

How Much Are Tariffs on Chinese Goods? It's Trickier Than You Think.

By Agnes Chang, Lazaro Gamio and Pablo Robles Updated April 12, 2025

The escalating trade war between the United States and China has created deep uncertainty for U.S. companies that rely on Chinese suppliers. Retaliations in recent days by the two countries have resulted in huge average tax rates on their each other's imports, with tariffs often costing more than the price of the goods themselves.



But because of an ever-changing patchwork of trade rules, not every product will be charged an astronomical tariff, trade lawyers, customs brokers and importers say. In some cases, tariffs will pile on other tariffs. In other instances, they can reduce costs, while other times they can cancel out new ones.

The new 125 percent rate that President Trump imposed will in many cases be added on top of long-existing duties. There are four main categories of tariffs that are imposed on goods from China.

IN EFFECT BEFORE MR. TRUMP'S SECOND TERM

Base rate

A standard tax applied to imports from the world. The rate depends on the goods. Most rates are very low.

3.4% avg.

Pre-2025 protectionist tariffs

Taxes introduced during the first Trump administration and expanded by former President Joseph R. Biden as a way to protect U.S. industries.

+7.5%–100%

NEW TARIFFS UNDER MR. TRUMP'S SECOND TERM

Steel, aluminum and auto

Trump imposed a 25% tariff on these imports worldwide.

+25% On steel and some products that contain steel.

+25% On aluminum and some products that contain aluminum.

+25% On cars and car parts.

“Fentanyl” and “reciprocal”

Trump imposed and raised tariffs on Chinese goods multiple times this year.

+20% On most goods as a punishment for the flow of fentanyl into the United States.

+125% On most goods in an effort to reset the trade balance between the two countries.

Note: The tariff on auto parts comes into effect in early May. The average provided for the base rate is calculated by the World Trade Organization, which computes an average of all tariff lines. A large share of U.S. imports are assigned a 0% duty, but there are some very high rates in the tariff schedule.

Rates ultimately depend on what is imported, what materials are used (from where), which special rates are applied and what sorts of products are exempt.

New tariff rates on select goods from China

Base rate	Pre-2025 tariffs	Steel, aluminum and auto	“Fentanyl” and “reciprocal”
Syringes and needles			245%
Lithium-ion batteries			173%
Squid			170%
Wool sweaters			169%
Plastic dishes			159%
Toasters			150%
Electric cars			148%
Toys, dolls, puzzles			145%
Vitamin C			145%
Aluminum foil		75%	
Car wheels		73%	
Semiconductors		70%	
Metal furniture		70%	
Door hinges for cars		67%	
Laptops	20%		
Children’s books	0%		

Note: Rates are rounded to the nearest whole number. The rates are calculated assuming metal furniture made of 100 percent aluminum and door hinges made of 50 percent aluminum.

