



The Ecopolitics Podcast – Episode 2.6: Great Power Politics and the Environment (TRANSCRIPT)

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INTRO: What influence do the world's most powerful nations have on global environmental politics? In this episode, Dr. Yixian Sun, Assistant Professor in International Development at the University of Bath, and Dr. Matthew Paterson, Professor of International Politics at the University of Manchester, help us investigate this question by exploring the ways in which the growth of the BRICS and corporate power have shifted who can sway climate change policy and other decisions on the global stage.

[00:00:00] **Matthew Paterson:** If we used in international politics, the thinking of states pursuing their national interests, then the first question we have to ask is what are those national interests? How does climate change or other environmental problems, how does that affect those national interests?

[00:00:20] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Hello, welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, season two, Global Ecopolitics. This is a podcast for university students tackling some of the big questions in the field of global environmental politics. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa, co-host of the show along with Dr. Peter Andrée from Carleton University, although he will not be joining us for this episode.

[00:00:45] For today's episode, we're zeroing in on great power politics and the environment. Because so many environmental challenges transcend borders, we've seen efforts to govern unsustainability shift to the international arena where scholars of international relations will remind us, there's no centralized governing authority. So within the structure, we nevertheless have some remarkable efforts in multilateralism and cooperation, such as the United Nations and international coordinating bodies and institutions. And these platforms have enabled countless environmental agreements and help to rally the international community along various sustainability causes going back to the Stockholm Conference of 1972. So we have, for instance, the UNFCCC or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and better yet the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which was signed in 1987, and is frequently held up as one of the most successful multilateral environmental agreements.

[00:01:50] However, as with any effort in global politics, there's the specter of uneven power dynamics and competing interests between states and other powerful non-state actors and how this might shape efforts to govern on sustainability. So we might ask, how has the United States' his status as a superpower throughout the post-war years, and in particular as

the world's sole hegemon after the fall of the Soviet Union, how has this influenced environmental governance? And what about the rise of other powers, in particular the BRICS, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa? Is this changing the way that the world confronts unsustainability? And what do we do when many states large and small seem to have vested interests in supporting domestic industries like the fossil fuel sector, or maybe other extractive sector industries that actively damage the environment and thus work against the very collaborative efforts to which they've signed on at the international level?

[00:02:48] So to help us unpack all this, we have two guests, Dr. Yixian Sun lecturer in international development at the department of social and policy sciences at the University of Bath and Dr. Matt Paterson, who's a professor of international politics at the University of Manchester. So nice to have you both on the show. Welcome.

[00:03:07] **Yixian Sun:** Thank you, Ryan. Nice to be here.

[00:03:09] **Matthew Paterson:** Thanks, Ryan. It's nice to be virtually back in Ottawa.

[00:03:15] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Okay, virtually we are. And I'm going to start off by asking you a question, Matt. Much of the modern field of international relations has been organized around trying to understand what it seems to refer to it as 'great power politics'. So great powers were told by realists in IR theory, seek to advance their interests and expand their power. But we have other theories of international relations like liberal institutionalism which kind of sees the potential for this cooperation between great powers and other powers for these greater causes. And when you add the environment to this equation, things become quite a bit more complicated because the environment, again, transcends these national borders.

[00:03:55] So curious to hear your general impression on how you see great power politics playing out in the sphere of global environment. Do you see states seeking to maximize their interests and their power in spite of the environment? Or do you see the environment as a kind of a rallying force that is really brought states together to solve these types of mutual problems? Or maybe it's a little bit of both?

[00:04:18] **Matthew Paterson:** Thanks. It's definitely a little bit of both. I would say that one of the problems, and I might make my comments mostly about climate change, but at one level you clearly have fairly standard great power politics playing out. And on climate there, the story is really about the tepid, shall we say, flip-flopping orientation of the US to dealing with climate change, right?

[00:04:46] So you've had, it's become a highly partisan issue in US domestic politics and increasingly so over time that you have more climate deniers in the Senate than you did 25 years ago, which seems a bit weird. And so that flip-flopping by the United States has really driven lots of the negotiations in the UNFCCC in the UN system over climate. And crudely speaking, when the Democrats had been in power in the White House, specifically the US has really tried to lead global negotiations. And when Republicans have been in office in the White House they have tried to undermine global negotiations. That's rather over simplified, but nevertheless, it is also meant that when the US has been engaged, it's actually quite

difficult for other countries to do very much because the US is not interested in being engaged unless it can claim it's the leader.

