, 2014; Li, 2015; Li, 2016; Li, 2017; Li, 2018; Li, 2019; Li, 2020; Li, 2021; Li, 2022; Li, 2023a; Li, 2024; Wen, 2012

a thematic shift in 2017 regarding how it is ensured and contextualized. Initially, the term was used in favor of the financial and monetary sectors, with formulations such as, “The real economy has always been the foundation of China’s development.”²⁶⁰ Before 2017 it was utilized in favor of the financial and monetary sector, formulated in prioritized sections as, “We will move ahead with financial reform to better serve the real economy.”²⁶¹ From 2017 onwards, the focus shifted to, “transforming and upgrading the real economy through innovation” and, “Improve its performance and competitiveness”,²⁶² showcasing their moves towards an export heavy economy rather than financial. From then on renewable energy applications such as wind, EVs, and solar, and other high-end tech began to be included with these terms:

We deepened supply-side structural reform, improved national and local innovation systems, and boosted self-reliance and strength in science and technology. We promoted development of the real economy through innovation, continued to foster new drivers of growth, and effectively countered external attempts to suppress and contain China’s development.²⁶³

The emphasis on what ‘the real economy’ functions for has thus changed in favor to reflect China’s new economic model and goals of innovation. The new discourse framing additionally coins it in a more severe security and competitive lens. Thus, provide argumentation that RE technologies as part of the innovative and high-end products strategy will be backed by government in order to be competitive in markets. In other words, secured to be competitive.

To further illustrate how economic growth has become securitized in high-politics, there are certain linguistic codes used in the 19th Party Congress (2017). Economic growth is framed as essential for achieving Xi’s ‘Great Rejuvenation’ (伟大复兴) and the ‘Chinese Dream’ (中国梦) using terms as “pivotal”, “critical transition” and “urgent” emphasizing the necessity of developing a modernized economy.²⁶⁴ Security and prioritization language, such as "we must put quality first and give priority to performance," further underscores this point. In the global market, competitiveness is highlighted as integral to Chinese national security.²⁶⁵ Xi’s emphasis is then also highlighted in the following GWR. With formulations such as “create a quality

²⁶⁰ Li, 2017

²⁶¹ Li, 2016

²⁶² Li, 2017

²⁶³ Li, 2023a

²⁶⁴ Xi, 2017b, p. 25

²⁶⁵ Xi, 2017b, p. 26

revolution made in China”,²⁶⁶ and “We will champion the pursuit of fine workmanship to boost the quality of Chinese manufacturing”,²⁶⁷ clearly indicating a competitive intent while also keeping the connection to transforming the economic industry through quality items as RE applications.

Furthermore, with the thesis objective and timeframe of Xi Jinping’s government period, the positioning of the goals of innovation and quality production within speeches are also significant in the analysis of its prioritization. Quickly mentioned in the methodological chapter, the GWR documents follow a repetitive structure. Though as a small repetition, the first chapter involves a review of the previous year, the second chapter lists specific goals the government wants to achieve, then the third chapter lists the key tasks of the year (average 1-9 tasks). The small variations in the GWR generally lie in the placement of the topic according to the list of main tasks for the year. For instance, tasks related to innovation and quality production are usually positioned early in the list (tasks 2-4), while ecological protection and green development appear later (tasks 7-9). With this, the most significant change of discourse in 2020, due to the economic halt from COVID-19, is also represented by the task towards innovation and technology development lowered on the list of main tasks.²⁶⁸ The discourse change is illustrated by the GWR giving attention towards geopolitical and economic turmoil, hence, giving space on promoting economic growth and safety. Thus, making a greater comparison when securitizing language reemerged 2023 and 2024.

The prioritization of economic safety lasted till 2023 when innovation and technological advancements was back as the second task in the GWR.²⁶⁹ However, the 2024 GWR takes it a step further and places innovation and quality production as the governments first main,²⁷⁰ marking the first-year economic growth or economic safety has been surpassed. The prioritization was predicted by analysts from Xi Jinping earlier statements in 2023:

On the new journey to build China into a great country and to achieve national rejuvenation, we must unswervingly promote high-quality development. (...) focus on achieving greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Li, 2018

²⁶⁷ Li, 2021

²⁶⁸ Li, 2020; Li, 2021; Li, 2022

²⁶⁹ Li, 2023a

²⁷⁰ Li, 2024

²⁷¹ Xi, 2023b

Confined in Xi Jinping's statement, lies the reason of making innovation and quality products number one priority, which is to strengthen Xi Jinping's goals of self-reliance. Central to achieving those goals is securing sufficient and reliable supply chains. As such, the first task of 2024 involves an increased emphasis on "striving to upgrade industrial and supply chains" and "we will work to upgrade industrial supply chains"²⁷² Showcasing, how intervened industrial supply chains, which includes critical minerals, are to the CPC economic goals. However, this will be touched upon further in the critical case after this section.

