

Stalled wind turbines: governance mechanisms and local routines in Chinese energy transition

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Abstrak

Promoting the development of renewable energy is one of the important strategies for China to achieve energy conservation, emission reduction and energy transition. Although China has successfully developed a large-scale wind power industry, the serious problem of wind energy curtailment has led to the conflicts between decentralization and centralization. Based on this issue, the research questions of this paper are: Under China's authoritarian regime, why does the Chinese government's wind power governance mechanism cause the problem of wind energy curtailment to rise and fall periodically? Why does the governance mechanism show an unstable phenomenon of alternating between decentralization and centralization? Based on the authors' interviews (including face to face interviews and remote interviews) targeting at seven provinces (cities/autonomous areas) in China from July 2014 to June 2022, this research proposes an analytical framework to explain the central and local government's response strategies and governance cycles, and explores the background behind the local government's response strategies- the "local routines" action mode. This research finds that when Chinese wind power governance mechanism faces the problem of wind energy curtailment, even if the central government proposes policy indicators and documents, the ultimate goal of local governments' "local routines" is to maximize their own interests, instead of solving problems effectively. Under the situation that the central and local governments continue to make moves with each other, the problem of wind power curtailment has been characterized by huge fluctuations for a long time, which impacts the effect of energy conservation and emission reduction. This study contributes to a renewed understanding of central-local relations and environmental politics in Chinese authoritarian regimes, as well as to explain the puzzling alternating trajectories in the field of governance.