

# China and the Planetary Environment, Climate Change

Stark reports about a warming planet were being issued in the early 1960s.

By [Shane Quinn](#)

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*During its 5,000 years in existence as a nation, China has created a cultural and technological legacy of global significance. Within the past century alone, China valiantly resisted and overcame the assaults of both Japan and the United States, taking a course free from the shackles of self-serving imperialism.*

Yet unfortunately, in recent times, China has been inflicting increasing harm upon the planetary environment – playing a major role in the rapidly worsening climate situation. Since 2006, China has been the number one releaser of greenhouse gases that have irrevocably skewed the planet’s weather systems, inflicting widespread harm, with far worse forecasts lying ahead.

Indeed, no other country now comes close in its contribution to planet-altering climate change. Not even America, the second largest carbon producer in the world, and on an increasingly destructive environmental path under the **Donald Trump** administration. China releases over twice as much greenhouse gases as the US, the most powerful country in history. Indeed, China discharges more fossil fuel emissions than the US, India and Russia combined, the latter two being the third and fourth biggest carbon emitters.

In the past few decades, China has endured massive, self-inflicted environmental deterioration in government attempts to raise the population’s living standards. Since the “land reform” campaigns of the late 1970s, about 700 million rural Chinese have indeed been lifted from grinding poverty. This has been achieved, however, through sustained attacks upon the country’s vast ecosystems – accelerating industrialization – a critical turning point in the planet’s lifespan. China has witnessed great declines in its grasslands, wetlands, lakes, coral reefs, mangrove forests, etc., while over a quarter of the entire Chinese landmass has succumbed to desertification.

Improvements in the Chinese quality of life could have instead been formulated on more sustainable, eco-friendly means benefiting humans while greatly reducing damage to the environment. Even as reports of worsening climate change were mounting – tracing back at least two decades – little has been done to address the root causes of China’s climate crisis, its fossil fuel dependence which continues apace. The country has in recent times been paying a severe price for its environmental degradation.

China has the worst air quality of any country, containing the majority of the world’s most polluted cities. It is estimated that up to two million Chinese die each year as a result of

consistent exposure to poisonous aerial fumes. Furthermore, China has significant water contamination problems with about 40% of the nation's rivers suffering extensive pollution, due to agricultural and industrial waste.



China is the world's biggest consumer of coal, last year burning over four times as much coal as second-place India, and more than five-fold that of the US. China is also clear in the distance as the world's greatest coal producer. In addition, the Chinese are the biggest oil importers on earth and are the second largest consumers of oil (behind the US), while the country is the fourth greatest guzzler of gas. As we enter the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it is astonishing that China continues relying so heavily upon fossil fuels - tendencies which should have been seriously addressed and reduced many years before.