[00:05:44] So actually for example, in 2009, when it was the Copenhagen Conference where people expected a new treaty to be agreed, the fact that Obama had just been elected and was really highly active and wanted to achieve lots of things on climate, as in other things, it actually got in the way, in a way. Because it wasn't willing to accept the design of a treaty, except one that looked like one he had designed because he said not to be involved in the implementation of the previous treaty, against protocol, he wanted to completely redesign everything from scratch. And that's ironic because it was also the case with the Kyoto Protocol, that its central design features were done at the behest of the United States.

[00:06:29] So it's quite conventional in that regard, in the sense that you've got this very specific situation that the leading state will only lead by making everybody else do what it wants. And actually it's almost made it easier when the US got out of the way, but then you've got the paradox, which is in the US is still about 15-16% of global emissions in 1997, when the Kyoto Protocol was treated it was more like 22-23% of global emissions. And so you can't have an effective treaty without United States, but that has been a predominant dynamic.

[00:07:04] I think the other aspect to your question though, which is really a different sort of a problem, which is that, we are used to in global politics to thinking that states, quote, 'pursue their interests'. And that then this sort of interaction between that, those interests in the international sphere determines what happens. But the problem with climate change is, what are state's interests, right? If you're an oil producing state that is also spectacularly vulnerable to desertification, which is actually the case of course, for lots of oil producing states, then what are you interested in relation to climate change?

[00:07:37] If you're a rapid industrializing state like People's Republic of China, then you have huge amounts of interest in using all your energy resources to do that. But lots and lots of your country might also be quite vulnerable to sea level rise or desertification or various other climate related impacts. And so the interests of states is much more difficult to discern.

[00:08:02] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Those are some great observations, Matt, I'm intrigued by the significance of the US's flip-flopping, as you say, in shaping international environmental governance. Yixian, what are your reflections when you hear Matt on this?

[00:08:16] **Yixian Sun:** This is a great question. And I really like the points that Matt just raised, I want to build on the last point that Matt said about what are the interests, or national interest of states? I think what we conceptualize in international policy, we tend to assume the states as unitary actors, but actually, this is not the case because we look at what the different actors in different countries and what they are interested in and how their interests play out and to shape national policy or domestic politics.

[00:08:49] And I think in that regard, we have to think about two different interest groups within different countries and especially in great powers or major economies and how they

shape the policy of the countries in the international stage. This is something why more and more scholars of environmental policy to try to look at the politics of decarbonization and the battle between different interest groups, especially in great powers.

[00:09:20] And the other thing I want to mention here is about kind of tensions between development and the environmental concerns. In this respect, I'd like to highlight from a developing country's perspective, so what are the priorities of these countries? And as Matt said, you have to think about what you gain and lose from climate change. And the puzzle that many emerging economies are facing is whether we should prioritize investment or economic development over environmental protection. But now for some big countries like China, I think they are really at a crossroads to see what they are interested in and what they should do. And this is why there's a lot of discussion about whether emerging economies should take more responsibility at the international level and even take a leadership positions to tackle these environmental challenges across the world.

[00:10:22] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** When people ask you about that, how do you address that question?

[00:10:26] **Yixian Sun:** I think this is a very difficult question and I think that for me, it's really trying to understand what are the strategies that the powerful actors in these countries and what are the plans that they to make for the future of their countries? But also what are the interactions between these emerging economies and other great powers in international politics?

[00:10:50] So we need to think about that different countries in a complex web of interactions in international politics. So this is why, when we look at what happened in international climate politics, cooperation is always important, and especially the corporation between great powers. For example, if we look at the success of the Paris Agreement, we should think about what happened before Paris and in that case, the deal made between China and the US, the Obama China agreement on climate change was really a critical milestone for the success of the negotiations in Paris.

[00:11:28] And so I think the question is really about how the international societies can try to work together and also different actors, not the national policy-makers, but also let's think about actors operating across national borders. They can shape the interest of policy-makers and try to make cooperation happen.

[00:11:51] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** So Matt, Yixian discussed the importance of both emerging economies, namely the BRICS, and also corporate actors. How do you think these two forces in particular have shaped climate governance?