To continue Xi Jinping's statement in 2023. The high pursuit for technological independence and the strives for innovative workforce to manufacture a leading global market, has been pointed to as being a part of the grander strategy of the 'fourth industrial revolution' by western researchers. As Doshi resonates, Xi promotes the historic movement of the industrial revolution with close connection to those who lead the revolution and technological leadership gaining a simultaneous strong global position.²⁷³ Further signal of this discourse is seen in a 'catching up' rhetoric stapled as achievable in the 2019 Whitepaper 'China in the New World'.²⁷⁴ The focus on increasing R&D funding, fast-paced industrial policies and control over supply and industrial chains are pointed to as the core advantage China has for a future technological competition.²⁷⁵ Specifically, the prioritization of industrial value chains has been clear in the primary data collection and analysis, such as the quotes from 2024 GWR in the paragraph above. Xi Jinping has made clear remarks on moving it up his prioritization list,²⁷⁶ as it with energy and food security, was a part of the 'six areas' to ensure stability.²⁷⁷ To achieve the technological self-reliance and a new economic model based on it, Xi has made great efforts to support education within innovation and entrepreneur workforce, deeming its necessity to "greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology".²⁷⁸

Further investigation of China's shifting economic priorities and strategies to incorporate positive spillovers towards innovation, would be interesting but needs a larger study. Thus, the sub-chapter will conclude with, RE manufacturing as a part of the high-end equipment and quality products umbrella, is an essential tool for the securitization of economic and innovation growth. With RE applications increasing position in the global market and as future energy

²⁷² Li, 2024

²⁷³ Doshi, 2021, p. 286

²⁷⁴ State Council, 2019

²⁷⁵ Doshi, 2021, p. 289

²⁷⁶ Xi, 2022a; Xi, 2022d; Xi, 2023a

²⁷⁷ Li, 2020

²⁷⁸ State Council, 2022; State Council, 2024; Xi, 2023a; Xi, 2023b

sources, China has securitized its position of becoming the high-end manufacturer to produce these products to compete in the international market and develop its ‘real economy’. RE applications are therefore not securitized in itself, but as a part of the larger economic security. However, to be able to achieve the manufacturing goals Xi Jinping has also emphasized his discourse on China becoming self-reliant. Thus, leading to the next logical securitization step for manufacturing RE applications, involving securing industrial supply chains, the critical case of access to critical minerals.

The case of critical minerals security

The chapter above discussed and analyzed the three main discourses that constituted Xi Jinping’s government framing of RE development. Discourses around China vigorously developing RE technologies and revolutionizing the energy sector are a key part of the green discourse that has grown over the years. However, the framing of RE development is pointed to as a solution to the government's battle against pollution, not to ensure energy security. The empirical evidence from the state plans and official speeches, both domestic and international, show that securing energy through traditional sources are prioritized and works toward the end goal of self-reliance.²⁷⁹ Likewise, the Chinese government has showcased a grand strategy on Chinese companies becoming the largest producer of RE applications such as solar, batteries and wind, and for China to take an active role in international climate negotiations. RE as a product of innovation and leading the “new normal” economic model, has had a significant rise, and for the government to achieve those goals, other significant parts of that value chain have to be ensured. Leading to the case of critical minerals being securitized during Xi Jinping’s government.

First and foremost, in linguistic terms, calling minerals strategic or key is what legitimizes the exceptional use of state power and resources to ensure sustainable access to or exploration of the raw materials. Seen in the mineral catalogue of the US and EU mentioned in the background, the catalogue’s meaning is to constitute legitimacy to develop stricter and more policy actions to enhance control over the minerals. The origin of calling the minerals of lithium, cobalt, copper and rare earth critical, are contextualized by these governmental reports. As discussed in the literature review for the Chinese context, the characterization of a mineral to be strategic or key does not equal criticality. However, calling the minerals advantageous, can deem the

²⁷⁹ Brown, 2022, p. 155; Vuori, 2023, p.118-119

difference between if China critically needs the minerals or if they have them in abundance and it's a competitive advantage.²⁸⁰ This is what will be discussed in this section, the differentiation of the securitizing grammar and its abundance.

