

FEATURE

China by numbers

10 facts to help you understand the superpower today

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Forty years of economic growth.

Image: REUTERS/Carlos Barria

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This article is part of the [Annual Meeting of the New Champions](#)

China, home to [almost a fifth of the world's population](#), is a country of superlatives. Forty years of economic growth, at an average of nearly [10% a year](#), has transformed the country into a global leader in technology and manufacturing.

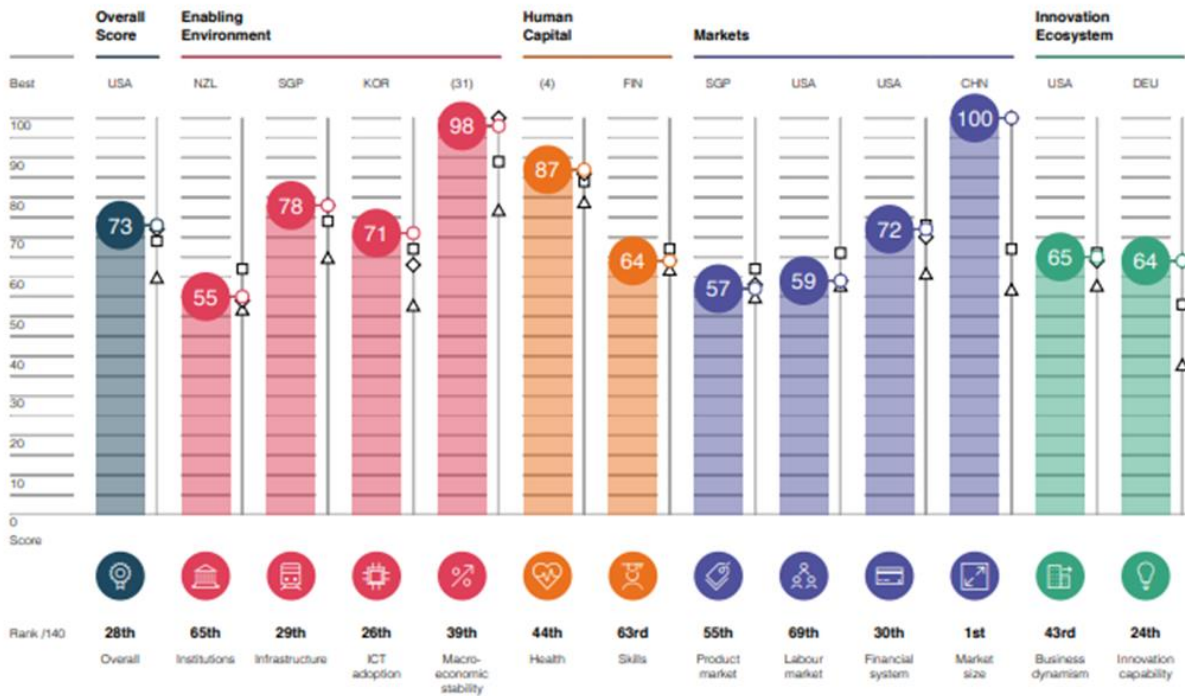
Its economy is now second only in size to the United States - larger if trade is taken into account - and it is [home to six of the world's megacities](#).

Despite its trade dispute with the US, China enjoyed [first-quarter growth of 6.4%](#) this year, more than double the [UN's forecast for the rest of the world](#).

Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 2018 edition

Rank in 2017 edition: 28th/135

Performance Overview Key ◇ Previous edition ▲ Upper middle income group average □ East Asia and Pacific average
2018



Life expectancy has risen to 75 for men and 78 for women, [according to the World Health Organisation](#).

But despite all this, there are big challenges - particularly around greenhouse gas emissions, as huge economic growth has rapidly made China the world's biggest producer of CO2.

Ahead of the [World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting of the New Champions](#) in Dalian, in July, here are 10 facts to help you understand China today.

1. It has landed a space rover on the far side of the Moon

The unmanned Chang'e-4 probe [touched down in a large crater near the Moon's South Pole](#) in January to analyse the geology of an unexplored region. [China's space agency](#) called

the landing "an important stride toward China being a strong country in space exploration".

The mission carried experiments from the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Saudi Arabia. Missions to Mars and Jupiter, a manned Moon landing and a permanent Chinese space station are also planned.

2. It's a world leader in Artificial Intelligence

Chinese businesses filed [473 of the 608 Artificial Intelligence patents](#) lodged with the World Intellectual Property Organisation last year and a third of all blockchain patents. The Chinese government is reportedly investing billions to support AI developers, including creating a [\\$2 billion AI development park in Beijing](#).

3. It's home to a third of the world's corporate unicorns

In 2018, China had a total of [186 unicorn start-ups](#) - companies worth more than \$1 billion - according to the Hurun List. And [it fostered 97 new unicorns](#), or one every 3.8 days, according to the South China Morning Post, which is owned by unicorn company Alibaba.