[00:12:04] **Matthew Paterson:** I would see those as actually quite separate processes, they're obviously intertwined because everything is intertwined, ecological banality. But if we take the BRICS question, I think if you ask the question of what has changed within the UNFCCC over the 30 years since - negotiations started in fact, 30 years ago this month, just outside Washington, DC in 1991 - the single biggest change has been the rise of China in particular, but to a lesser extent, India. Brazil has always been important, but because of the

forests question, so it's quite distinct. But China and India in particular and in a regional context, South Africa as well, and there's a number of dynamics in there.

[00:12:49] So if you go back to 1991-92, when I was doing my PhD on following those negotiations then prior to the Rio Convention in 1992, Chinese PLC emissions per capita were so low that if everybody in the world was emitting at Chinese levels, there would be no global warming. PLC emissions per capita now are about 9-9.5, I think. That means that they're actually now about 50% higher than the United Kingdom's, for example. There are lots of European countries with lower per capita emissions of carbon dioxide than China. And so that's a radical reshaping of the landscape of who can claim to be, have obligations to act, to reduce their emissions.

[00:13:44] Now, there are other ways of thinking about that. One of which is that we should be thinking about historical emissions, not just this year's and then countries like the UK looks way more important than it does if you just look at UK emissions today. And the other ways to think about whether you're measuring the emissions territorially in that country, or you're measuring the consumption emissions of a country. That is to say, for example, if I buy a fridge in the UK that's built in South Korea or the PRC, then where do the emissions from the manufacturing of that fridge get accounted for? Maybe they should account for the UK rather than Korea or China.

[00:14:26] So there's things around the edges about how we measure the emissions, but it doesn't really matter too much how you slice those - the geography of where emissions come from has changed dramatically. That's the one single thing that has changed really radically over the 30 years that climate has been on the agenda. And that means it's much, much harder for a country like the PRC to say, 'we are no longer responsible'.

[00:14:49] And at the same time, of course, China's interests have changed quite dramatically because they now aspire to a sort of, to actually contest with the United States' global leadership, right? So they've got political reasons to actually try to assert leadership, but on the other hand, they can't avoid responsibility in the ways that in 1992, they could just sit there and say, 'we are literally not part of the problem'. And it was true then, it's no longer true. So that's I think what's the really important geopolitical change. The first part to do with the BRICS, and China is really the standout, but it applies to a lesser extent to India as well.

[00:15:25] On the corporate power question, that's not new, all right? That's always been an issue in climate politics. In fact, you can make a pretty strong case that the trajectory of global climate politics has still been determined more than anything by the power of oil interests and coal interests in blocking progress, sometimes aided by nation-states who radically depend on those resources, like Saudi Arabia, or I'll say something controversial, maybe for your colleagues, Canada, those oil oriented states have been significant blocks of progress on climate action in the formal negotiations, but that landscape of corporate power has changed quite dramatically as well, and was changing quite early on, even into the 1990s.

[00:16:09] So right at the beginning, you had a block called the Global Clock Climate Coalition, which was a coalition of corporations that was essentially oil, coal, car manufacturing, and so on, steel, heavy industry, that were really seeking to lobby within the climate negotiations and in lots of individual countries to try and block progress and prevent action on climate change. And quite quickly, then you've got them being joined by other groups, either promoting renewable energy - a notable one early on has been the insurance companies, of course, who are worried about the paying out on increases in natural disasters, hurricanes, flooding, and so on - and then during the 2000s, a significant shift in the corporate landscape, never quite enough to really create a tipping point. But it's nevertheless now the case that if you come up with a climate policy proposal to reduce emissions quite dramatically, you will have many more companies and sectors in favor of that policy than you would have at 20 years ago and it becomes rather easier to sell.

[00:17:14] And then one thing just to flag, I think a really important shift that's happened in the last 10 years is that - or 15 maybe - that it was for a very long time, the case that car manufacturers and oil companies were really in lock step, and a really powerful block of corporations, all of who were operating transnationally. And now it's the case that they're basically, the car manufacturers have realized that oil companies are being taken for a ride. Electric vehicles are going to be the 'in' at some point and they need to be well positioned for that transition. And so you've got a break up of that block, which has been quite powerful for a long period of time and is no longer anywhere near as powerful as it was. But nevertheless, the question underpinning what you're saying is that designing climate governance, whether at national or international level, needs to be done within the sort of capitalist circumstances that oil states operate in a way that generates investment, employment, growth, and so on. And so the question has been a struggle over the trajectory of that economic growth.

