

‘China Is the Engine’ Driving Nations Away From Fossil Fuels, Report Says

Its vast investment in solar, wind and batteries is on track to end an era of global growth in the use of coal, oil and gas, the researchers said.



Solar panels and wind turbines in Shandong Province, China, in June.Credit...Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By [Max Bearak](#) Sept. 8, 2025

Since the beginning of the industrial age, the global economy has required more and more fossil fuels — coal, oil and gas — to power growth.

It is increasingly clear, however, that China’s aggressive efforts to sell batteries, solar panels and wind turbines to the world is on course to bring that era to an end, a new report says. The Chinese dominance of clean-energy industries is “creating the conditions for a decline in fossil fuel use,” according to [a report by Ember](#), a research group focused on the prospects for clean-energy technologies.

The report includes a sprawling set of data to support its claim.

As renewables rise, fossil fuels show signs of plateau

China's Renewable Energy Investment Helping Stem Fossil Fuel Growth, Report Says - The New York Times

The scale of Chinese production since 2010 has driven the price of these technologies down by 60 to 90 percent, the researchers found. And last year, more than 90 percent of wind and solar projects commissioned worldwide produced power more cheaply than the cheapest available fossil-fuel alternative, they said. That cost advantage might have seemed laughable before China began pumping billions of dollars of subsidies into the sector.

"China is the engine," said Richard Black, the report's editor. "And it is changing the energy landscape not just domestically but in countries across the world."

If Beijing is trying to wrest the future of energy from anyone, it would be the United States, the world's biggest oil and gas producer and exporter. The Trump administration has [eliminated almost all federal support for renewable energies](#) and has [pressured countries](#) to purchase American fossil fuels as part of trade deals.

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The falling cost of renewable energy, though, means that many countries, particularly poorer ones, have a strong incentive to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels.

According to Ember's report, the falling costs of energy produced by Chinese-made wind and solar installations have allowed countries like Mexico, Bangladesh and Malaysia to race past the United States in recent years in terms of using renewably produced electricity (rather than fossil fuels) in everyday activities like heating and cooling buildings or powering vehicles.

Across Africa, solar panel imports from China rose 60 percent in the last 12 months, and 20 African countries imported a record amount over that period, Ember said in a [separate study](#) recently.

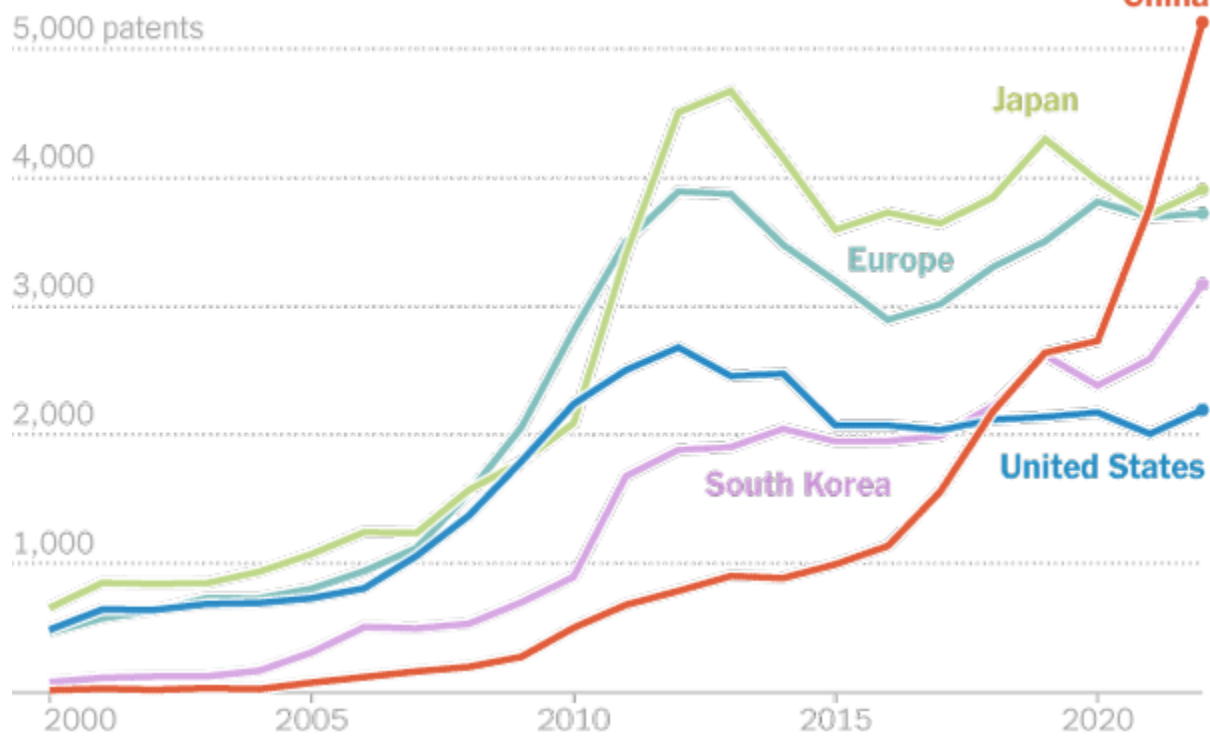
American companies, who do not make solar panels or wind turbines at anywhere near the scale of Chinese ones, are at a major disadvantage. Chinese companies now supply 80 percent of solar panels and 60 percent of wind turbines worldwide, Ember said.

