A Global Hydro Power
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The bosses at Sinohydro (中国水利水电) have racked up some serious air miles of late.

Sinohydro has business interests scattered across China, Africa, Southeast Asia and lately a growing number in Central Asia – the state-owned company is currently working on a 150 megawatt (MW) hydropower station in Tajikistan, using part of a USD 200 million loan the Chinese government extended to Tajikistan’s main utilities firm, along with projects in Myanmar and Laos.

Sinohydro’s success is part of a wider trend across China’s hydropower sector, along with many of the nation’s other technology sectors.

Where once China was reliant on foreign technological imports and knowledge to operate its power stations, construct its dams and build its modern factories, the country now has a small but growing number of companies with the knowledge and expertise to supply its domestic needs, and increasingly those of other nations around the world as well.

TESTING THE WATERS

After relying heavily on foreign imports from global players like France’s Alstom and America’s General Electric — both of which were building hydro power stations long before Chinese firms got in on the act — China is slowly becoming self-sufficient in the design and production of the turbines and equipment needed to build hydro power stations.

While German company Siemens supplied the turbines for China’s first hydro power station back in 1909, Chinese firms are now building 19 of the 24 largest hydropower plants currently under construction worldwide, as ranked by the International Hydropower Association. The 12,600 MW Xiluodu dam, being built by state-owned Gezhouba Water and Power Group (中国葛洲坝), will be the country’s second-largest after the Three Gorges project, with a 22,500 MW maximum output when it comes online in 2015.

The growth of China’s hydropower industry has been one of the key reasons why power generation equipment has risen to become the country’s second-highest export earner...