China is building a giant tech hub comprising 11 cities to rival Silicon Valley. The Pearl River Delta, home to nearly 70 million people, will be [united into a giant megalopolis](#) to be known as the Greater Bay Area.

4. China is a world leader in renewable energy - but also in emissions

The image of smoggy Chinese cities belies the reality that, last year, [China built more solar and wind electricity generating capacity](#) than any other nation. Three of the [world's five largest floating solar plants](#) are in China.

New coal-fired power stations are still coming on stream, but a major programme to close down older plants is under way. As national wealth grows, demand for electricity is booming.



China's Greater Bay Area
Image: World Economic Forum

The International Energy Agency says the average Chinese household will use [twice as much electricity by 2040 than it does today](#).

China is also the world's [biggest energy-related carbon dioxide emitter](#).

This figure increased from 2017-2018 by 2.5%. But, given its massive population, the [per capita](#) picture is a bit rosier.

5. One third of the world's new vegetation is being planted in China

[China accounts for a quarter of the human-caused greening](#) observed since 2000 – despite containing only 6.3% of the world's landmass. Two-fifths comes from expanding its forests.

The [Shandong Ecological Afforestation Project](#) alone planted trees on 67,000 hectares of barren mountainous slopes and saline coast over five years, increasing forest cover and improving biodiversity.

Last year, China created three [sustainable development zones](#) based on United Nations 2030

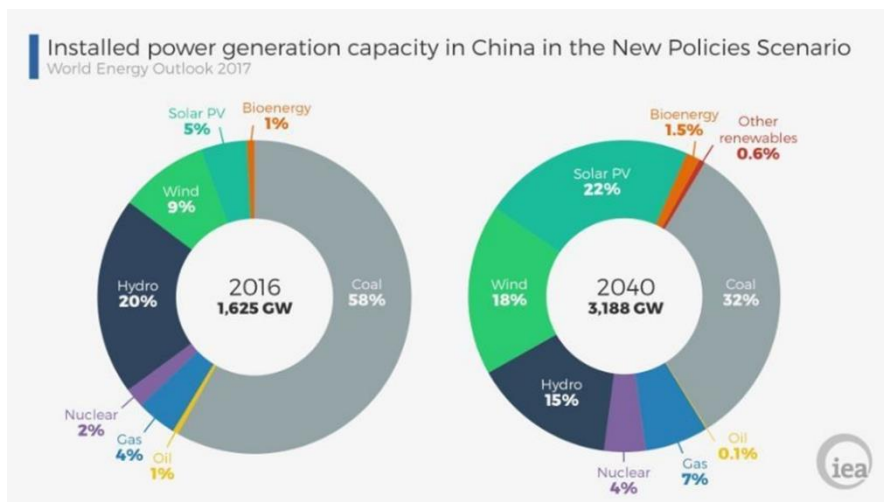


Image: IEA

Global plug-in electric car sales, 2014-2018

China's electric car market is growing much faster than electric vehicle sales in Europe, the United States, Japan and the rest of the world combined.

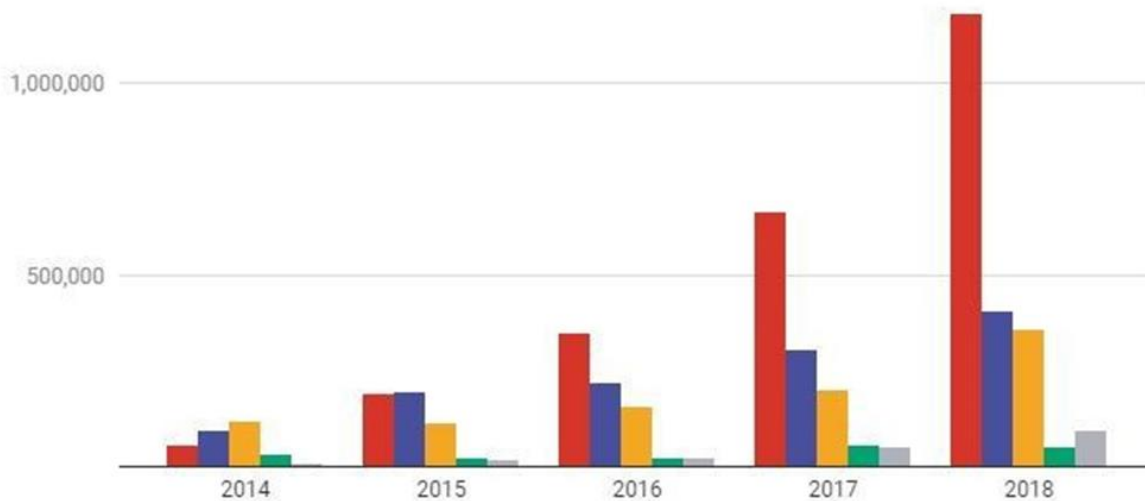


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: EV-Volumes.com • Get the data

Image: Market Watch

Sustainable Development Goals in Shenzhen, Guilin and Taiyuan.