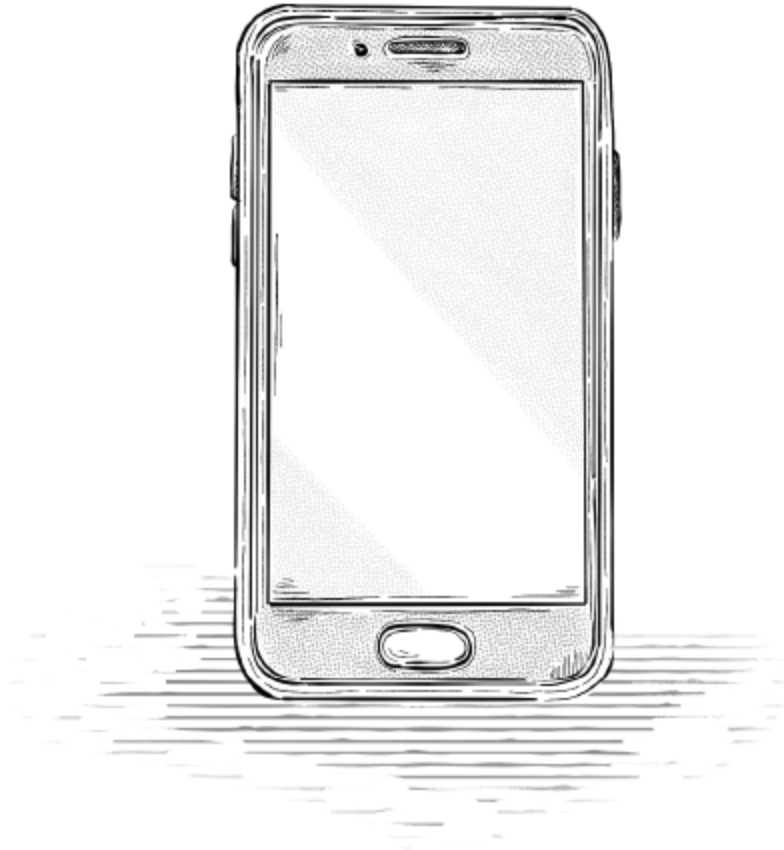
Understanding which tariffs will apply and which ones won’t will ultimately determine what businesses choose to buy, how they’ll factor in the new costs — if they can even afford them — and what they may ultimately pass on to their customers.

“Companies are scrambling to mitigate their tariff exposure, particularly those with supply chains involving China,” said Richard A. Mojica, a customs lawyer at Miller & Chevalier. “But

there are only a few levers they can pull.”

Here is how the import duties on certain goods from China add up:

Smartphones



$$0\% + 20\% = 20\%$$

Base tariff	“Fentanyl” tariff	Total tariff rate
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The United States imported nearly \$52 billion worth of smartphones in 2024 — more than 80 percent of it from China. Smartphones from the country were originally subject to a duty of up to 145 percent, but customs guidance issued late Friday

exempted laptops and smartphones from the 125 percent reciprocal tariff on most Chinese goods. The devices are still subject to new import taxes introduced earlier this year.

