INSIGHTS INTO CHINA'S ENERGY STORAGE

IAN ROWLANDS

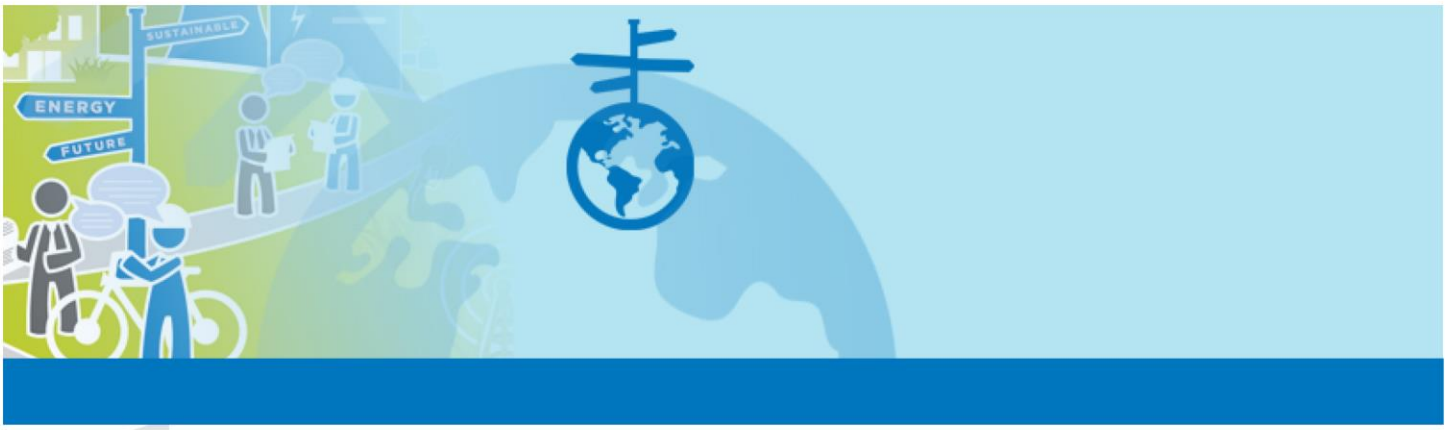
Socio-political factors can make or break the large-scale deployment of virtually any new technology. Energy storage (e.g., batteries, pumped hydro, and compressed air) is one such technology, requiring broad social acceptance if it is to play an essential role for a sustainable energy transition.

So how are those factors affecting energy storage deployment in China — the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter? Because Chinese media outlets typically reflect government positions and further shape public perceptions, WISE researchers Yixin (Candice) Chen and Ian Rowlands decided to investigate.

They scrutinized two of the nation's top circulating mainstream newspapers — the People's Daily and China Daily — for relevant articles between 2017 and 2019. These years marked significant growth in energy storage and public debates over it, driven by China's 13th Five-Year Plan for Energy Development and other official policies related to energy storage.

Next, they analyzed those articles using the Socio-Political Evaluation of Energy Deployment (SPEED) framework. Originally developed by U.S. researchers, it's designed to assess the development and deployment of energy technologies through a set of six different aspects, e.g., social, political, and economic "frames".

In the Chinese newspaper coverage analyzed, the angle that came up most often was technical. Three-quarters of articles discussed topics like the rapid advancement of energy storage technology and the growth in R&D. One-half covered economic aspects, while one-third touched on political, environmental, and regulatory and legal issues.



Although some of the articles discussed the risks of energy storage, the overwhelming majority of coverage focused on the benefits, reflecting an optimistic perspective of storage technology and political commitments to it. While by no means 'the whole story', media representation may serve to be a positive catalyst for the deployment of energy storage in China — and for the country's transition to a low-carbon future.

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***Funding support received from**: Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada*

Source: Chen, Y., & Rowlands, I. (2022). The socio-political context of energy storage transition: Insights from a media analysis of Chinese newspapers. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 84, 102348, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102348.

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