The Tariff Exemption Saga and the Results for the First Half of 2026

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Answering a question from a journalist at the magazine *Yicai* (第一财经) at his press conference of 14 July 2026, Wang Jun (王军), Deputy Director of the General Administration of Customs, clearly drew a link between the evolution of Africa's trade with China and the general tariff exemption that China has applied to the whole of Africa since 1 May 2026. Before questioning this explanatory account — taken up, for instance, by the *South China Morning Post* (China's imports from Africa surge after Beijing expands zero-tariff policy) — let us note that, according to the online database of Chinese customs, Africa's trade deficit widened from 302.5 to 392.8 billion yuan (44.7 to 57.9 billion dollars) by the end of the first half of 2026, a jump of +29.8% compared with the same period in 2025. Over the first half of 2026, Chinese exports to Africa rose by 21.8% and imports from Africa by 16.3% compared with the same period in 2025. Apparently, this worrying situation does not trouble Wang Jun, who extols the fruits of Sino-African cooperation and hopes that it will benefit the development of South-South relations.

The classification of many African countries among the 'Least Developed Countries' (LDCs) has, since 2005, allowed them to export their products to China without being subject to customs duties. Initially numbering 190, these tariff lines gradually increased until they reached 98% in 2017, then 100% from 1 January 2025. African countries that did not benefit from LDC status have enjoyed the same advantages since 1 May 2026. It is doubtful that an announcement made unexpectedly by Xi Jinping on 14 February 2026, in Addis Ababa, where the 39th African Union summit was being held, could have triggered such a jump in African exports in so short a time. This is all the less plausible given that the products behind the growth in trade appear to be products whose producing countries already benefited from the zero tariff, either under LDC status or through application of the most-favoured-nation clause.

Two preliminary observations:

- In May 2026, exports to China from non-LDC African countries barely increased (+0.5%), whereas those from LDCs surged (+30.7%).
- In June 2026, exports from non-LDC African countries accelerated sharply (+29.8%), which might have suggested a delayed effect (customs clearance lags, reorganisation of trade flows); however, LDC exports also accelerated (+36.2%), so the increase is not specific to non-LDCs even though they were only just beginning to benefit from the tariff exemption.

Even supposing that the tariff exemptions may have played a role, other factors — such as commodity prices or sectoral Chinese demand — could equally have influenced the results.

Eight countries alone account for around 94% of the total increase in exports in the first half of 2026. In other words, the rise in Chinese imports from Africa during this half-year is almost entirely driven by this small group of countries, while the rest of the continent (46 countries, including Eswatini) contributes only around 6% of this additional import volume.

Country	Status	Contribution amount		Growth rate
		billion yuan	billion USD	H1 2026 vs H1 2025
South Africa	non-LDC	18.2	2.7	+17.1%
DR Congo	LDC	13.3	2.0	+17.8%
Zambia	LDC	9.3	1.4	+47.2%
South Sudan	LDC	7.4	1.1	+1,289% (very low base)
Nigeria	non-LDC	6.5	1.0	+72.6%
Chad	LDC	5.7	0.9	+361% (low base)
Algeria	non-LDC	3.4	0.5	+102.1%
Zimbabwe	non-LDC	3.2	0.5	+28.8%
Total		**67.0**	**10.0**	

What is the composition of these eight countries' exports?

- **South Africa** (24.5% of African exports to China, non-LDC): a major supplier of iron ore, manganese and platinum to China, as well as industrial raw materials unlikely to be very sensitive to customs duties.
- **DR Congo** (17.3%, LDC): a supplier of copper and cobalt. One important point should be noted: Chinese imports of Congolese cobalt fell sharply in early 2026, owing in fact to the export quotas that Kinshasa has imposed on itself since February 2025. The overall rise in Congolese exports to China is therefore most probably due to copper, whose price is also rising. There would appear to be no effect resulting from the Chinese tax exemption.
- **Zambia** (5.7%, LDC): this country exports almost exclusively copper. Here again, the bulk of the increase is probably a price/volume effect on the copper market, independent of the tax regime.
- **Zimbabwe** (2.8%, non-LDC): this country exports chrome to China, but above all lithium (15% of Chinese imports of this raw material in 2025), the price of which rose by around 50% in early 2026.
- Two non-LDCs (**Algeria** and **Nigeria**) and two LDCs (**Chad** and **South Sudan**): these countries are hydrocarbon suppliers, for which world prices carry more weight than Chinese tariff barriers.

Almost the entirety of the increase in the value of African exports is therefore explained by a shock in world commodity prices, largely preceding or independent of the timing of the two Chinese tax exemptions. In addition, there is a favourable exchange-rate effect for the yuan.