Syringes



$$0\% + 100\% + 20\% + 125\% = 245\%$$

Base
tariff

Pre-2025
extra tariff

"Fentanyl"
tariff

"Reciprocal"
tariff

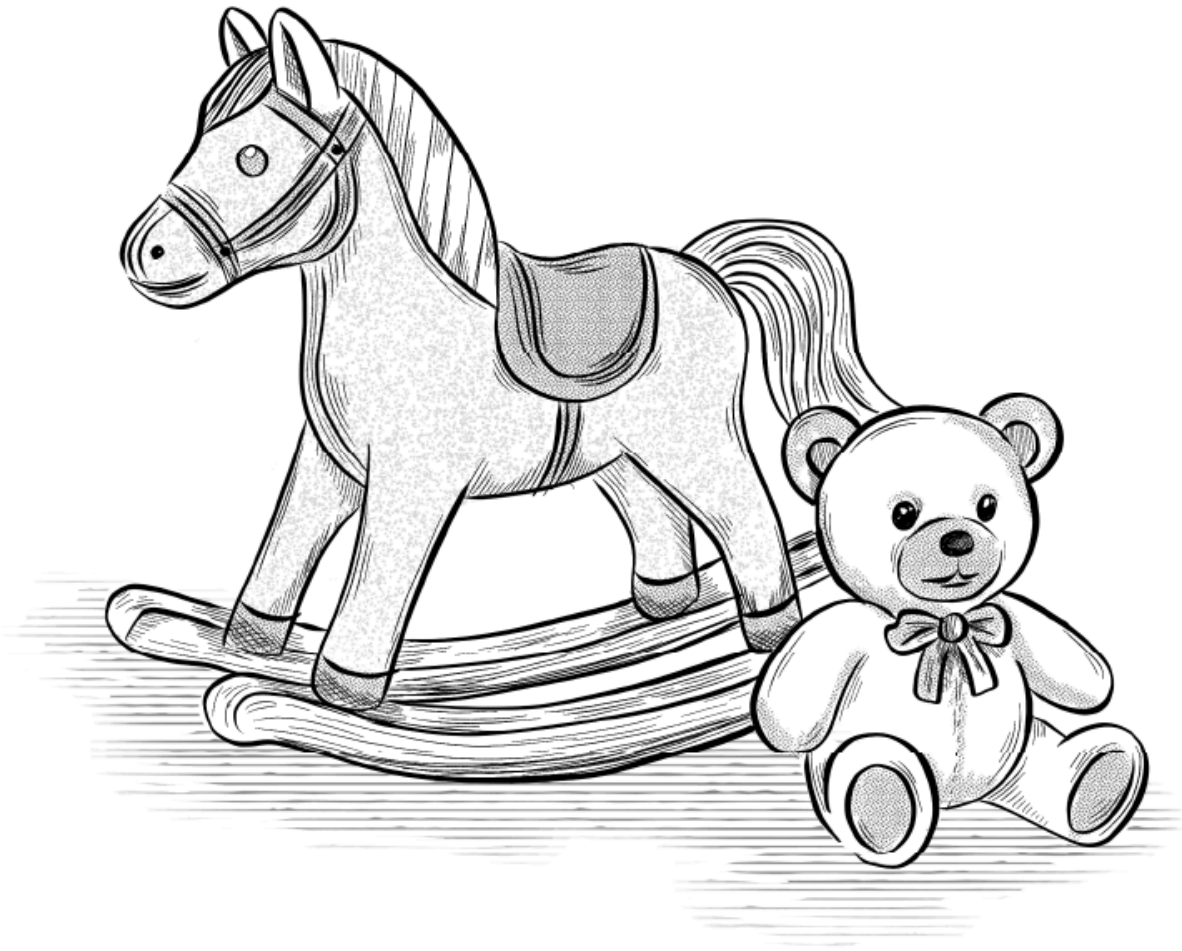
Total tariff
rate

Syringes and needles are charged some of the highest tariff rates. These items are among the Chinese goods targeted initially by the first Trump administration and then subject to increases under Mr. Biden. His administration levied a 100 percent tariff on syringes and needles last September as a part of an effort to protect American factories and show a tough-on-China stance.

These types of tariffs on Chinese goods can range from 7.5 percent up to 100 percent and apply to clothing, solar panels, electric vehicles and other goods that China has been accused of selling at far lower prices than many American businesses do.

With this week's tariffs included, American importers will now have to pay a 245 percent tariff — or roughly 2½ times the cost of the product itself.

Toys



$$0\% + 20\% + 125\% = 145\%$$

Base
tariff

“Fentanyl”
tariff

“Reciprocal”
tariff

Total tariff
rate

Over three-quarters of toys imported into the United States come from China, making it America’s biggest supplier. Previously, things like tricycles, stuffed animals, dolls and puzzles could enter the country duty free. Now, all these items are charged a 145 percent import tax. Retail prices for these items are expected to rise significantly.