The criticality of key minerals and its speech acts – visualized with policy development

Domestic policy development

Since the 2000s, the Chinese government enhanced the politicization of what they deem “strategic minerals” (战略矿产). Quickly mentioned in the literature review, Vice Premier Wen Jiabao politicized minerals as a strategic necessity by emitting the statement and goals to enhance exploration of minerals in the 10th FYP (2001-2005).²⁸¹ Minerals being a key part in the ‘going out’ strategy, also supports the statement of the party issuing its importance. The strategy would accelerate development through foreign investments and secure their enterprises investments overseas.²⁸² The stable promotion of the strategy to ensure access to, “energy, raw materials, agriculture, manufacturing, services, infrastructure”, is significant as it spans throughout the GWRs until 2015.²⁸³

The issue is deemed to only be politicized as security language is not part of the political discourse. Following the logic of Vuori,²⁸⁴ the scale between politicization and securitization can lie in the details between if the issue is promoted as significant for the world or for specifically the Chinese population. As such, signified in ‘China’s policy on Mineral Resources’ from 2003, mineral resources are framed as, “an important material foundation for the development of human society”.²⁸⁵ No connection to national security or security at all, creates a contrast with the present securitized political discourse. Furthermore, when looking for “advantageous”, it is defined as “The country enjoys obvious advantages in the world in the resources of coal, rare earths, tungsten, tin, molybdenum, antimony, titanium, gypsum, bentonite, mirabilite, magnesite, barite, fluorspar, talc and graphite.”²⁸⁶ Indicating that these are not what they refer to later as strategic in the same text. Making the difference between

²⁸⁰ Andersson, 2020, p.135

²⁸¹ Andersson, 2020, p. 131

²⁸² Bekkevold and Kristoffersen, 2012; IEA, 2022c; Vuori, 2023

²⁸³ Li, 2013; Li, 2014; Li, 2015; State Council, 2012; Wen, 2012

²⁸⁴ Vuori, 2023

²⁸⁵ State Council, 2003

²⁸⁶ State Council, 2003

advantageous as minerals they have an abundance of, and thus is institutionalizing through increasing politicization.

Throughout Hu's era there are more examples of minerals, such as rare earths, not being securitized. Standing in contrast to Xi's government later securitizing language. The examples will be showed in the Mineral Resource plan (2008-2015), WP on China's rare earth industry and 2011 State Council of "guideline to promote healthy development of rare earth industry".²⁸⁷ While the 2008-2015 plan incorporates goals to increase reserve values of "specific minerals" (特定矿种) to "meet the needs", the context reveals it's the need for medium-large enterprises not connected to the safety development of the country.²⁸⁸ There are some notions of increasing the advantageous important minerals, such as tungsten and other rare earth minerals, but it is clear what is significant for the states national security is petroleum and special coal types.²⁸⁹ The 2010 WP²⁹⁰, does not include any notions to security or urgency to ensure resources, although it increased its framing of importance through calling the rare earth minerals "indispensable" for the modern industry. It is rather a tool to showcase international readers of their sustainable growth within utilization of the minerals and builds on their developing country, thus high emitting industry discourse. Lastly, while the guidelines from 2011 have a security grammar with Wen Jiabao stating, "urgent need to protect environment and save resources by accelerating industrial upgrading",²⁹¹ the intention is strengthening the management of transformation pattern of the industry, not ensuring a lacking supply line. What is interesting, is after Wen Jiabao states rare earths are crucial for certain high-tech products (specified as consumer electronics), he also emphasizes "but their mining is known to be destructive to forests, soil and farmland. The waste released after mining also damages the environment."²⁹² While not relevant to this paragraph's argument and discussion, this will be picked up again later.

Moving into the beginning of Xi's era, as mentioned in the example of the going out strategy, critical minerals continue to be discussed in the discourse between 2012-2015 involved gaining oversight over raw materials or mineral resources with emphasis on 'efficiently utilize' and

²⁸⁷ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2011; National Development and Reform Commission, 2008; State Council, 2010a; State Council, 2011b

²⁸⁸ National Development and Reform Commission, 2008

²⁸⁹ Xinhua, 2009

²⁹⁰ State Council, 2010a

²⁹¹ State Council, 2011a; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2011

²⁹² State Council, 2011a; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2011

‘conserve’.²⁹³ The major development of minerals framed as more critical in Xi’s era begun in 2016. The 2016 GWR had the goal “will increase the import of advanced technology and equipment, key spare parts and components, and energy and raw materials in short supply in China. Being the first and only GWR to frame the Chinese dependency on importing raw materials due to lacking supply lines”.²⁹⁴ The 13th FYP (2016) on economic and social development addresses similar goals to prevent and control risks within areas such as energy and mineral resources in the possible economic security risks in the new national security system.²⁹⁵ Building on this 13th FYP, two new significant FYPs were also launched. Firstly, a FYP on Strategic Emerging Industries (SEI),²⁹⁶ being a strategic outline for Beijing’s goals on investments in technologies, support subsidies for RE development and support companies to establish value chains abroad. With the goal of:

By 2020, strive to make certain that new material varieties enter 17 the global supply chain and that the self-sufficiency rate for major key materials reaches over 70% to initially realize the strategic transformation of China from a materials power (材料大国) to a materials superpower (材料强国).²⁹⁷

Secondly, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) followed up with a new national plan for Mineral Resources.²⁹⁸ The plan became the blueprint for mineral resource management, with plans for various mineral classifications, emphasizing the encouragement of exploration in areas of scarcity, regulation of traditional mineral advantages, reduction of excess capacity, and assurance of supply for SEIs. Simultaneously, establishing strategic mineral catalogue,²⁹⁹ spotlighting key minerals vital to China's economic interests across energy, ferrous, and non-ferrous sectors. With the goal of protecting mineral resources essential for national modernization and ensure safe supply of mineral resources. Notably, the mineral resource plan underscores the significance of rare earths and proposes stringent measures to control their exploitation, including the implementation of a control system, the establishment of a dynamic balance mechanism, and the acceleration of a traceability system³⁰⁰. Due to the rapid development of new energy and new materials, the demand for minerals for the SEIs are

²⁹³ Wen, 2012; Li, 2014; Li, 2015

²⁹⁴ Li, 2016

²⁹⁵ State Council, 2016b (chapter 73)

²⁹⁶ State Council, 2016c

²⁹⁷ State Council, 2016c

²⁹⁸ National Development and Reform Commission, 2016

²⁹⁹ MLR, 2016

³⁰⁰ National Development and Reform Commission, 2016

increasing and the level of industrial development for resource protection needs to be strengthened³⁰¹ With this formulation, it recognizes their struggles, but also highlights their already “comparative advantages”. The resurgence of strategic minerals in the FYPs and GWR subsequently with its involvement in a new form of SEI FYP and mineral resource FYP, leads to strategic minerals being further institutionalized and politicized into the economic and national security dimensions. It is not yet a complete securitization move as there is a lacking “urgency” in the discourse, but the increased politicization and the clear signal from Beijing gives rise to economic measures to be taken.

Other than the economic and industrial connection, and similar to the main discourses for RE, we also see mineral resources aligned with the “beautiful China” discourse.³⁰² Often linked with energy and other natural resources, it’s the nature degradation and high emission releasing of gathering the resources that gives it the connection of promoting green transformation. The mining industry, as Wen Jiabao said himself in 2011,³⁰³ struggles with high nature degradation. Therefore, in the 2016 GWR when minerals were given its own section “Strengthen the conservation and management of mineral resources”,³⁰⁴ it emphasized to strengthen, vigorously develop, and promote mining systems to become more green, technological, effective. Similarly in the 13th FYP, mineral resources were given their own space in the larger chapter (10) in “Accelerate the improvement of ecological environment” and sub-chapter (43) “Promoting conservation and intensive utilization of resources”.³⁰⁵ Signaling the target to build new and transition old mining enterprises greener, but in general implementing a more comprehensive supervision, conservation, utilization, and protection of the resources. With this case, it is worth pointing out the acceleration of green mines and mineral resource protection has been configured from a paragraph in the 13th FYP to a closing sentence in the larger picture of accelerating green transformation methods in the 14th FYP.³⁰⁶ Concluding that the role of critical minerals connected to national security and the prioritization of innovation driven economy, overextends its need to be a part of the green transition and ecological discourse. Furthermore, exploring for ‘new minerals’ and developing ‘new energy’ maintain an essential main goal as a part of the research and innovation prioritization within developing the economy.

³⁰¹ State Council, 2016a; State Council, 2016c; State Council, 2016d

³⁰² Li, 2016

³⁰³ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2011; State Council, 2011b

³⁰⁴ Li, 2016

³⁰⁵ State Council, 2016b

³⁰⁶ State Council, 2021a

Innovation-driven development is drawn out as strategically necessary to not only improve quality and efficiency, but competitiveness.³⁰⁷

