



China plays Tai Chi on global climate governance issues

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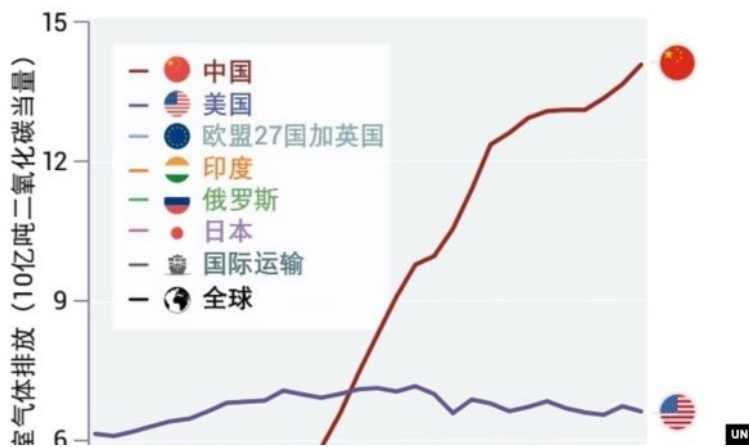


Cooling tower of Sanhe Power Plant in Hebei Province, China. (July 18, 2019)

WASHINGTON—

Chinese President Xi Jinping said at the Global Climate Summit on Thursday that China will strictly control coal-fired power projects, but has not made any new commitments. China has previously stated that it will strive to achieve no growth in carbon dioxide emissions by 2030, and achieve "zero emissions" of carbon dioxide by 2060 with various neutralization effects. However, some analysis pointed out that China can fully achieve these goals ahead of schedule.

China's greenhouse gas emissions far exceed those of any other country, and its goal of carbon neutrality is ten years later than that of more than 100 countries in the world. But for a long time, China has not become a target of the international community, but has won considerable praise. The voice of China has made it possible for China to transform itself into a leader in international climate governance, making this issue a rare bright spot where China is able to do well on the world stage.



UN greenhouse gases chart

What has China promised?

China's greenhouse gas emissions account for as much as a quarter of the global total, which is about twice that of the United States. Moreover, China's emissions are still rising despite the reduction in the United States and the European Union over the past decade or two. It will not reach its peak until 2030. Information from the US Environmental Protection Agency shows that carbon dioxide emissions in the United States reached its peak as early as 2007, more than 20 years earlier than China.

China has not set an absolute limit on carbon dioxide emissions since it formally proposed its emission reduction target in September last year, nor has it released any details.

Zhou Xiaochuan, the former governor of the People's Bank of China, stated earlier this month that China's emission reduction targets have clarified the reduction of carbon emission intensity, but the total amount of emissions is still unclear. He said in an article published on China's new website that he continues to not use absolute quantitative indicators, "it is possible to 'play Tai Chi' numerically, especially for foreigners."

In addition, China's "coal peak" and "carbon neutral" targets only involve carbon dioxide, not greenhouse gas emissions. The target is carbon neutral, not climate neutral. Although carbon dioxide is one of the main greenhouse gases that cause global warming, it is not all greenhouse gas emissions. For this reason, the emission reduction targets of countries such as the United States and the European Union are all based on greenhouse gas emissions.

Data from the US Environmental Protection Agency shows that carbon dioxide from fossil fuels and industrial production only accounts for 65% of total greenhouse gas emissions, and natural emissions such as forests account for about 10%. A report by the US think tank "Strategic and International Research Center" stated that non-carbon dioxide emissions such as methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases account for about 20% of China's total emissions, and the heat trapped by methane in the atmosphere is carbon dioxide. 28 times. The report cited data from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and pointed out that with the development of the economy, China's nitrous oxide and methane emissions have skyrocketed for many years. In 2017, China's methane emissions accounted

for 18.8% of the global total. Accounted for 18.4%, which is more than the sum of India, France, Germany and Russia.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said at the climate summit on Thursday that China will strengthen the control of non-carbon dioxide greenhouse gases, but did not mention whether these gases will be included in China's carbon emission reduction targets.