Wool sweaters



$$16\% + 7.5\% + 20\% + 125\% = 168.5\%$$

Base
tariff

Pre-2025
extra tariff

“Fentanyl”
tariff

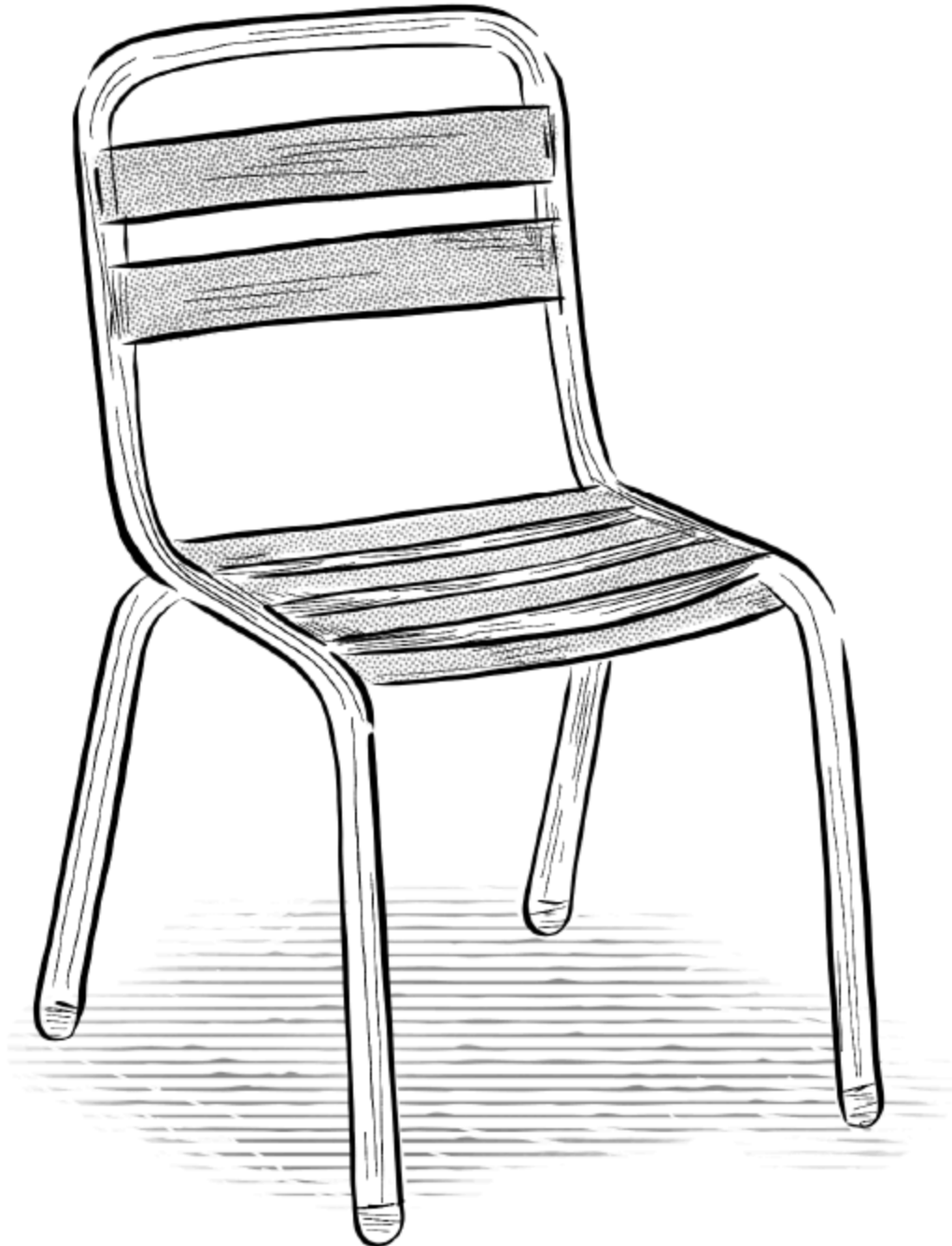
“Reciprocal”
tariff

Total tariff
rate

Many goods have a category-specific tariff that applies regardless of the country of origin. For wool sweaters, that is 16 percent. They are also on the list of goods subject to an additional tariff introduced during Mr. Trump’s first term. For the \$170 million worth of wool sweaters that came into the United States from China last year, the tariff rate was roughly 24 percent — which at the time was considered relatively high.

Now, with tariffs from February intended to punish China over the flow of fentanyl into the United States and with this week's "reciprocal" round, the import tax for sweaters has significantly jumped.