China trade – African countries: 1st half 2026 vs 1st half 2025 (Chinese customs data, in RMB)

Source: General Administration of Customs of China

Country	Trade H1 2025 (RMB m)	Trade H1 2026 (RMB m)	Change in trade %	Share of total Africa 2025 %	Share of total Africa 2026 %	Exports CN→ H1 2025 (RMB m)	Exports CN→ H1 2026 (RMB m)	Change in exports %	Share of Africa exports 2025 %	Share of Africa exports 2026 %	Imports CN← H1 2025 (RMB m)	Imports CN← H1 2026 (RMB m)	Change in imports %	Share of Africa imports 2025 %	Share of Africa imports 2026 %
Total Africa	**1 178 533,8**	**1 411 140,9**	+19,7%	100,00%	100,00%	**740 554,9**	**901 969,3**	+21,8%	100,00%	100,00%	**437 978,9**	**509 171,6**	+16,3%	100,00%	100,00%
South Africa	181 179,6	218 753,1	+20,7%	15,37%	15,50%	74 825,8	94 216,7	+25,9%	10,10%	10,45%	106 353,8	124 536,3	+17,1%	24,28%	24,46%
Nigeria	92 655,4	120 537,9	+30,1%	7,86%	8,54%	83 707,9	105 098,1	+25,6%	11,30%	11,65%	8 947,5	15 439,8	+72,6%	2,04%	3,03%
DR Congo	89 996,1	114 096,4	+26,8%	7,64%	8,09%	15 164,5	25 972,6	+71,3%	2,05%	2,88%	74 831,6	88 123,8	+17,8%	17,09%	17,31%
Egypt	67 892,1	81 625,3	+20,2%	5,76%	5,78%	65 320,8	77 495,7	+18,6%	8,82%	8,59%	2 571,2	4 129,7	+60,6%	0,59%	0,81%
Angola	76 561,1	75 051,2	-2,0%	6,50%	5,32%	19 693,3	16 374,7	-16,9%	2,66%	1,82%	56 867,8	58 676,5	+3,2%	12,98%	11,52%
Liberia	59 902,6	73 966,9	+23,5%	5,08%	5,24%	59 574,8	70 895,0	+19,0%	8,04%	7,86%	327,9	3 071,9	+837,0%	0,07%	0,60%
Guinea	72 673,0	72 131,8	-0,7%	6,17%	5,11%	22 135,3	24 515,4	+10,8%	2,99%	2,72%	50 537,7	47 616,4	-5,8%	11,54%	9,35%
Algeria	50 556,7	62 604,6	+23,8%	4,29%	4,44%	47 190,4	55 802,6	+18,2%	6,37%	6,19%	3 366,4	6 802,0	+102,1%	0,77%	1,34%
Ghana	47 031,9	60 193,8	+28,0%	3,99%	4,27%	39 598,0	52 762,0	+33,2%	5,35%	5,85%	7 433,9	7 431,7	-0,0%	1,70%	1,46%
Tanzania	36 289,7	44 961,5	+23,9%	3,08%	3,19%	34 499,0	42 969,3	+24,6%	4,66%	4,76%	1 790,7	1 992,1	+11,2%	0,41%	0,39%
Morocco	36 599,3	43 510,5	+18,9%	3,11%	3,08%	32 643,8	40 117,1	+22,9%	4,41%	4,45%	3 955,5	3 393,5	-14,2%	0,90%	0,67%
Kenya	36 911,4	40 691,4	+10,2%	3,13%	2,88%	35 957,7	40 018,3	+11,3%	4,86%	4,44%	953,6	673,1	-29,4%	0,22%	0,13%
Zambia	25 598,6	37 960,6	+48,3%	2,17%	2,69%	5 897,5	8 962,7	+52,0%	0,80%	0,99%	19 701,1	28 998,0	+47,2%	4,50%	5,70%
Côte d'Ivoire	25 929,0	33 713,8	+30,0%	2,20%	2,39%	21 313,7	28 601,6	+34,2%	2,88%	3,17%	4 615,3	5 112,3	+10,8%	1,05%	1,00%
Congo (Republic of)	22 266,1	25 603,5	+15,0%	1,89%	1,81%	5 191,9	6 296,9	+21,3%	0,70%	0,70%	17 074,1	19 306,6	+13,1%	3,90%	3,79%
Zimbabwe	16 405,9	23 577,3	+43,7%	1,39%	1,67%	5 349,7	9 335,5	+74,5%	0,72%	1,04%	11 056,2	14 241,8	+28,8%	2,52%	2,80%