[00:18:21] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** You've brought in capitalism here and we're going to come back to that in a moment, when I ask about how this fits within a sort of international political economy framework, but I want to give Yixian chance to comment on what you were saying about the rise of China in particular as a really important force in shaping climate governance. And so Yixian, closely studied the rise of China in the context of global environmental governance and you've written a book about China's engagement, specifically in terms of transnational certification or sustainability certification.

[00:18:55] But I'm wondering if you can contextualize, for our listeners the PRC's approach to both of these realms, like what are the driving interests within China that you spoke of that are shaping their approach to climate governance and sustainability certification? How would you characterize their approach to these realms of environmental governance?

[00:19:18] **Yixian Sun:** To answer that question, let me try to address the links between your two questions that you initially asked Matt that is about the rise of BRICS, but especially China in this case, but also the corporate power in global environmental or climate politics. I think here, what I'd like to highlight is the intersections between the corporate powers, but also the corporates powers' other economic interest of emerging economies. So here we

have to think about the climate policy of environmental governance is not only trying to protect the nature, but there is also an important economic aspect in the policy arena.

[00:19:59] So for me, when I started to study China's role in global environmental politics or environmental governance, my main interest is about environmental issues. But then the more I studied, the more I realized that the economic interests really matter in this case. What we have seen is not only for political reason that China is trying to take a leadership positions, but especially in recent years in the global arena, but also for economic reasons. Especially when we have more and more regulations to protect the environment and protect the environment and climate change with the decarbonization processes, we have seen the development of new technologies. In this processes, emerging economies like China see a lot of opportunities, for example, we see the rise of renewable energy industry.

[00:20:57] The main reason for China to develop a strong, renewable energy industries is trying to build a strong economic sector and try to lead the economic growth for the future of the countries, but also at the global level to become a global leader in that industry and similarly in many other sectors as well. For example, when we see the rise of electric vehicles in China and the Chinese government has implemented very ambitious policies to promote EVs. This is how we have seen the rise of a strong EV sector in China, but also the Chinese car manufacturer also trying to expand their businesses around the globe.

[00:21:40] So for me, why I started this specific case of eco-certification or sustainability governance, the long question is to what extent China has engaged with these governance systems or rules or standards that developed by non-Chinese or Western actors to promote sustainable production and consumption. Here, really again, we see the environmental interest matter and originally, you would think that because these rules are not created by the Chinese actors to try to regulate the production consumption in China, the Chinese government would not have an interest in collaborating or promoting or accepting these governance systems.

[00:22:24] But actually what I have found in my research is that a lot of actors in the Chinese government, they see the benefits of using these transnational rules of governance to promote a certain sector not only within China, but also at the global level. And this is why I think they become more and more proactively engaged with a lot of corporate social responsibility initiatives. And this is what I found interesting in a sense that not only at the inter-governmental level, but also at the transnational business networks, the Chinese companies also become more proactive to embrace sustainability norms or rules.

[00:23:09] And this is also where the potential or the promise is, I think. While we think about the obligation of emerging economies and these corporates actors in this part of the world, or in these countries, are also interested in taking a more important position and be more proactive to address the sustainability challenges.

[00:23:31] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** That's really interesting Yixian and that leads me to something I've wanted to ask you about, which is China's international development sort of objectives, and you've spoken, and Matt as well, have spoken to this alignment or unapparent alignment of interests between economic objectives and also environmental

objectives at the level of both the corporate sector but also within a certain state context as well. And so I'm wondering if you can help us understand both China's Belt and Road Initiative as a force in shaping global sustainability and whether or not - how do you see it relating to questions of global environmental governance?

[00:24:11] **Yixian Sun:** Let me start with what is the Belt and Road Initiative. So the Belt and Road Initiative is international cooperation platform to create new drivers of shared development through different arenas. And broadly speaking, we could say this is a broad framework to promote international cooperation by China, but also by working with many countries, other countries, or any - according to the Chinese government's discourse - is working with any partners who want to join this Initiative.