Jumping to 2021 with new launches of FYPs and a continuation of increasing politicization and creating a clearer security discourse. The 14th FYP advances on minerals criticality with the launch of the energy resource security strategy (矿产资源保障战略).³⁰⁸ While most of the section focuses on ensuring stable supply of fossil fuel sources, the last sentence involves ‘strengthening’ and ‘controlling’ strategic mineral resources by improving security capabilities and new strategic mineral prospective projects. Combined with the following 14th FYP for ‘Raw Material Industry Development’,³⁰⁹ the government has gathered industries within building materials, non-ferrous metals, chemicals and raw materials to create a stronger synergy of control.³¹⁰ With a large focus on strengthening rare earth enterprises and support to extend their industrial value chains downstream.³¹¹ The framing of mineral resources to enhance development within “protection” measures (and enhancing mineral security is a necessity for national security) can be pointed to as a new, significant securitizing discourse.³¹²

Lastly, and moving into the most up to date discourses, the phrasing of energy resource security is only mentioned again in the 2024 GWR.³¹³ It’s listed in a new main task for the year that we have not seen before, (6/10) “Better coordinate development and security, and effectively prevent and resolve risks in key areas.” Together with food security it’s formulated, “Strengthen the security of energy resources and increase the exploration and development of oil, gas and strategic mineral resources”. Essentially, indicating that the political discourse is not necessarily stable and formulated in the same way each year, compared to the promotion of ecological society and green development. However, the focus on exploring and controlling more resources is significant in showcasing an ontological self-sufficiency ideal that has become a more prominent part of the ideological discourse of the government. The reasoning for this and more in-depth examples of such measures increasing securitizing language will be the topic of the next sub-chapter.

³⁰⁷ Li, 2017

³⁰⁸ State Council, 2021 a - part of chapter 15 “Coordinate development and security to build a higher level of Safe China”, Chapter 53 “Strengthening National Economic Security”.

³⁰⁹ MIIT, 2021 - launched by ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) and ministry for Natural Resources

³¹⁰ Xinhua, 2021a

³¹¹ IEA, 2022a

³¹² Wang, 2022, p. 1556

³¹³ Li, 2024

International influence – geopolitical risks

The escalation of energy resource security and increase of mining exploration seen in GWR and FYPs,³¹⁴ is due to COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.³¹⁵ As formulated by Xi Jinping at the economic forum 2022 “The global industrial and supply chains have been disrupted”.³¹⁶ The upsetting of status-quo lead to direct risks to short supply of global value chains and the increasing event of “friend-shoring”. Referring to a strategy of countries who have similar shared values, such as the US and EU, to implement policies for companies to work within the bounds of the group.³¹⁷ The growing geopolitical untrust between the west and Russia has similarly increased the untrust to China.³¹⁸ Thus fueling protectionist measures such as IRA and CBAM, presented in the background.

As a reaction to what is perceived as these stricter Western regulations and growing geopolitical risks, there have been three main responses. Firstly, visible in ‘Xi Jinping – The Governance of China (I, II, III, IV) Xi has increased emphasis on the value of multilateralism, open markets and anti-deglobalizing.³¹⁹ Comparably, none of the speeches in volume 1-3 have the word “multilateralism” in the title, while in volume IV there are three just in the span of November 2020 to October 2021.³²⁰ While earlier speeches in the other volumes talked about multilateralism, it is significant that the word was used in the titles so many times within this short time period. With statements such as “Those who exploit the pandemic in pursuit of deglobalization or clamor for economic decoupling or parallel systems will only end up hurting their own interests and the common interest of all”,³²¹ the undertext is clear critique of western states protectionist policy to not only exclude Chinese companies, but also other developing countries interests within the EU and US market. The discourse gains a high-moral effect and opens for larger cooperation between developing countries, building on China’s BRI initiatives and new identity within global governance.

³¹⁴ Li, 2020; Li, 2022; State Council, 2021a

³¹⁵ Vivoda, 2023, p. 3; Wang, 2022, p. 1556

³¹⁶ Xi, 2022d

³¹⁷ Maihold, 2022

³¹⁸ Zhou, et al., 2023

³¹⁹ Xi, 2014; Xi, 2017a; Xi, 2020 the fourth volume is not published as the others, but was retrieved from Xi, 2022c

³²⁰ Xi, 2022c

³²¹ Xi, 2022c – The speech “Stay True to Multilateralism and Contribute to World Prosperity” - 2020

Secondly, with concerns through western media,³²² China is utilizing their control over resources such as the rare minerals earths gallium, tungsten and graphite. The minerals have been used as a tool through export controls to control and punish unfavorable company and state behavior.³²³ As provided in the background, certain protectionist measures against Chinese products in EU and US markets led to China answering with export imports on essential mineral supply lines. The Ministry of Commerce (Mofcom) addressed the temporary export control as following the international law and not targeting any nation, but most importantly it is legitimized through “ensure the security and stability of the global supply chain and industrial chain”, and “safeguarding national security and interests”.³²⁴ Though the explicit wording says it’s not targeting any specific state. China has thus been successful with their vast influence in value chains and subsidies for its manufacturing industries, which is a strong bargaining chip in potential conflicts. Its import prowess can work as a leverage.³²⁵ Therefore, the Chinese government has an increasing motivation to define rare earth minerals as “strategic”, as Premier Li Qiang states under meeting with the State Council in November 2023.³²⁶ It essentially ties the control of rare earth minerals closer to national security measures to make more groundwork for such measures as export controls.

