

Counted Twice: China's Trade with Central Asia in 2025

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SUMMARY. China's trade with the five Central Asian states reached \$106.3 billion in 2025, up 12%, according to Chinese customs. China sold the region twice as much as it bought, and only Turkmenistan, with its gas, sold China more than it bought. The countries' own statistics often show much less trade: Kyrgyzstan records less than a fifth of the figure China reports.

1. Data

The main series is China's customs data (General Administration of Customs of China), as published by Xinhua [1] and reported country by country by Eurasianet [2, 3]. Each Central Asian country's own figure comes from its statistics or customs service [3-6]. Turkmenistan does not publish one.

2. Trade by country

China's trade with Central Asia reached \$106.3 billion in 2025, up 12% and above \$100 billion for the first time. China exported \$71.2 billion to the region and imported \$35.1 billion, a surplus of \$36.1 billion. Kazakhstan accounts for 46% of the total and Kyrgyzstan for 26%.

Table 1. China's trade with Central Asia, 2025, \$ billion

	Total, Chinese data	Growth	China's exports	China's imports	Total, own data
Kazakhstan	48.7	+11%	29.7	19.0	34.1
Kyrgyzstan	27.2	+20%	22.0	5.2	5.0
Uzbekistan	16.1	+18%	14.2	1.9	17.2
Turkmenistan	10.0	-5.6%	1.6	8.4	n/a
Tajikistan	4.3	+12%	3.7	0.6	2.8
Central Asia	106.3	+12%	71.2	35.1	

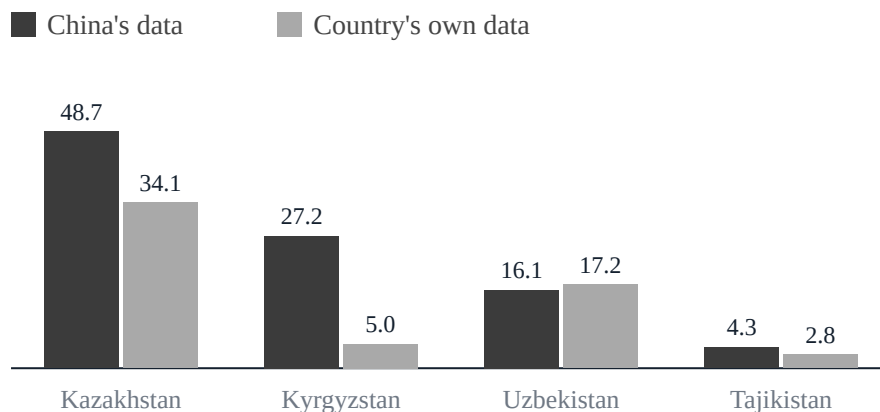
Tajikistan's own total is imports (\$2.3 bn) plus exports (\$0.52 bn) reported by its customs. Sources: [1]-[6].

Four of the five countries import more from China than they export to it. For Uzbekistan the ratio is more than seven to one. Turkmenistan is the exception: it sold China \$8.4 billion of goods, almost all of it natural gas, and bought \$1.6 billion. It was also the only country whose trade with China fell, by 5.6%.

3. The same trade, counted twice

The countries' own statistics often show much less trade (Figure 1). Kazakhstan records \$34.1 billion, \$14.6 billion less than China. Kyrgyzstan records \$4.97 billion against China's \$27.2 billion, and the gap grew from \$17.1 billion in 2024 [4]. Kyrgyz customs officials say China counts every shipment sent to or through Kyrgyzstan, while Kyrgyzstan counts only goods for its own use; under-declared values, unregistered online purchases and goods arriving through Kazakhstan add to the gap [4]. In Tajikistan the two sides agree on exports but not on imports [3]. Uzbekistan is the one case where the country's own figure, \$17.2 billion, is higher than China's [5].

Figure 1. Trade with China in 2025: China's figure and the country's own, \$ billion



Sources: [2]-[6].

A headline figure of "\$27 billion of trade with Kyrgyzstan" describes goods leaving China, and a large part of them may end up elsewhere. Any use of these numbers should say whose data they are.

Author's view

I do not think the trade deficit with China is bad on its own. Central Asia buys machinery, cars and electronics that it cannot yet make, and many of these goods help local businesses grow. The real risk is that the region stays a market for Chinese goods and a source of raw materials, and never builds its own industry. Kyrgyzstan becoming a transit point is both a chance and a warning for Kazakhstan. Chinese goods will find a way into the region anyway, so Kazakhstan should compete for this transit with its own railways and logistics hubs such as Khorgos, instead of losing it to its neighbour. As for the statistics, I trust neither side fully. China's numbers are more complete, but they only show what leaves China, not where the goods end up. The honest approach is to use both and always say which one you are quoting.

References

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Note on method: AI (Claude) was used as a tutor and editor and helped collect the data and draw the figures. Figures are taken from the sources listed; calculations are the author's.