[00:24:44] And the main areas include the policy coordination, but more importantly, the infrastructure development, trade and trade and finance, but also people to people connectivities, this is a way that China tried to grow its international influence, but also try to use the capital that China has acquired in part from its development to support development in other parts of the world, and to connect Asia with Africa or Europe, but now also including Latin America. So basically it's around the globe everywhere.

[00:25:19] So whenever you see the Chinese engagement of the investment of Chinese companies that could be understood as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. So there is no strict definition in a sense that it's all about when we talk about china's overseas engagement or investment that you could understand such engagement as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

[00:25:40] But the challenge of the rise of this Belt and Road Initiative is that we have seen a massive amount of investment that China has made in other parts of the global South and especially in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. And most of this investment have been used for infrastructure development, which have a large implications for an environmental sustainability in the global South, and also the trajectories of these countries in terms of their development, especially whether they will go towards a path of low carbon economies or high carbon economies.

[00:26:21] I think this presents huge challenges for global environmental governance. And then the way that China governs this Belt and Road Initiative of the environmental and social safeguards that the Chinese stakeholders want to use in allocating finance, but also in implementing projects are very important to the local environment in these recipient countries, but also people there.

[00:26:49] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Thanks Yixian, that's really interesting. And I'm going to turn to Matt now, and this might be a good opportunity to shift to a question about international political economy or IPE, because of course, China isn't the only great power that's investing tremendous sums of capital in projects in other parts of the world. And there's a question about how environmental initiatives and sustainability policy gets embedded or not within these types of international investments.

[00:27:17] But just to scale back a little bit Matt, can you tell us a little bit about what an international political economy or IPE approach has to offer to this discussion about climate change mitigation and great power politics that we might not get by focusing primarily through either one of these spheres, like either by looking at international economics or looking at international relations specifically?

[00:27:41] **Matthew Paterson:** Sure, I can have a go at that. There isn't a single international political economy approach, obviously. The starting point I would say is that everywhere in the world, more or less with the exception of Bhutan, is obsessed with economic growth. That is to say the measure of progress everywhere is the physical expansion of the economy and that's something that's rather specific to the geopolitics of the last 200 years or so. The second point then is that growth everywhere has been, for the vast majority of the last 200 years, dependent fundamentally on fossil fuel resources and pretty much the large majority of policy-makers and corporate leaders actually still de facto assume that's going to be the case for the foreseeable future.

[00:28:26] A company like Shell is still doing hundred-year planning ahead where only fairly recently has it even really started to accept that climate action is going to impact on its scenarios of oil sales. And that fossil fuel dependent nature of growth is really important to understand, because that also means then that you go back to the more conventional international relations accounts, then the question of quotes 'national interests' can be read through that.

[00:28:57] So with the extreme case of some states essentially, there are their interests as states are fundamentally structured by fossil fuel resources of which oil is usually the most important of those, if only because coal actually is quite widely dispersed around the world, there are relatively few parts of the world they don't have any coal, but oil is quite concentrated in specific parts of the world. And of course the extreme versions of that are places like Saudi Arabia where it's an oil economy more or less entirely. So that's one way of thinking about it, and then you can situate the strategies of different countries in relation to that, in relation to climate change as a sort of in relation to the available fossil fuel resources and the sorts of economies that have been built up on the back of that.

[00:29:45] But it's also then really interesting to look at the variations and you can see that there's actually quite a lot of ways in which those crude questions of resources don't determine fully what states do. So you take a state like Norway which is an oil state - it's essentially for Canadian audiences it's Alberta, basically in the European context - but compared to Alberta with the partial exception of the Rachel Notley government era, but only a partial exception; it's radically different in terms of how it's oil dependent economy has then interacted with its desires to do something about climate change. Over 50% of new car sales in Norway are electric vehicles, which would seem completely paradoxical from its interest as a producing state.

[00:30:39] So you do have quite a lot of variation even within this sort of general point that you would get from an IP sort of perspective to say that it's the embeddedness of the global economy in fossil fuel resources over the last 200 years that is the driving force for lots of the patterns we see about why which different countries take different types of strategies

and broadly, if you like, it would bring back to thinking about climate governance, as you could think about it as crudely speaking, a conflict between a Carboniferous block, a block of countries whose economies are really dependent on coal and other resources versus a group of countries which we could call an ecological modernizing block or something, who are much less dependent on those fossil fuel resources or whose resources of those are going to run out quite soon.