Thirdly, with the increasing risk of import competition of stable supply of raw materials, Xi’ government has made it clear that China is increasing their own mining exploration.³²⁷ As such, the government will “do more to ensure energy and resource security by stepping up the exploration and development of oil, natural gas, and strategic mineral resources³²⁸ legitimizing the exploration of minerals to be a part of the key areas to be ensured to increase security and defusing risks. This means that the current discourse establishes a prioritization and calls for new efforts to keep exploring for raw materials to ensure self-reliance, thus securing national security. Xi’s remarks on ensuring strategic minerals over environmental protection showcase the industry’s importance compared to his discourse on ecological civilization and green development discourse. Additionally, to ensure China has an established reserve and emergency

³²² Allen, et al., 2023

³²³ Zenglein and Gunter, 2023, pp. 49-50

³²⁴ Mofcom, 2023c

³²⁵ Zhou, et al., 2023, p. 27

³²⁶ Li, 2023b

³²⁷ Li, 2023b; State Council, 2023a - Li, 2024

³²⁸ Li, 2024

response system,³²⁹ a revision of existing ‘mineral resource law’ is legitimized to explore for new domestic mineral resources.³³⁰ With the reasoning:

Mineral resources are an important material basis for economic and social development and are related to the national economy, people's livelihood, and national security. It is necessary to thoroughly implement Xi Jinping's Thought on Ecological Civilization, the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important instructions on ensuring the security of energy resources (...).³³¹

While the revision draft utilizes Xi's ecological strategies, the green priorities and measures to ensure ecological safety are lacking. China's ability to extract more mineral resources within their own borders makes China less vulnerable to future supply shocks and is thus prioritized³³².

With these three reactions, China has increased emphasis on the unfairness discourse between developed and developing countries, using juxtaposition of the west as protectionists and themselves as the open and globalizing front. China has simultaneously been able to create their advantageous control of minerals as a hard power mechanism, aligning with earlier wolf diplomatic tactics.³³³ However, the most significant sign of the Chinese insecurity in supply chains, is the escalation of mineral exploration. With knowledge of how environmentally damaging mining operations are, their strategic nature exceeds the costs. China's larger focus on ensuring the strategic availability of rare earth minerals also aligns with the minerals being their most domestically self-sufficient critical mineral. Though the speeches do not frame rare earth minerals by mentioning security, they are still said to be important and defined ‘strategic’ and ‘key’. This creates a balancing, but contradictive discourse between China being self-sufficient and self-reliant in an increasingly polarized world, but also working towards interdependence and trade relations through BRI and multilateralism.

Securitization or politicization?

The first analysis has established what discourses the renewable energy development is performed in, and how it functions as a support to understanding how it has been connected to

³²⁹ Xinhua, 2023a

³³⁰ Huzhou People's Congress, 2023; NPC, 2023 – the law to be revised can be found at <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=1033&lib=law>

³³¹ NPC, 2023

³³² MOJ, 2023; Trivium China, 2024b

³³³ Vuori, 2023

green transition, energy security, and economic and social development. The case of how the role of critical minerals fits into these discourses has proved to be in large for the economic growth and innovative discourse. China's historical development has showcased that their mining industries and improving mineral reserves have been involved in high-politics as essential for national security since the 2000s. With the policy overview and the external geopolitical influence, it is clear that minerals from the CPC viewpoint has an extensive need for securitizing. By comparing the 2003 WP on mineral resources to the most recent 2024 GWR, and with the announcement of revision of Mineral Resources law, the emphasis on the necessity of national security is undeniable.³³⁴

Yet, calling the minerals 'critical' within the Chinese context is still misleading. Though it is becoming more frequent within the government discourse, it is not based on the lack of the resource but is rather an adoption of terms from the European and American discourse. To deem if the minerals critical for the RE manufacturing have been under a securitization move or simply have been politicized, there is a need to look at it within a scale. As such, there has not been an emergency discourse and framing as being between life and death or crucial for the countries utmost safety to increase governmental measure to gain these resources. Rather, a more subtle securitization has occurred with an increasing state control over minerals. Leading to what Buzan et al. recognize as a de-politicization, the matter is becoming less within the political sphere, and the initiatives are increasing the state control.³³⁵ Thus, weakening market mechanisms. The securitization moves align closer to Vuori's developed term of 'macro securitization' and Trombetta's view of a governance influence implication.³³⁶ Whereas, as the topic of critical minerals increases, the government has more inclination to increase their influence to secure control in the name of innovation and economic development. Resulting in a more subtle and not full-force state intervention. Also evident with the increasing abundance of 'raw materials' and 'key minerals' mentioned in the official documents,³³⁷ seen in tables 2 and 3 in the appendix. Concluding with, there has been an increase of securitization moves of control over critical minerals to RE development within official discourse in Xi Jinping's government.

