

China has long been the world's top emitter of greenhouse gases, making its climate and energy policies crucial for the rest of the world. It initially took the position that Westerners had caused the problem and should carry the entire burden of fixing it. Over time, however, it has shifted into a position of leadership in clean technology and cooperation on climate issues. The world didn't take notice of this shift, however, until very recently. At the moment, China's stance is thrown into high relief by the current American government's hostility to clean energy and climate policy.

It would be naive to think that this is because of a willingness to sacrifice for global welfare. Instead, it reflects the Chinese leadership's views of China's economic and geopolitical interests. At the moment, however, those coincide with the imperative of expanding clean energy.

2001.

U.S. rejects Kyoto Protocol. The Protocol required developed nations to start cutting emissions. A major reason for opposition was that the Protocol did not require developing countries like China to cut emissions.

2006.

China becomes #1 carbon emitter globally.

China says the West caused climate change and should be solely responsible for fixing it.

2009.

At the Copenhagen conference, China retreats from previous demand that developed countries fund emissions reductions.

China becomes #1 producer of wind turbines.

2011.

China begins pilot emissions trading programs in select cities

2013.

China becomes world's #1 producer of solar cells.

In a joint presidential statement with the U.S., China announces support for Paris Agreement.

2015

China becomes #1 producer of EVs and of batteries.

2021.

China launches nationwide trading program.

President Xi decides to prioritize renewables as a strategic industry.

2023.

Chinese firm BYD's sales begin to exceed Tesla's.

2024.

China's emissions appear to peak.

China hits its 2030 target (set in 2020) for renewable energy six years early.

2025.

China pledges emission reductions for the first time.