[00:31:31] And so they feel the need to transition away with some anomaly countries like Norway fitting in, and in terms of what Yixian was saying about China, then you're in a really interesting situation where on the one hand, there is still huge amounts of coal in China that they could burn, but it's got its own contradictions, which are not really anything to do with climate policy, but they have lots of other reasons to reduce coal consumption because of air pollution, problems and health issues, to do with that within China. But also of course they've generated a huge amount of inward investment to do with the renewable energy economy, solar in particular. So you've got these sort of competing interests around energy resources that I think you can see drive a lot of the patterns in global climate politics.

[00:32:21] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Matt that gets me to a specific question that I wanted to make sure I asked you; you raised this question earlier about whether Canada is an example of a state that might have some contradictions in terms of competing interests between perhaps an economic desire to extract fossil fuel resources and maybe environmental interests in terms of mitigating climate change and decarbonizing, and also an economic interest there.

[00:32:48] And we have seen the rise of considerable amount of opposition towards pipeline projects and I'm curious about the argument that is often made by proponents of pipelines, which is that if you are successful in your opposition and we don't build this fossil fuel infrastructure, you will essentially see other countries, like Russia or Saudi Arabia or Iran, fill a production void, fill a demand for this product oil and gas. And I'm wondering what you make of this counter-argument against fossil fuel activism?

[00:33:22] **Matthew Paterson:** I think the first thing I would say is that a lot depends on what you think the trajectory of oil demand is going to be. And I would take a lot from an energy economist at Oxford called Dieter Helm who's an interesting guy because he is an oil man, right? That's what he is and he's always coming to climate change from the point of view of oil. And he's, I think in the last 15 years or so, changed his position quite dramatically - he used to be somebody who was very bullish about the future of oil, thought peak oil was nonsense, still probably thinks peak oil is nonsense actually, but was fairly bullish about how oil would deal with the climate futures and now his position is much more bearish from another point of view on that. And it's not a peak oil argument, but it is saying that if you look at the dramatic decline in oil prices over the last year, last few years, and you look at the sort of demand trajectories in lots and lots of countries, including rapidly industrializing countries like China although oil demand is still going up in China, you now see, for him he says, 'Like we're in an era of low oil prices because we're in an era where a) the US has dramatically expanded its supply and it's done so at the same time as there is essentially a

slowdown or stagnation of demand globally, and that's likely to stay in part because enough parts of the world are now engaged in transitions away from oil'.

[00:35:02] That in the transport sector, which is obviously where oil is predominantly used, that means that you can't base an economic strategy on oils in a way that you would have assumed to be enough to do even 20 years ago. So I think that's a fairly persuasive argument about the future of oil demand. The point that Yixian was saying about EVs, the last figures I saw EVs of in China, I think it was that 6% of new cars in China are EVs. Gave the example of Norway, obviously a small country, but we're over 50% of new cars are EVs - loads and loads of countries are fairly dramatically increasing that. Sort of figures for the UK during obviously the COVID related crisis of the last year, the demand for new cars in general declined quite dramatically, but the demand for EVs actually accelerated in the UK; people were buying increasingly high percentage of the new cars being bought were electric vehicles.

[00:35:59] So that's the sort of scenario where basing your economy on oil, when you're a relatively high cost producer, which Alberta oil is always going to be high cost and it was only ever really profitable when prices were high, is just a mistake in economic strategy. So the ethical oil stuff was always obviously a certain amount of nonsense to that anyway that was self-serving. But I just can't see the Canadian economy sensibly being managed on the basis of a rebounding of oil demand in ways that Alberta producers could take advantage of effectively.

[00:36:36] And so the pipelines make that more difficult because there's a certain amount of the costs that it would bring down and make them slightly more competitive. But the demand is just not there, it seems to be in the longer term. And so that's already the scenario and to the extent that lots of other countries are getting on the end of the internal combustion engine sort of a bandwagon, which increasing numbers are doing and some of the announcements out the US government probably don't hinder that. The US is way beyond the curve as is compared to many other countries. But it doesn't, it wouldn't take much to create those sorts of tipping points away from an oil centered economy, it seems to me. And the sorts of things that were mentioned about China, that those seem to me to be a way that even places where currently oil demand is increasing that may not last much more than the next 5-10 years.