Aluminum outdoor chairs



0% _ 25% _ 25% _ 20% _ 70%

Base tariff | Pre-2025 extra tariff | Aluminium, steel tariff | "Fentanyl" tariff | Total tariff rate

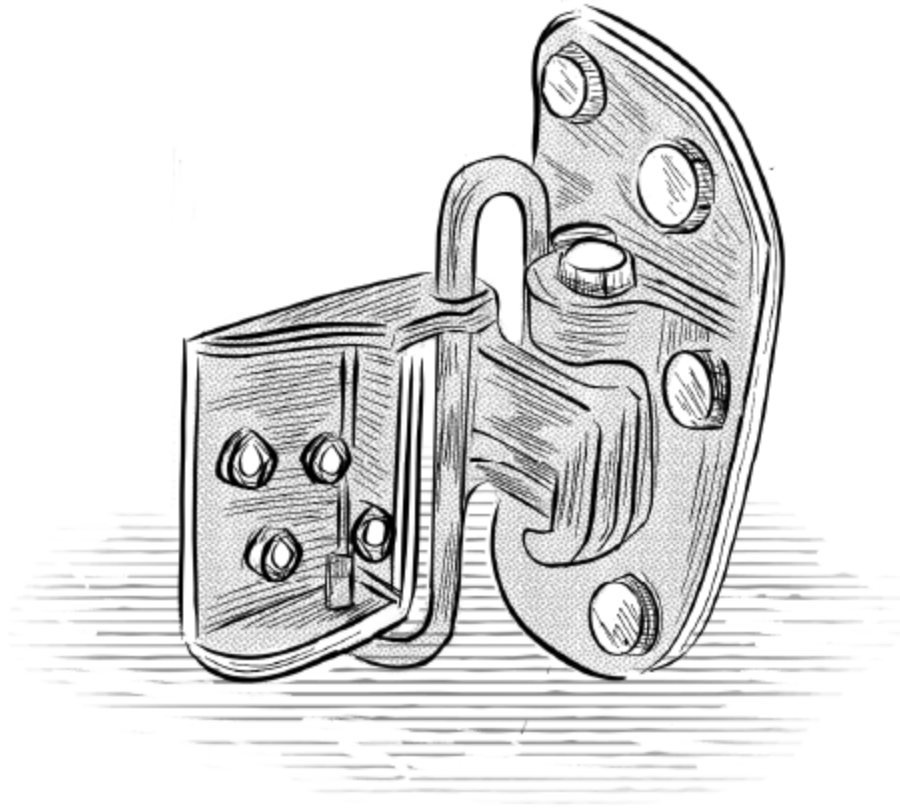
Note: For this example, we assume that the chair is 100% aluminum.

Before Mr. Trump imposed a 25 percent tariff on all foreign steel and aluminum parts in March, there was already a levy on some Chinese metal imports — all part of a protectionist effort to bolster domestic manufacturing. But Mr. Trump’s new tariffs significantly expanded what will be taxed: Not just steel beams or aluminum rods, but a wide range of products that contain aluminum and steel components.

While most U.S. imports of these metals are from other countries, including Canada, China supplies many products that have metal components.

Aluminum and steel products are exempted from this week’s “reciprocal” tariffs, which reduces the effective tax rate of Chinese steel and aluminum products to lower than that of many other goods.

Door hinges for cars



2%	+	7.5%	+	12.5%	+	25%	+	20%	=	67%
Base tariff		Pre-2025 extra tariff		Aluminium, steel tariff		Cars, car parts		"Fentanyl" tariff		Total tariff rate

Note: For this example, we assume that the door hinge is 50% aluminum.

New tariffs of 25 percent also apply to all imported cars, and starting in May, car parts. Some car parts, like door hinges, fall under both the car parts tariff and the aluminum tariff. In this case, an importer would not only have to pay a duty on the value of the aluminum in the part, but also an additional tariff on the value of the entire product.

Because this item is subject to the aluminum and car parts tariffs, it is exempted from the China-specific reciprocal tariff.

Children's picture books



0% = 0%

Base
tariff

Total tariff
rate

On the other end of the cost spectrum are books. Ninety-three percent of the nearly \$600 million in children's books that the United States imports each year comes from China. Children's books typically enter the United States duty free.

“Informational materials” are one of the very few classes of goods that are exempt from new tariffs on China this year.