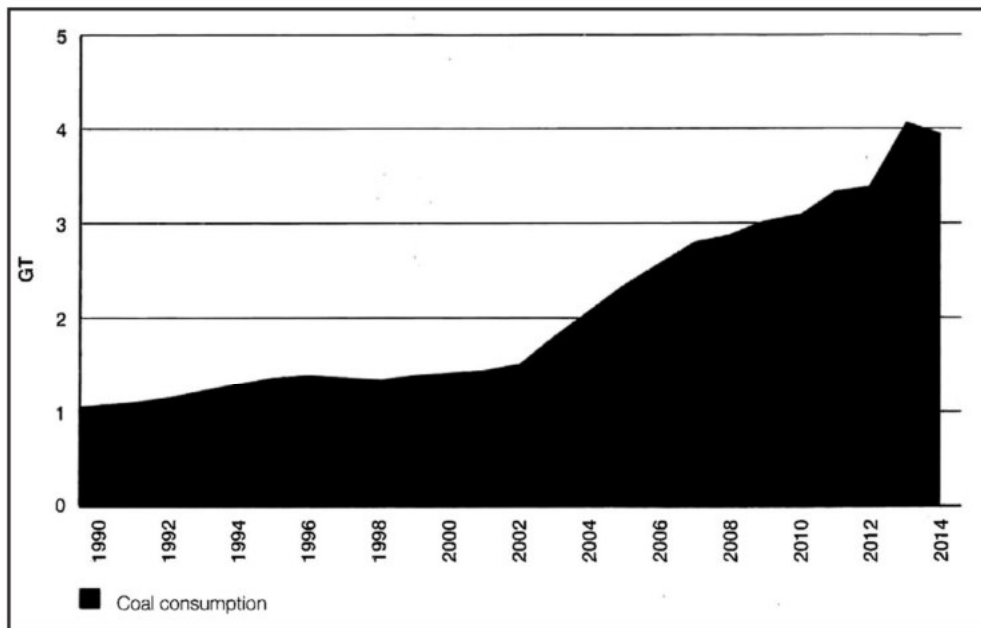


This Is Just to Say...

Figure 1. Total coal consumption in China, 1990-2014



Source: Green and Stern 2015 (drawing on: National Bureau of Statistics (China) (2015)).

There are some figures and graphs which give climate change researchers, politicians, and activists a headache: the development of the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere, measured on Mauna Loa, Hawaii; the too slow decline of carbon dioxide emissions in industrialized countries and regions (mainly the U.S., EU, and Japan, or, in general, OECD countries); and the sharp growth of carbon dioxide emissions in China and India, in big parts caused by the growing use of coal for the production of electricity in these countries.

Not surprising to intimate observers of China's energy policy, the use of coal for the production of electricity declined in 2014 (see Figure 1). This trend continued in 2015, when the consumption of coal declined another 3.7 percent.

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What are the reasons for this development?

Almost everybody who visits big Chinese cities is shocked by the extremely bad air quality, in part caused by coal-fired power plants. The Chinese government became more and more aware of coal's growing impact on health, ecology, and economy, and introduced measures to cut emissions. One of these measures is the reduction of the use of coal – although cheap and available – to produce electricity. Hand in hand with this go efforts to make China a global player in wind energy and photovoltaics. Photovoltaic modules produced in China are much cheaper than comparable modules made in Europe – which causes a major free-trade conflict between China and the European Union. And, the renewable power net additions to capacity in China are – since 2013 – by far higher than in the U.S. or EU.

A current signal: the U.S. and the Republic of China were among the first nations to ratify the Paris agreement of 2015. Some optimism seems to be appropriate.

Günter Getzinger, Graz, in June 2016

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