[Chinese Car Giants Rush Into Brazil With Dreams of Dominating a Continent](#)

[As the likes of Ford and Mercedes retreat, Great Wall Motor and BYD are building factories and bringing affordable EVs and hybrids to one of the world's biggest markets.](#)

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Where high-quality patents are originating



[How China Went From Clean Energy Copycat to Global Innovator](#)

[A surge in high quality research and patent applications has cemented China's dominance in the industry.](#)

[China has pushed for dominance](#) in renewable energy partly for economic reasons and also to protect its national security by limiting its reliance on oil imports. But the implications for the planet's health could scarcely be greater. Scientific consensus has long been that a sharp decline in fossil fuel use is the surest way to lessen the pace of climate change.

"For too long, emerging economies have faced what seemed like a stark trade-off between growth and sustainability," said Suwit Khunkitti, Thailand's former deputy prime minister. The Ember report "challenges that assumption," he said.

To be sure, some countries would not be keen to rely so heavily on Chinese technology for geopolitical reasons. And few developing countries have the spending capacity to install the kinds of energy transmission and storage capacity that has allowed China to transform its own domestic energy grid so quickly.

When the world's fossil fuel use will peak also comes down to the pace of that change in China itself.

China still burns more coal than the rest of the world combined and emits more climate pollution than the United States and Europe together. The country has not yet seen a decline in coal usage overall, though its total greenhouse gas emissions have reached [what looks like a plateau](#).

But last year, China met 84 percent of its electricity demand growth with solar and wind power, according to the report. That meant it was able to cut fossil fuel use by 2 percent, despite a growing demand for power.

Renewables meet most of China's new electricity demand

By Harry Stevens/The New York Times

Mr. Black said that decline in fossil fuel use was largely due to burning less coal to produce electricity. He pointed to a number of recent policy directives that have reallocated subsidies and production incentives away from coal and toward solar and wind.

China is still building dozens of new coal-burning power plants, he said, but instead of running constantly like many existing ones, they might be at full capacity only during peaks in energy demand. Meanwhile, the contribution of wind and solar to the grid was quickly growing, he said.

"Coal is increasingly acting like training wheels," said Yuan Jiahai, a professor at North China Electric Power University. "It provides balance and backup while the clean electricity system gains strength and confidence."

China's economy as a whole is increasingly reliant on the clean energy sector.

Investment and production in clean energy last year contributed nearly \$2 trillion to China's economy, a figure which the report said was around one-tenth of the country's economy as a whole, or comparable to Australia's entire economy. The clean energy sector grew at a rate three times that of China's economy overall, according to the report.

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