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The Energy of Russia. Hydrocarbon Culture and Climate Change

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Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen, *The Energy of Russia. Hydrocarbon Culture and Climate Change*. Cheltenham & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2019, x + 153pp., £70.00 h/b.

THIS BOOK EXAMINES THE ROLE OF RUSSIA'S ENERGY RESOURCES IN SHAPING not only its policy, polity and political processes, but its social identity and worldview, thereby exerting critical influence over Russia's relations with the rest of the world. The main thread running through the book is that 'geography has played a significant role in framing how the country has been governed —and it continues to do so' (Chapter 1) in that 'geographical space [is seen] as controllable flows of resources, not as a territory of communities' (Chapter 2). Russia has been historically dependent on natural rather than human resources, with the vastness of Russia's natural wealth located in its periphery, away from its urban centres. A spatiality and materiality approach thus argues that the natural and human resources of Russia are detached from one another, and that this detachment shapes Russia's polity, understood as broad territorial governance.

The book begins by outlining its methodology. While the author's background is in political geography, the volume is informed by related interdisciplinary approaches, such as the 'resource curse', historical path dependence and power analytics, as well as actor–network theory. Furthermore, the analysis uses empirical case studies to showcase how energy power is practised. The book then proceeds by grounding its analysis in a series of propositions. Firstly, Russia is a rentier state as its exports of energy resources account for 25–30% of its GDP (2015). Therefore, the dependence is significant but not 'chronic' (Chapter 1). Second, the more dependent states become on energy resource rents, the more authoritarian they turn over time. Russia's political elites justify high dependence on oil and gas *via* 'space and time', denying 'the inevitable systemic change that is approaching, and brought about by global climate change' (p. 1). Instead, the exploitation of vast resource fields located in the state's inhospitable periphery reinforces the negative path dependencies of societal detachment. This amounts to 'leapfrog' economic development, where the state bypasses traditional stages of development (pp. 18–25, 82).

Russia's transition to carbon neutrality is highly dependent on investment in its energy infrastructure. The peripheral location of Russia's critical fossil fuels (coal, gas, oil) and energy minerals (uranium) necessitates continuous infrastructural investment, such as pipelines, to bring these downstream. This logic is applied robustly, including to the Arctic, where the author suggests that Russia's interests are accelerating climate change (Chapter 5). The high cost of ongoing infrastructural projects enabling the fossil and mineral energy resource contribution to Russia's GDP is, in turn, a constraint on renewable energy capacity investment and thereby carbon neutrality. The national focus is on portraying Russia as an energy 'hydrocarbon' power, both at home and abroad, while the transitioning of Russia's energy mix has been delayed into the future. This is achieved through soft (ideational) and hard (coercive) means. The latter includes *inter alia* Rosatom, the Russian state-owned nuclear corporation, which, Tynkkynen maintains, promotes Russian influence abroad in ways in which traditional state-owned enterprises may not be able to, where Rosatom has no statutory obligation to generate economic surplus and may thus afford at times to prioritise Russian state interests over the pursuit of enterprise profit. The author raises salient questions about the implication of Rosatom projects in Finland and Hungary on the EU's Russia sanctions regimes (Chapter 4).

The book can be criticised on several fronts. At times, the analysis meanders too rapidly through high- and low-level analytical approaches, breaking up the flow of the pivotal argument. I find the spatiality and materiality approach of the manuscript useful in highlighting how geography shapes energy power in the Russian state. By contrast, a Foucaultesque approach to understanding energy as part of Russian identity politics moves the dominant 'big picture' energy power analysis to the familial gas kitchen stove (Chapter 3), but this is a distraction to the reader's understanding of how

the Russian polity works. Similarly, some hypotheses could be more fully developed. For example, highlighting the incidence of Russia's historically weak oil and gas unions to argue that this weakness has contributed to authoritarianism in the Russian state overlooks the fact that, while studies in early democratisation had noted the critical role of unions for the enlargement of civil rights and liberties, the then assumed causal link between this type of societal and economic development and democratisation has been refuted in studies of later (post-WWII) regime change. Unionisation as such in the private sector has also been consistently declining in developed economies since at least the mid-1970s; thus, Russian unions are not necessarily an outlier. These observations could introduce some helpful nuances to the analysis.

In the discourse of Russia as global energy power, the author often speaks of Russia as 'a raw material provider, an "energy-producing appendage" of the West' (Chapter 2). Russia's pivot to China, which goes hand-in-hand with the discourse on Russia's efforts at converting geopolitical constraints into material opportunities, has been marginalised (bar a passing 'rare minerals' parity analysis) and while rightly so from an immediate economic perspective in which the EU–Russia trade relationship is far more significant than the Sino–Russian trade relationship, the purpose of the book's analysis is to also glimpse into the future of Russian energy power. Russia's Eurasian pivot presents opportunities to extend the spatiality and materiality approach of the book. Lastly, the analysis of empirical studies in Russian energy power, such as Russian–Finnish energy trade (Chapter 4), appears critical of Russia's use of soft and hard power, a thread that runs more generally through the work. Yet, the very nature of relational power entails the parallel uses of both hard and soft power tools to develop what is known in international relations studies as 'smart' power. An appraisal of Russia's smart power capability could have yielded interesting perspectives on shifting geopolitical positions and the thematic issues of climate change.

The book is well suited to those with interests in energy, governance and security. The author applies a number of methodological approaches to shed light on Russia's energy power status, both at home and abroad. The book is suitable for students from a variety of disciplines, such as geography, economics and politics.

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Stefano Bianchini & Antonio Fiori (eds), *Rekindling the Strong State in Russia and China. Domestic Dynamics and Foreign Policy Projections*. Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill, 2020, xxvi + 489pp., €164.00/$197.00 h/b.

THE EMERGENCE OF CHINA AND RUSSIA AS 'STRONG STATES' HAS BECOME a leading theme in contemporary academic and policy analysis. *Rekindling the Strong State in Russia and China* presents a timely survey of the numerous dimensions of the issue and its implications.

The 24 contributions assembled in the volume are the product of a three-year research project, 'State and Society in China and Russia', sponsored by the Department of Political and Social Science at the University of Bologna, Forlí Campus. The authors present European, Russian and Chinese perspectives. The lack of North American views is unfortunate, given the vanguard role