[00:37:26] So I think that the Canadian government, which has always been in this weird in between position where it always wants to present itself as progressive internationally and yet structures its economy and the decentralized nature of the federation - meaning the provinces like Alberta have disproportionate amounts of capacity to block federal action or block nationwide action and limit it - has meant that this massive gap between ambition and the ability to realize that. But I think that'll be helped by the increasing realization that even in Alberta, which of course the Notley government did recognize that an oil centered economy is not a long-term proposition anymore, and the sooner Canadian politicians of various stripes realize that, the easier it will be for Canada to resolve that contradiction.

[00:38:17] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Thanks, Matt. That helps to answer that question and one quick question for you, Yixian, before we close up, because I did promise Peter I would ask about this, Yixian you've helped out with the Earth Negotiations Bulletin and we thought this

would be a helpful resource for our students to know about. Can you just quickly tell us about your involvement in that and what it is and how a resource it might offer for students studying environmental politics?

[00:38:41] **Yixian Sun:** I say the Earth Negotiations Bulletin is a very good resources to understand international environmental politics, not only on climate change, but also across all environmental issues because this is a project to try to make the negotiation processes more transparent. So it's part of a program at the International Institute for Sustainable Development, IISD, a Canadian non-profit organization. In this project, every time there's a UN processes of environmental negotiations, the organization sends consultants, which is a global network of people who are interested in environmental issues; I think many of us in environmental politics or governance researchers, and we are sent to the negotiation rooms to track the negotiation processes and take notes and also write an analysis at the end about each meeting.

[00:39:37] So for students of international environmental politics, that can help you to understand what's going on in the negotiation rooms and also to understand the dynamics within the rooms. So often, if you only look at the report, the reports don't mention a country and which countries said what, whereas in the Earth Negotiation Bulletins, in the reports we actually are allowed to mention the countries and also there are more details in the ENB reports and more importantly, for each meeting we do analysis to try to take a broader perspective and also taking into account the historical processes of different discussions and try to analyze the dynamics in this meeting and also predict what could happen in the future.

[00:40:30] So I think I would encourage everyone who is interested in environmental politics to have a look. You can find resources or meeting reports on any kind of environmental issues, so not only on climate change as I said. And for me, it was a great experience to work as an ENB writer, to be able to sit in the negotiation rooms, but also to observe the processes of interactions between negotiators, between these policy-makers.

[00:40:59] And I want to link to a point that Matt mentioned earlier about the kind of obligations that emerging economies like China fuel these days and try to also take a leadership position. And in that sense from my observations, I think this kind of negotiation processes is also a normalization processes to diffuse kind of international norms and responsibilities and try to influence policy-makers in different countries. I think at the end, while you have to work together in the same room and have some face to face interactions, I think you realize maybe there are some common goals between different countries and people really try to work together.

[00:41:41] And of course these days we can't really have physical meetings, I think, and so a lot of meetings, subsidiary meetings, have already moved online. We still hope to have physical meetings, especially for the Conference of the Parties, the COPs, because this is why people think it matters to have physical interactions. And of course, if you are a student of environmental politics, I think ENB also recruits regularly new writers, so you are welcome to apply for it.

[00:42:14] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** That's a good point to end on and thank you for sharing that. So it's a tremendous resource and I'm sure if you even just Google it, Earth Negotiations Bulletin, you should be able to track down some of the reports and newsletters or bulletins, whatever you want to call it, that Yixian has just shared with us.

[00:42:30] Thank you guys, both so much. We do have to leave it there, but this has been a really enlightening discussion for me and I'm sure for our listeners. You've really helped us better understand the nuanced and complex ways in which politics, both within and between great powers, is shaping global environmental governance. Let me thank you both Dr. Matthew Paterson and Dr. Yixian Sun for sharing your thoughts on this complicated topic, so thank you once again.

[00:42:55] And a reminder to everyone out there, the podcast is made available under a Creative Commons License 2.0 Canada, so we share it widely, we just ask that you provide appropriate attribution. Follow us on Twitter @EcoPoliticsP, that's ecopolitics with a capital 'P'. And get in touch, our website is [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca). The Global Ecopolitics Podcast is produced by Nicole Bedford, support with transcription and captioning is provided by Kika Mueller, and Adam Gibbard helps us with artistic design and digital support.

[00:43:24] See you all in the next step, stay tuned. .