Senegal	23 707,5	22 469,0	-5,2%	2,01%	1,59%	18 849,6	20 774,7	+10,2%	2,55%	2,30%	4 857,9	1 694,3	-65,1%	1,11%	0,33%
Mozambique	18 773,9	21 575,3	+14,9%	1,59%	1,53%	12 153,0	16 871,7	+38,8%	1,64%	1,87%	6 620,9	4 703,7	-29,0%	1,51%	0,92%
Togo	20 263,3	18 160,9	-10,4%	1,72%	1,29%	15 011,1	16 756,9	+11,6%	2,03%	1,86%	5 252,2	1 404,0	-73,3%	1,20%	0,28%
Cameroon	16 921,1	17 373,3	+2,7%	1,44%	1,23%	15 441,8	16 221,1	+5,0%	2,09%	1,80%	1 479,3	1 152,2	-22,1%	0,34%	0,23%
Libya	16 836,1	17 005,4	+1,0%	1,43%	1,21%	14 544,4	12 729,1	-12,5%	1,96%	1,41%	2 291,7	4 276,3	+86,6%	0,52%	0,84%
Djibouti	12 567,0	17 003,2	+35,3%	1,07%	1,20%	12 506,2	16 789,5	+34,2%	1,69%	1,86%	60,9	213,6	+250,9%	0,01%	0,04%
Ethiopia	14 609,3	16 306,3	+11,6%	1,24%	1,16%	11 887,2	13 224,1	+11,2%	1,61%	1,47%	2 722,1	3 082,3	+13,2%	0,62%	0,61%
Gabon	13 141,9	14 037,8	+6,8%	1,12%	0,99%	2 471,1	2 744,1	+11,0%	0,33%	0,30%	10 670,9	11 293,8	+5,8%	2,44%	2,22%
Tunisia	9 765,8	11 366,9	+16,4%	0,83%	0,81%	8 900,2	10 252,2	+15,2%	1,20%	1,14%	865,6	1 114,7	+28,8%	0,20%	0,22%
Sierra Leone	7 693,2	10 127,2	+31,6%	0,65%	0,72%	2 914,8	4 366,4	+49,8%	0,39%	0,48%	4 778,4	5 760,8	+20,6%	1,09%	1,13%
Mauritania	8 934,7	9 563,8	+7,0%	0,76%	0,68%	4 240,9	4 995,5	+17,8%	0,57%	0,55%	4 693,8	4 568,3	-2,7%	1,07%	0,90%
Chad	3 209,5	9 512,6	+196,4%	0,27%	0,67%	1 623,1	2 206,7	+36,0%	0,22%	0,24%	1 586,4	7 305,9	+360,5%	0,36%	1,43%
Mali	4 727,9	9 382,6	+98,5%	0,40%	0,66%	4 503,8	6 372,1	+41,5%	0,61%	0,71%	224,1	3 010,5	+1243,4%	0,05%	0,59%
Sudan	6 696,7	9 235,9	+37,9%	0,57%	0,65%	6 382,0	9 034,3	+41,6%	0,86%	1,00%	314,7	201,6	-35,9%	0,07%	0,04%
South Sudan	950,4	8 608,9	+805,8%	0,08%	0,61%	376,8	641,0	+70,1%	0,05%	0,07%	573,7	7 967,9	+1289,0%	0,13%	1,56%
Uganda	6 849,3	7 756,6	+13,2%	0,58%	0,55%	6 330,0	7 226,6	+14,2%	0,85%	0,80%	519,3	530,0	+2,1%	0,12%	0,10%
Namibia	5 971,3	7 339,5	+22,9%	0,51%	0,52%	1 773,7	2 692,9	+51,8%	0,24%	0,30%	4 197,6	4 646,6	+10,7%	0,96%	0,91%
Benin	5 115,0	7 321,7	+43,1%	0,43%	0,52%	5 093,3	7 292,7	+43,2%	0,69%	0,81%	21,8	29,0	+33,1%	0,00%	0,01%
Madagascar	5 866,7	7 058,8	+20,3%	0,50%	0,50%	5 173,2	6 011,4	+16,2%	0,70%	0,67%	693,5	1 047,5	+51,0%	0,16%	0,21%
Botswana	3 809,4	5 902,0	+54,9%	0,32%	0,42%	885,6	914,4	+3,2%	0,12%	0,10%	2 923,8	4 987,6	+70,6%	0,67%	0,98%
Rwanda	2 801,1	4 856,5	+73,4%	0,24%	0,34%	2 118,3	2 655,2	+25,3%	0,29%	0,29%	682,8	2 201,3	+222,4%	0,16%	0,43%
Burkina Faso	3 635,5	4 688,7	+29,0%	0,31%	0,33%	3 306,2	4 466,7	+35,1%	0,45%	0,50%	329,3	222,0	-32,6%	0,08%	0,04%
Mauritius	3 675,1	4 227,3	+15,0%	0,31%	0,30%	3 596,1	4 074,3	+13,3%	0,49%	0,45%	79,0	153,0	+93,7%	0,02%	0,03%
Niger	5 523,5	4 150,0	-24,9%	0,47%	0,29%	1 061,3	1 404,3	+32,3%	0,14%	0,16%	4 462,2	2 745,7	-38,5%	1,02%	0,54%
