

Key Facts about UK-China Relations (Updated 14 May 2026)

Trade and Economic Ties¹

- China (including Hong Kong) is the UK's **third largest trading partner** for goods and services after the US (£312 billion) and Germany (£148.7 billion), with total trade amounting to **£130.6 billion (+5.8% YoY)** in the four quarters ending Q4 2025.
- China is the UK's **fifth largest export market**, with exports of goods and services worth **£46.4 billion (+6.2% YoY)** in the four quarters ending Q4 2025, equal to **5.2%** of total UK exports.
- China is the UK's **third largest import market** after the US (£111.6b) and Germany (£87.8b). The UK imported **£84.2 billion (+5.7% YoY)** worth of Chinese goods and services in the four quarters ending Q4 2025.
- UK goods exports to China grew **5.3% YoY to £25.9 billion** in the four quarters ending Q4 2025, while goods imports from China increased **5.5% to £75.4 billion**.
- UK service exports to China grew **7.3% YoY to £20.6 billion**, while service imports from China grew **6.9% YoY to £8.9 billion**, ending Q4 2025 with a surplus of **£11.7 billion**.

China is the UK's
Third Largest
Trading Partner

China is the UK's
Fifth Largest Export
Market

The UK has an £11.7
Billion Surplus with
China in Services

Contribution to the UK Economy

- Chinese-owned firms across services, manufacturing and energy employed over **57,000** people in the UK and generated **£98.7 billion** in revenue in 2024.²
- British exports to China supported an estimated **452,600** jobs in the UK in 2022.³
- The UK has historically been the leading European destination for Chinese FDI, attracting a cumulative **£75.8 billion** between 2000 and 2026.⁴
- The stock of Chinese and Hong Kong FDI in the UK stood at **£32.5 billion** in 2024.⁵

Chinese Owned
Firms in the UK
Generated £98.7
Billion in 2024

Financial Services

- London is the world's **second-largest** offshore RMB trading hub, accounting for **22%** of total trading volume — just behind Hong Kong at **29.7%**.⁶ In 2024, daily foreign exchange volumes reached **£172.7 billion**, a **43.2% YoY** increase.⁷
- London is the **only** offshore centre for Chinese sovereign green bonds (excluding Hong Kong), with the first **£624 million (¥6 billion)** issued in April 2025.⁸

London is a Top
Offshore RMB
Trading Hub

Education & Tourism

- The UK is the **top study destination** for Chinese students.⁹ There were **159,955** Mainland and Hong Kong students enrolled at UK universities in 2024/25, making them the **largest** cohort.¹⁰
- Chinese students contributed **£5.4 billion** to the UK economy in 2021 through tuition and living costs.¹¹ Student numbers have since fallen by around **5.76%**.¹²
- China is the UK's **second-biggest** research partner¹³, with joint publications rising steadily across science and tech fields.
- Chinese tourist visits to the UK are estimated to surge **46%** to an estimated **827,000** in 2025. Travel spending is set to hit **£1.6 billion**, close to pre-COVID levels.¹⁴
- **52** UK cities have official twinning partnerships with cities in China.¹⁵

The UK is the Top
Study Destination
for Chinese
Students

China's Economic Heft

- China is the world's second-largest economy with an estimated GDP of **£15 trillion** in 2025¹⁶ – roughly **3.8 times** the UK's projected GDP for the same year.¹⁷
- The IMF estimates China will grow **4.5%** this year¹⁸, nearly the equivalent of adding another **Poland** to the world economy.
- China has the world's **largest** middle-class population as of 2024, with over **500 million** individuals earning more than 120,000 yuan (£13,200) annually.¹⁹
- China **leads** the world in **66** out of **74** critical technologies, including space, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum technologies.²⁰

The IMF Estimates
China will Grow by
4.5% in 2026

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