By using Hansen's logic of discourse analysis and through Copenhagen's securitization framework, what provides the discursive power is creating the story of why this issue is

³³⁴ Li, 2024; NPC, 2023; State Council, 2003

³³⁵ Buzan et al., 1998

³³⁶ Trombetta, 2019; Vuori, 2023

³³⁷ Li, 2015; Li, 2022; Li, 2023a; Li, 2024; State Council, 2016b; State Council, 2021a

important. As such, how critical minerals have evolved and is used more substantially to frame how they are vital for China's economic future, is the securitization moves to transfer the topic out of public discussion. The examples showing how the minerals have moved from being called 'strategic' and 'advantageous' to being spoken as 'key', is a vital signifier demonstrating the changing discourse. This pattern of speech acts informs my thesis conclusion that the discourse presented leads to increased securitization moves of critical minerals in the Chinese high-political discourse. Then, the abundance of this progression provides a clearer overview of its development. This also signifies the necessity for further study. In addition, as pointed out in the case, the best indication of critical minerals being prioritized is visualized by the language used to frame why the Mineral Resource Law needs revision and how it reveals a double standard from earlier discourse on the mining industry being bad for climate and environment.

Conclusion

This thesis takes place within the discussion of individual countries performing policies and discourses to align with the Paris Agreement of a max rise in world temperature 1.5-degree C. Specifically, within the energy sector transforming from a fossil fuel-based economy and industry to utilizing renewable energy sources, characterized within the green transition umbrella term. To succeed in the green transition of energy, countries are dependent on manufacturing and innovating renewable energy applications. Most substantially wind power, solar PV and batteries. With this dependency, the next necessity is provision of these technologies and the resources needed to manufacture them. Creating the next most likely dependency on certain minerals that are deemed critical due to their low frequency and unequal distribution between states.

With this real-world issue, this thesis has provided an empirical investigation of China's high political official language and framing of RE development through a discourse and document study. The discourse analysis has been situated on Hansen's three criteria for text selection to enhance the legitimacy and reflexivity of the text.³³⁸ Combining with Doshi's hierarchy for text selection within the Chinese government, the thesis is based on the highest tier of official documents.³³⁹ In this way, applying the securitization framework allows analyzing the top state actors' discourse, to showcase how security is constructed through language and framing. The

³³⁸ Hansen, 2006

³³⁹ Doshi, 2021

political arenas such as Government Work Report at Two Sessions, Five-Year Plans, Party Congress speeches by Xi Jinping, all exemplify stages where the quality of security can be reinforced.³⁴⁰

By evaluating and studying three main types of official documents (Governmental Work Reports, Five-Year Plans and White Papers), accompanied with a broader search for high-official speeches, the thesis has read through over 80 Chinese official documents. By pointing to policy development and state authoritative targets, the thesis answers its main research questions of how RE is framed in Xi Jinping's government and concludes with three emerging discourses. Firstly, the renewable energy promotion has been largely targeted to the national goals of ensuring ecological protection. The emphasis began with a main focus on obtaining blue skies (eta. Air pollution), to develop with a broader goal on carbon neutrality. Over the course of 12 years, China has signified itself as a nation working towards harmonious society and social development for all. This discourse is heavily used regarding development of green energy sources as it's framed as a solution to not only mitigate climate change but to also secure economic development over time. The analysis concluded that while academic literature discusses whether climate change related issues are securitized within the Chinese state, the role of RE sources is further politicized to enhance the government's framing of building a green and better future. As such, RE is not securitized within this discourse due to a lack of necessity to protect the Chinese state and urgency.

Secondly, seen in both discussions of RE development and CM, the emphasis on China's green transition is lessened between 2019 and 2020-2021. After the dual carbon goal announcement in 2020, Beijing has emphasized that the green transition will not be done in haste. It will not risk economic and social welfare. Supporting the literature, the green transition has been provoked as urgent and important for overall health of the world, but not been subjugated to a prioritization over economic growth. The discourse of the key documents confirms that energy supply will be secured by safe sources such as fossil fuels, concluding with RE as an energy source has not been securitized within the energy sector either. Further infrastructure and power grid development is needed to revitalize the dream of a renewable energy powered economy.