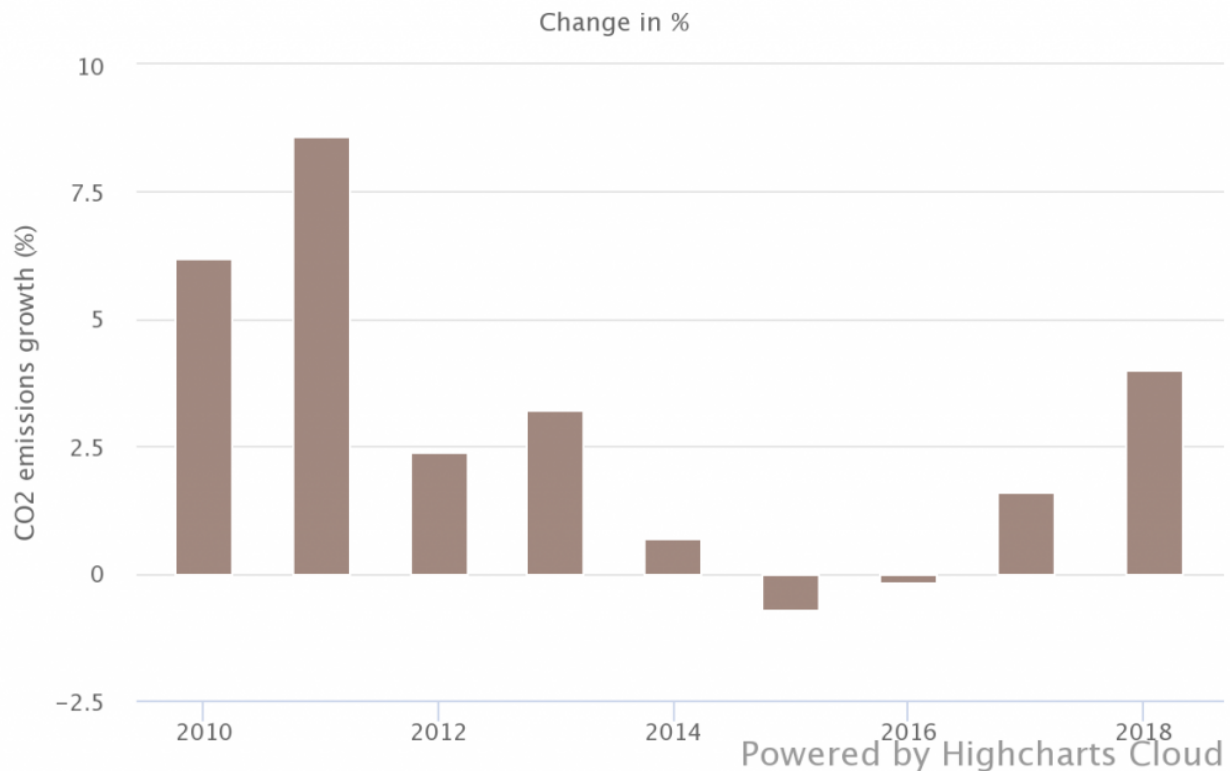
Trends so far in 2018 reveal China's rising consumption of a variety of fossil fuels. Three months ago, the non-governmental organization Greenpeace outlined that,

"China's carbon emissions have accelerated since the beginning of the year [2018]... Led by increased demand for coal, oil and gas, China's carbon emissions for the first three months of 2018 were 4% higher than they were for the same period in 2017... Big spending on energy intensive industries persisted through 2017, meaning China has been backsliding on the climate progress it made earlier this decade, and the rest of the world must redouble efforts simply to ensure global carbon emissions don't climb dramatically".

Some admirable attempts in recent years by China, in leading the way with renewable energy investments and reforestation efforts, will be negated if the country does not tackle its fossil fuel dependence. This is above all crucial. A signatory of the Paris Climate Agreement, China's full emissions for 2018 are forecast to rise by 5% on the previous year, the largest annual increase since 2011.

The Greenpeace report [recognizes](#) that, "For the decade up to 2013, China's CO2 emissions were the dominant driver of global emissions growth, making it nearly impossible for global emissions to peak" and fall. With emissions again taking off at this critical juncture, Greenpeace pins the blame on the Chinese government for "running an aggressive stimulus program that has breathed life to smokestack industries, and set the clock back on the economic transformation and clean energy transition that are so crucial for the country's future".

## China CO2 emissions



By 2025 another colossus, neighboring India, will overtake China as the world's most populous country. As mentioned, India is the planet's third largest greenhouse gas emitter, and its fossil fuel imprint is steadily increasing, even after the nation recently signed up to the Paris Climate Agreement. Within the past two years alone, India's greenhouse gases have increased by almost 10%. Indeed, since 1971 India's carbon emissions have risen by over 1,000%.

Like China, India is unwilling to separate fossil fuel reliance from its economy, with the country being the second biggest coal burner in the world (behind China). Moreover, India is the planet's third greatest oil consumer and third biggest importer of oil, being topped only by China and the US in both cases. With regard oil and coal, India's trend for consumption of the lethal substances is rising. At this pivotal phase, it is again truly amazing to see that the major powers are actively accelerating the race to disaster.

