

Superpowers

America Vs China in 2025-2026

	USA	China
This table about the relative strengths and weaknesses of America and China as superpowers does not use the same language as given in the spec. Use a key to show whether each strength and weaknesses is economic, political, military, cultural, demographic or environmental. Remember, when talking about strengths and weaknesses of superpowers we need to use the language of '<i>inhibit</i>' or '<i>advance their economic and geopolitical role in the future</i>'.		
Hard Power	- World's largest military budget - Has a global military presence (800+ overseas bases) - Strong in cyber security, space and nuclear capabilities	- Increasing military power and modernisation - Dominance in regional areas (e.g. South China sea) - Expanding cyber and space capabilities - But no major overseas bases and has a limited global reach compared to the US.
Soft Power	- The global leader in media, culture and education- still one of the strongest university systems in the world that is very attractive to migrants from abroad too. - But declining soft power under Trump's leadership.	- China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (established in 2013) has increased in pace since Trump returned to office. A key economic and soft power tool. - Hit a record amount of activity in the first half of 2025: \$120bn in new contracts and investment handed out in the scheme. - Nearly half of these contracts were awarded to Chinese firms for projects in Africa. - But censorship and authoritarianism damage its image and soft power abroad.
Global trade	- Still the largest economy in the world when ranked by total GDP. - A predicted 10.4% of global trade in 2023. - In 2024, the USA imported \$440bn from China. - Trump's trade war and tariffs continue to reduce America's share of global trade.	- The world's largest exporter - A predicted 17.5% of global trade in 2023. - In 2024, China imported \$145bn from the USA. - Continues to increase its role in global trade: From June to August 2025, China's total shipments rose by 6% year on year. - Sales to Africa surged by a third, exports to ASEAN climbed by a 5th and shipments to Europe increased by nearly a tenth.

Currency	• The dollar continues to dominate global finance and trade ('dollar hegemony'). • 50% of global payments made in dollars. • 58% of central-bank currency reserves held in dollars.	• 4% of global payments made in yuan. • But this share has doubled since 2022 • 2% of central-bank currency reserves held in yuan.
TNCs	• Still home to most of the top 10 biggest TNCs in the world (Apple, Amazon, Alphabet which owns Google).	• Is now the largest contributor of global patent applications having overtaken the US in 2010. • Many TNCs are starting to become household names beyond China: Temu, Shein, Popmart. This is increasing China's cultural influence as well as economic power.
Global environmental governance	• 2nd largest emitter of CO2 behind China. One of the highest per capita emitters- far more than China. • Withdrew from the Paris 2015 agreement under Trump's leadership and currently not a world leader re. willingness to act on climate change.	• Now the world's largest emitter of CO2 and makes up about 25% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. But far lower than the US when considered as per capita emissions. • Focus is still on economic development rather than tackling climate change but is becoming a global leader in renewable energy (although coal use continues). • Its batteries, solar panels and electric vehicles lead the world.
Role in global action	• Has acted as the 'global police' since the end of World War 2 but is increasingly unwilling to do so in the 21st century (largely because of the cost of doing so).	• Seems unwilling to 'step up' to fill the void of 'global policeman' and get involved in issues beyond its own region / sphere of influence.
AI	• Still regarded as the world leader in innovation and R&D. • Home to tech giants which are some of the largest TNCs in the world (Google, Microsoft, NVIDIA, OpenAI). • Is trusted globally with data and how it is used.	• Still lacks tech firms that are household names. • However, the government is investing vast amounts into the 'AI 2030 plan'. • Is not trusted globally over data handling and data ethics (e.g. concerns over links between the Chinese government and their use of data from TikTok and previous concerns about use of data from Huawei devices).
Biggest challenges to superpower status?	• Trump's leadership and policies are reducing America's global influence significantly: is this irreversible decline or just for the duration of his 2nd term?	• China's economic growth has stemmed from it being the 'Workshop of the World': can it move away from manufacturing and mature its economy into the tertiary and quaternary sector?

		● It's GDP per capita is still much lower than many developed countries. Its population is starting to shrink and is ageing fast: can China get rich before it gets old? ● China's soft power is increasing: can it increase to the USA's level to truly rival them as a superpower?
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Sources:

<https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2025/09/09/chinese-trade-is-thriving-despite-americas-attacks>

<https://www.economist.com/china/2025/09/10/china-is-ditching-the-dollar-fast>

For each of these graphics, write 3 bullet points about what it shows and how this links to superpower status.

Graphic	3 bullet points linking to superpower status
Estimated military spending % of total The chart shows the percentage of total spending on military from 1994 to 2024. The y-axis represents the percentage of total, ranging from 0 to 100. The x-axis shows years from 1994 to 2024. The areas represent: United States (red, bottom), EU27 and Britain (orange), China (blue), Russia (light blue), and Rest of world (grey, top). The US has the largest share, followed by EU27 and Britain, then China, Russia, and the Rest of the world. Source: SIPRI	
America imports considerably more from China than it exports Annual imports and exports of goods in \$US, seasonally adjusted The chart shows annual imports and exports of goods in \$US from 2000 to 2024. The y-axis ranges from \$0bn to \$500bn. The x-axis shows years from 2000 to 2024. The red line represents US imports from China, and the blue line represents US exports to China. US imports from China are significantly higher than US exports to China, showing a sharp increase starting around 2008. Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis	
Who needs Uncle Sam? China, goods exports to selected countries, June-August 2025*, % change on a year earlier The chart shows the percentage change in China's goods exports to selected countries from June-August 2025 compared to a year earlier. The x-axis ranges from -40 to 60. The y-axis lists countries: Nigeria, Vietnam, Thailand, Egypt, India, Germany, Mexico, and United States. The bars are red. Nigeria shows the highest increase, followed by Vietnam, Thailand, Egypt, India, Germany, Mexico, and the United States shows a decrease. Source: China Customs *Or latest available	

Top 5 imports/exports (2024)

Share of total

US exports to China		China exports to US	
Soybeans	9%	Smartphones	9%
Aircraft and engines	8%	Laptops	7%
Integrated circuits	4%	Batteries	3%
Pharmaceuticals	4%	Toys	2%
Petroleum	3%	Telecoms equipment	2%

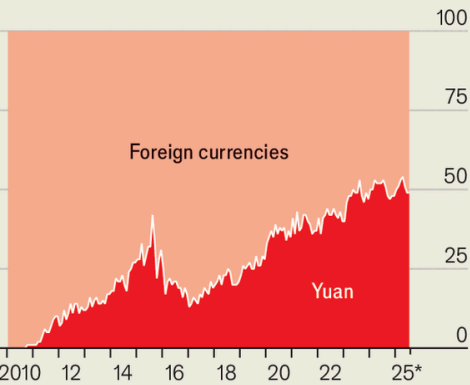
Source: US International Trade Commission

BBC

Betting on red

1

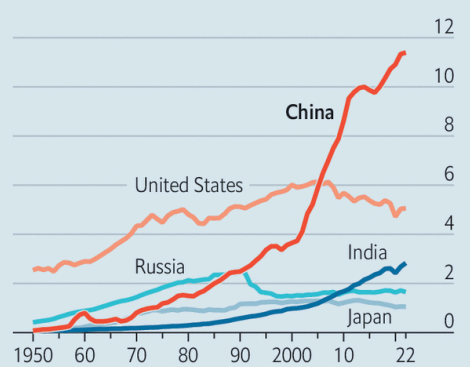
China, cross-border inbound payments, % of total



Chinese exceptionalism

2

CO₂ emissions, annual, gigatonnes



Red rising

1

Preferred leading world power, % responding