China gorgeous turn

Despite this, China's commitments and emission reduction efforts have attracted a lot of praise in the international arena. While China has received international condemnation for a series of issues such as the new crown epidemic and the human rights of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the climate issue is one of China's few issues that has gained certain international recognition.

Although the emissions of most of the G20 countries are decreasing, China is increasing, and the neutralization goal is also ten years later, but the UN Secretary-General Guterres made the UN climate ambitions at the end of last year. After the summit, it was stated that China's carbon neutrality goal and other new nationally determined measures "set an example for other G20 members".

Such compliments also include: The Chinese mission to the United Nations stated that Hart, the special adviser to the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action, also spoke highly of China's climate change goals. It is highly praised by the international community." In addition, China's People's Daily also reported that Manuel Vidal, director of the World Wide Fund for Nature's Global Climate and Energy Project, praised China for sending a very important positive signal at a critical moment in global climate governance, "reflecting China's response International leadership on climate change issues".

Xi Jinping said at the climate summit on Thursday that China is a "participant, contributor, and leader" in the construction of global ecological civilization.

Even among some independent observers, there is no lack of affirmative voices for China, believing that China's commitment represents a big step forward for China in demonstrating climate ambitions. After Xi Jinping announced China's emission reduction targets in September last year, Joanna Lewis, associate professor and director of science, technology and international affairs at Georgetown University in the United States, told China Dialogue, a website dedicated to environmental issues, that China's carbon emissions The meaning of the neutralization goal is very important, "even if it is just to put forward this concept, it is already unusual."

McKinsey, a global management consulting firm, stated in a report last year that China is actively responding to climate change and "takes measures that have caught the world's attention." The report particularly appreciated China's progress in the field of clean energy, saying that "China Our solar and wind power generation technologies lead the world and have achieved remarkable achievements."

Chinese official data show that China's installed renewable energy capacity has accounted for 30% of the world's total, accounting for 44% of the global increase. In addition, the number of new energy vehicles has accounted for more than half of the world.

Claiming to optimize international evaluations for developing countries

Although China is the world's second-largest economy, it has a world-leading position in many fields from infrastructure, manufacturing, to cutting-edge technology, but China insists on calling itself a developing country. Under China's insistence, the Paris climate agreement clearly stipulates that developing countries and developed countries should treat peaking issues differently. The agreement said: "It will take longer for developing country parties." This statement laid the foundation for China's subsequent series of positions and commitments on climate issues.

Since then, China has repeatedly emphasized this provision in the Paris Agreement on various occasions. In his speech on Thursday, Xi Jinping also called on "we must fully affirm the contribution of developing countries to climate change." Earlier, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng also stated that China's "carbon peak" and "carbon neutral" goals are not easy for a large developing country, and it is "unrealistic" to advance the time limit.

Although the emission reduction targets set by China are quite difficult for China, some studies believe that they are within a feasible range. The goal of reaching the peak in 2030 first appeared in an independent contribution provided to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015. At that time, China had stated that it would "strive to reach the peak as soon as possible". A study by Chinese experts published in the environmental science journal *Resources, Conservation & Recycling* in 2017 showed that China is even capable of bringing the carbon peak forward to around 2023. However, setting Dafeng in 2030 will give China an opportunity to announce that it has fulfilled its commitments ahead of schedule on a major international occasion in the future, or make further commitments on the basis of what has already been promised, which may lead to another round of applause.

On the other hand, it is no easy task for the Chinese leadership to achieve carbon neutrality while maintaining rapid economic growth in 2060. China must make major adjustments to its economic structure. Chinese official media said that with the government's strong encouragement, China's new renewable energy power generation equipment last year was equivalent to 120 nuclear power plants, and the proportion of thermal power generation fell below 50% for the first time.

China's "economic miracle" in the past few decades is believed to be based on coal energy, and coal is related to the fundamentals of China's economy. Even in the context of the government's vigorous promotion of clean energy, a recent report by the Global Energy Monitor ([GlobalEnergyMonitor](#)) stated that China's new coal-fired power generation capacity last year was more than three times that of other regions in the world. A research report by the environmental affairs think tank "TransitionZero" earlier this month stated that China currently has 1,058 coal power stations, more than half of the world's total. For China to become "carbon neutral" by 2060, 588 of them must be closed within ten years.