Lastly, RE sources and applications have been connected to industrial manufacturing and innovation driven discourses. Formulated as high-end products. This discourse, though starting pessimistic, has evolved to be firmer and more persistent, with initiatives of SEIs. There is a

³⁴⁰ Buzan., et al, 1998, p.204

clear goal of China utilizing their potential and changing their former identity to a ‘quality’ producer. Also made clear with Xi’s announcement of the government prioritizing innovation and technological economy models rather than normal GDP growth.³⁴¹ This discourse is also interesting as it has been contested by geopolitical conflicts rising between the US and EU. The potential risk factors have thus evolved into the Chinese planning documents to establish ‘ensuring stable supply chains’ as the number one priority. With the goal to protect their own security to be self-reliant on production and manufacturing.

In accordance with the findings of a dependency on certain minerals to manufacture and provide RE applications, the critical case provides insight into China’s securitization moves of critical minerals. With the primary and secondary sources, research and analysis provided, there is not enough indicators pointing towards critical minerals in the context of renewable energy manufacturing having reached an urgency level that affects national security within a short period of time. However, the escalation of politicization, through new policy measures, updating of laws and in general more abundance of references, showcase that China is still prioritizing the issue on a steady growth. In the context of an increasingly politicized world and with the current strategy of self-reliance and keeping the dual-carbon goals, securing strategic minerals has been tied more closely to ensuring national and economic security. Thus, answering the sub-research question, that renewable energy has been performed through speech acts and is utilized in settings to advance mineral resource exploration and to legitimize export control of rare earth minerals.

Through combining a broad analysis of the Chinese political discourse on renewable energy, combined with an in-depth case study analyzing securitization moves with regards to critical minerals, this thesis concludes with the Chinese government enhancing the framing of renewable energy within Xi’s goal of China as an innovative and high-end manufacturer. With this, the discourse analysis and using the logic of securitization, contributes to emerging literature within the rising role of critical minerals in the geopolitical landscape and provides insights into the political framing of RE in one of the world’s most consequential state actors for the realization of the green transition of energy. For further study, China’s ambitious and drastic goals to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy will continue to impose competition towards the EU and US own strategic goals. For instance, as the EU works towards bringing production back to Europe, a further in-depth study comparing the security discourse

³⁴¹ Xi, 2024

between an EU member and China would elevate the contextualized securitization moves. A study into how enterprises involved in the manufacture value chain frame China as a security risk would also be an interesting continuation of the thesis topic.

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Appendix 1

The list of specific words and in order they were searched on:

1. 绿色转型 = Green transition
 - (持续发展) = sustainable development -> noticed from 2022 when no mention of the prior
 - 绿色发展
2. 能源安全 = Energy security
3. 再生能源 = Renewable energy
4. 资源安全 = Resource security
 - 能源资源(供应) = Energy resource supply
 - (关键)矿产资 = (key) Mineral assets
 - In white paper 2023 it is presented as “重要矿产资源» = important mineral resources
 - 矿产资源保障 = mineral resource protection/security
 - 能源资源 = energy resources
5. 关键矿场 = Critical minerals
6. 产业链供应链 = Industrial supply and value chain

I started with the list above, but when assessing the material in the analysis there were several points that were overlooked due to the large amount of data collected. For instance, to narrow down I didn't include number 6 and only some 1. I gave a larger focus to results with 'energy security', 'renewable energy' / 'clean energy' / 'non-fossil energy', 'resource security' including all the mentions of 'mineral resource' and some 'energy resources'. In general, I tried to have a continuous focus on energy related text, strategic resources and mentions about competitive industries and renewable equipment.

To provide a quantitative representation of word use, I created three tables of the most interesting findings to showcase in what year and documents certain concepts developed. The tables only provide findings within the primary sources that are annual planning documents

(GWR and FYP) and White Papers, as those are comparable over time and indicate emerging trends.

Table 1: Energy security

- 2012 WP
- 2016 FYP
- 2020 GWR + WP
- 2021 GWR + FYP + WP
- 2022 GWR
- 2023 GWR

Table 2: Raw materials

- 2012 GWR
- 2016 GWR
- 2021 FYP
- 2022 GWR
- 2023 WP

Table 3: Key minerals / important minerals / strategic minerals

- 2015 GWR
- 2016 FYP
- 2021 FYP + WP
- 2023 GWR + WP
- 2024 GWR



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