India's failures, along with that of the other major powers, are already impacting its people. Extreme weather events in the country are increasing. Earlier this month, after "once a century" monsoon rains, hundreds of people died in the southern Indian state of Kerala, with 1.3 million people displaced. Two-and-a-half times the normal level of rainfall fell, which matched the forecast of climate scientists predicting such a calamity. In reality, the "once a century" rains will likely be witnessed on numerous occasions, and in rising severity, during the years to come.

With India already among the hottest countries in the world, its general population is increasingly suffering from soaring heat and drought. A national record temperature of 123 degrees Fahrenheit (51 Celsius) was noted in May 2016 in the northern state of Rajasthan, a heat wave which killed over 1,600 people across India. This list of destructive side effects can be linked to India's rising industrialization occurring in the second half of the 20th century, resulting in inevitable deterioration of its environment - loss of wetlands and lakes, deforestation, pollution of rivers and atmosphere, etc., which led to significant losses with

regard the country's globally important biodiversity.

The environmental decline is in many ways encapsulated by the travails of India's majestic Bengal tiger, which numbered between 40,000 to 50,000 in the year 1900, but then fell to less than 2,000 tigers by 1972 (today, numbers are slightly more than 2,000 after extensive conservation efforts). An adult male tiger requires a territory covering 60 to 100 square kilometers, yet there have been no qualms confining these animals to zoos, when by all moral accounts such actions should long ago have been banned.

The issue of climate change itself has been in the public domain for six decades or more. In 1957 the American scientists, Roger Revelle and Hans Suess, co-authored a paper signalling the planet's oceans would not absorb all the human-generated carbon emissions, as previously thought. The Revelle-Suess study instead [suggested](#) that the artificial carbon dioxide levels might create a "greenhouse effect" resulting in further global warming as the decades progressed.

These findings added weight to the opinions of Guy Stewart Callendar, an English inventor and steam engineer. As early as 1938 Callendar provided evidence that, over the previous half century, the world's land temperatures had risen due to the ongoing human-driven emissions of carbon dioxide, dating to the Industrial Revolution. Callendar's views at the time were met with skepticism and ridicule, but were later proved accurate.

The above assertions were further bolstered in 1961, when the American scientist Charles Keeling amassed evidence-based data proving that carbon emissions were considerably rising, due to human consumption of fossil fuels. The "Keeling Curve" had already been created in the late 1950s, a graph outlining the rising levels of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere, showing an upward curve ever since. In 1963, America's National Science Foundation issued the first public warnings with regard the planet's heating, and were [delivered](#) to president **Lyndon B. Johnson** that very year. As one can see, these critical warnings were well known by government leaders from an early stage.

Less than a decade later, in 1972, the eminent English meteorologist **John Sawyer** published his study titled, *Man-made Carbon Dioxide and the 'Greenhouse' effect*. In his work Sawyer predicted, accurately as time would prove, that:

"The increase of 25% CO<sub>2</sub> expected by the end of the [20th] century therefore corresponds to an increase of 0.6 Celsius in the world temperature - an amount somewhat greater than the climatic variation of recent centuries".

Now, it will be impossible to limit the globe's heating to 2 Celsius, with global greenhouse gas levels having shot up by over 60% since 1990. Sawyer's work was published in the long-running British scientific journal, *Nature*, so his findings were surely well known.

The above scientific studies provided clear warnings of what was to come if government strategies were not altered, and shifted away from the destructive influence of multinational corporations. This evidence-based data should have been inserted into government policy from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, reducing a threat that today has evolved into a proverbial monster. Instead, such works by Revelle, Suess and Sawyer were cast into obscurity, overlooked and forgotten, as the world's carbon emissions continued their rise.

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**Shane Quinn** obtained an honors journalism degree. He is interested in writing primarily on foreign affairs, having been inspired by authors like Noam Chomsky. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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