At the summit on Thursday, Xi Jinping promised that China will strictly control coal power projects, strictly control the growth of coal consumption during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, and gradually reduce during the "15th Five-Year Plan" period.

Many specific measures in China are currently unclear, but analysts believe that the Chinese leadership should have a certain degree of certainty to achieve this goal. As early as 2018, the

research results of China's energy research organization "Energy Transition Commission" showed that some of the most carbon-emitting industries are likely to achieve zero emissions by the middle of this century. The committee's report said that from a technical and financial perspective, China is at least likely to achieve zero carbon emissions in heavy industry and heavy transportation by 2060.

The International Leadership Controversy

China is well aware of the importance of climate change issues to geopolitics. In order to demonstrate its demeanor as a great power, China must show a willingness to cooperate with the United States. At a time when relations between the United States and China were tense, China received its first visit to a senior member of the Biden administration. Xi Jinping also appeared at a summit hosted by the United States, calling on all countries to work together and "not to blame each other." The two countries previously stated in a joint statement after Kerry's visit that they would be committed to mutual cooperation to resolve the climate crisis.

Deborah Seligsohn, Villanova University, said that to deal with climate change is mainly about countries formulating and implementing their own policies, and there is no need for a large number of countries to work together.

She said in an interview with Voice of America: "We don't need a huge joint project to achieve the goal of tackling climate warming. Each country has its own energy policy. Carbon policies, most of these policies are purely domestic policies."

Michael Klare, Honorary Professor of Peace and World Security Studies at Hampshire University and Secretary of the Arms Control Association (the Arms Control Association) Board of Directors, Michael Klare said, just as China provides vaccines to third world countries to gain geopolitical points, The response to climate warming has now become a diplomatic game.

He said: "Chairman Xi Jinping of China and President Biden of the United States both want to prove that they are ready to lead this issue. From my perspective as an observer who has been serious about climate change for a long time, we need more than just It's talkative, what we need is a real promise."

Harry Broadman, managing director of Berkeley Research Group LLC, said that apart from Xi Jinping's promise to attend a summit hosted by the United States, it is not clear what the results of Kerry's trip to China have achieved. The former assistant U.S. Trade Representative told VOA: "My guess is that he went through an experience similar to that of other White House officials when meeting with the Chinese in Anchorage."

During Kerry's China trip, neither the United States nor China revealed details. According to Chinese state media reports, Vice Premier Han Zheng of China's State Council in charge of climate issues told Kerry that China expects the United States to "take its due responsibilities and make necessary contributions."

Kerry has repeatedly emphasized that the United States' position is not to deal with Beijing on human rights and trade with respect to climate issues, but the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it is impossible for the atmosphere of the relations between the two countries

to affect climate cooperation. Scott Moore, a former U.S. State Department official and director of the China Program at the University of Pennsylvania, said that during the Obama administration, China used to cooperate on climate issues to pressure the United States to make concessions on other issues.

The American official who had participated in the negotiation of the US-China Paris climate agreement told VOA: "At that time, China had to associate the issue of climate change with certain concessions made by the United States on human rights or political freedom."

The core of the US-China climate political game is considered to be the dispute over international leadership status. A recent report from the Bank of America stated that climate will be the next core in the fight for global dominance. Analysts pointed out that if China may be seen as leading the response to global warming, then this is in many ways because China has taken the lead in many aspects of renewable energy development.

US Secretary of State Blinken warned on Monday that the United States has fallen behind China in renewable energy such as panels, wind turbines, and batteries. He said: "If we cannot lead the renewable energy revolution, it is hard to imagine that the United States can win long-term strategic competition with China."

Broadman represented the United States in negotiations on international agreements. He said that the top priority for the United States is to work with allies to formulate an 'R&D7' at the G7 Summit to meet China's challenges in clean energy and other fields.

He said that the G7 includes the most developed democracies in the world. Although there is a series of trade, investment and other agreements between them, for a long time there has been a lack of an effective cooperation mechanism in the vital R&D field. He told VOA: "As a United States negotiator, I participated in the negotiation of international investment and trade agreements many years ago, as well as of international science and technology agreements. The science and technology agreements are far less powerful and comprehensive than the agreements on investment and trade."