

People's Republic of China solar industry

Solar power contributes to a small portion of China's total energy use, accounting for 3.5% of China's total energy capacity in 2020.⁸ Chinese President Xi Jinping announced at the 2020 Climate Ambition Summit that China plans to have 1,200 GW of combined solar and wind energy capacity by 2030.⁹

Solar water heating is also extensively implemented, with a total installed capacity of 290 GWth at the end of 2014, representing about 70% of world's total installed solar thermal capacity.¹⁰¹¹

As of at least 2023, solar power is cheaper than coal-fired power in China.¹⁶⁵ By the first quarter of 2024, the momentum continued with China installing 45.7 gigawatts of photovoltaic panels, a 34% increase from the previous year. This reflects ongoing growth, although the increase was less than the 154% surge seen in early 2023, showing some variability in expansion rates.¹⁷

China's Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) was the first to address government policy support for solar PV panel manufacturing.¹⁹⁵⁸ Policy support for solar panel manufacturing has been a part of every Five-Year Plan since.¹⁹⁵⁸

In the early 1990s, Tsinghua University scientists developed a new type of evacuated tube solar water heater design.²⁰⁵⁸ These units became ubiquitous in rural China during the early 2000s. By 2014, China had more than 85 million solar water heaters, primarily operating in rural households.²⁰⁵⁸

After Suntech's listing on the New York Stock Exchange in 2005, founder Shi Zhengrong became the richest person in China.²¹⁵⁸ Academic Lan Xiaohuan writes that Shi's wealth following the listing "acted as a strong demonstration effect and local governments across China soon began to invest in the solar industry."²¹⁵⁸

The global financial crisis of 2007-2008 prompted significant stimulus efforts by China to invigorate its then-struggling solar industry.¹⁹⁵⁸ Policy tools to stimulate growth in the industry included inexpensive land, tax incentives, and subsidized loans.²¹⁵⁸

In May 2011, the National People's Congress (NPC) revised the solar target again, setting 5 GW as an official minimum PV target for 2015, with a longer-term target of 20-30 GW by 2020.²⁸ According to a 2012 forecast by the European Photovoltaic Industry Association, the total installed capacity was predicted to reach between 47 GW and 66 GW by

2017.[29]: 35 

Beginning in 2013, China's domestic demand for the solar industry rapidly increase.[21]: 150 

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Between first 6 months of 2022, China built nearly 31GW of new solar power capacity, which up 137% compared to a years before. It expected the full-year installations would hit a record high.[42]
China added a total of 87.41 GW of solar in 2022, up 62% from the year before.[43]

Because solar works well as a distributed power source, recent Chinese policies have focused on increasing the prevalence of distributed solar energy and for developing systems so that electricity from solar energy can be used at its point of generation instead of transmitted over long distances.[19]: 34 

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