Equatorial Guinea	3 840,3	3 430,1	-10,7%	0,33%	0,24%	620,6	646,7	+4,2%	0,08%	0,07%	3 219,6	2 783,4	-13,5%	0,74%	0,55%
Somalia	3 399,4	3 280,0	-3,5%	0,29%	0,23%	3 391,3	3 259,9	-3,9%	0,46%	0,36%	8,1	20,1	+146,7%	0,00%	0,00%
Eritrea	3 800,5	2 351,7	-38,1%	0,32%	0,17%	925,4	547,8	-40,8%	0,12%	0,06%	2 875,1	1 803,9	-37,3%	0,66%	0,35%
Gambia	1 428,6	2 187,2	+53,1%	0,12%	0,15%	1 284,0	1 900,9	+48,0%	0,17%	0,21%	144,6	286,3	+98,0%	0,03%	0,06%
Malawi	1 284,1	964,0	-24,9%	0,11%	0,07%	1 203,1	909,5	-24,4%	0,16%	0,10%	81,0	54,6	-32,6%	0,02%	0,01%
Réunion	811,8	846,0	+4,2%	0,07%	0,06%	811,8	845,9	+4,2%	0,11%	0,09%	0,1	0,1	+85,8%	0,00%	0,00%
Burundi	416,7	591,0	+41,8%	0,04%	0,04%	356,1	499,9	+40,4%	0,05%	0,06%	60,6	91,0	+50,3%	0,01%	0,02%
Central African Republic	442,6	583,8	+31,9%	0,04%	0,04%	318,8	419,4	+31,6%	0,04%	0,05%	123,8	164,3	+32,8%	0,03%	0,03%
Comoros	400,9	551,3	+37,5%	0,03%	0,04%	400,0	550,8	+37,7%	0,05%	0,06%	0,8	0,5	-40,2%	0,00%	0,00%
Seychelles	316,2	458,6	+45,0%	0,03%	0,03%	305,0	453,5	+48,7%	0,04%	0,05%	11,2	5,1	-54,8%	0,00%	0,00%
Cabo Verde	465,8	420,4	-9,8%	0,04%	0,03%	465,8	420,4	-9,8%	0,06%	0,05%	0,0	0,0	+56,1%	0,00%	0,00%
Lesotho	578,9	360,2	-37,8%	0,05%	0,03%	450,7	264,7	-41,3%	0,06%	0,03%	128,2	95,6	-25,5%	0,03%	0,02%
São Tomé and Príncipe	193,9	336,8	+73,7%	0,02%	0,02%	193,7	336,8	+73,9%	0,03%	0,04%	0,2	0,0	-91,9%	0,00%	0,00%
Guinea-Bissau	207,1	279,2	+34,8%	0,02%	0,02%	207,1	279,2	+34,9%	0,03%	0,03%	0,0	0,0	-44,3%	0,00%	0,00%
Mayotte	223,4	260,8	+16,7%	0,02%	0,02%	223,4	260,8	+16,7%	0,03%	0,03%	0,0	0,0	-57,7%	0,00%	0,00%
Eswatini (Swaziland)	199,6	208,6	+4,5%	0,02%	0,01%	160,4	200,2	+24,8%	0,02%	0,02%	39,1	8,4	-78,4%	0,01%	0,00%
Canary Islands	14,2	12,9	-9,2%	0,00%	0,00%	14,1	12,8	-9,6%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,1	+305,8%	0,00%	0,00%
Other African countries/regions	9,0	5,1	-43,4%	0,00%	0,00%	9,0	5,1	-43,5%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,0	+51,2%	0,00%	0,00%
British Indian Ocean Territory	2,4	1,4	-42,9%	0,00%	0,00%	2,4	1,4	-43,6%	0,00%	0,00%		0,0	n/a	0,00%	0,00%
Western Sahara	0,7	1,0	+43,6%	0,00%	0,00%	0,7	1,0	+44,3%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,0	-84,9%	0,00%	0,00%
Saint Helena	1,8	0,7	-60,1%	0,00%	0,00%	1,8	0,7	-59,6%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,0	-99,8%	0,00%	0,00%
French Southern Territories	0,9	0,1	-91,2%	0,00%	0,00%	0,9		-100,0%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,1	+636,4%	0,00%	0,00%
Melilla	0,0	0,1	+7,7%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,1	+9,8%	0,00%	0,00%	0,0	0,0	-66,1%	0,00%	0,00%
Ceuta	1,0	0,0	-99,2%	0,00%	0,00%	1,0	0,0	-99,2%	0,00%	0,00%			n/a	0,00%	0,00%