6. GDP growth is slowing, but still high

For years China has been associated with [rapid GDP growth](#). Since the late 1970s, it's averaged nearly 10% a year and 850 million people have been lifted out of poverty.

But, since the early part of the decade, it's slowed as the economy has made a transition away from rapid, export-led growth towards domestic consumption. By global standards, it's still high, however - 6.3% in the latest [IMF World Economic Outlook](#) compared to a global average of 3.3%.

The IMF said rapid growth had negative impacts: "high inequality (especially between rural and urban areas), challenges to environmental sustainability, and external imbalances. China also faces demographic pressures related to an aging population and the internal labor migration."

7. China accounts for more than half of global electric car sales

[Chinese drivers bought 1.1 million new electric cars](#) last year. At the recent Shanghai Motor Show, Chinese car makers unveiled 10 [new electric car models](#) for 2019.

China makes [more than half of the world's vehicle batteries](#) and prices are forecast to fall to the point where electric cars will be cheaper in China than fossil fuel-powered vehicles.

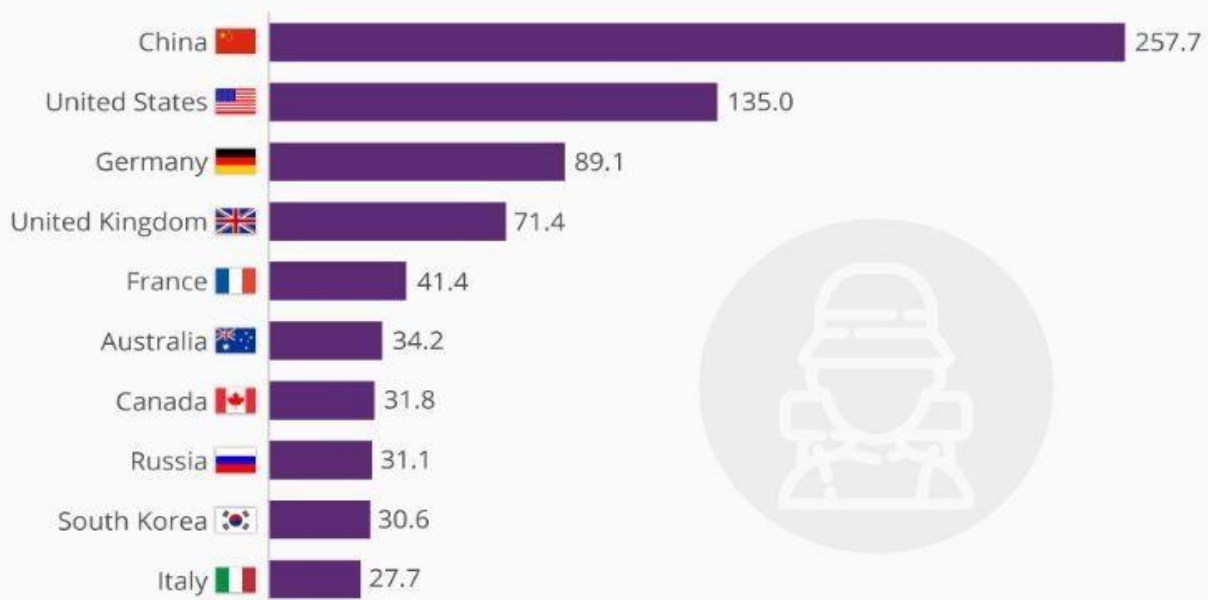
The country is also home to 99% of the world's electric bus fleet with [400,000 vehicles already on the roads](#). [Shenzhen was the first city to replace all its buses](#), and is now replacing all its taxis too.

8. Chinese tourists are driving the growth of global tourism

As China has opened up to the world, so its citizens have set out to explore the globe. The number of [Chinese citizens taking foreign](#)

Chinese tourists spent a quarter of a trillion dollars abroad

International tourism expenditure in 2017 (billion U.S. dollars)



@StatistaCharts Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

statista

Image: Statista

[holidays is growing](#) at over 6% a year and McKinsey forecasts 160 million will take holidays outside China next year.

In 2017, Chinese tourists spent a quarter of a trillion dollars abroad. [One London station](#) now announces departures in Mandarin as well as English.

9. China is closing the gender gap, but lots more remains to be done.

Progress towards gender parity slowed in 2018 and China ranked 103 out of 149 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report.

It did see marginal improvements in the share of women in parliament and has fully closed its gender gaps in professional and technical roles and women's tertiary enrolment.

10. It leads the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, China and India) for competitiveness

China featured at number 28 in the [World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index](#) scoring highly on investment in research and development, infrastructure and IT adoption.

China's innovation score is among the highest in the world, lagging only Germany, the US and Switzerland. But the Index says it needs to "improve performance on softer drivers of innovation, such as diversity, collaboration and various aspects of openness".

So what's stopping China reaching the top of the competitiveness league table? The Forum says it needs to promote competition in its domestic market by allowing foreign firms to compete with home grown industries and it calls for action to address "inefficiencies and rigidities in the labour market."