

FREE BONUS GUIDE

How to Contact & Order from Chinese Suppliers

The step-by-step playbook from your first message to goods delivered: what to write, what to ask, how to stay safe, how to ship and what it really costs.

Inside:

- Shortlist the right factories in your SourceAtlas file
- Choose the right channel: email, WeChat, phone
- 7 ready-to-copy message templates
- The 15 questions to ask before ordering
- Red flags and checks before you pay
- How to order: from deposit to delivery
- Freight forwarder or supplier: who should ship?
- Incoterms made simple: who pays what
- Customs, duties and your real landed cost

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How to use this guide

Read sections 1 to 3 once, before your first contact. Keep sections 4 to 7 open while you write to suppliers: they contain the templates, the questions and the checks. Sections 8 to 11 cover what happens next: placing the order, shipping, Incoterms and customs.

The one-page checklist at the end sums everything up. Print it.

Why work with Canton Fair suppliers?

A first quality filter

The Canton Fair (Guangzhou) is China's largest export trade show. To exhibit there, a company has to be **verified and selected by the organisers**: it must be a registered business, export-oriented, with products that meet the fair's requirements. The suppliers in your file are not anonymous sellers: they are companies admitted to China's reference export fair.

This filter does not replace your own checks before paying (section 7), but it gives you a much stronger starting point than most sourcing platforms.

What you gain

- **No travel.** Flights, hotel, visa, interpreter, days away from work: visiting the Canton Fair easily costs thousands. Here, you reach its suppliers from your desk.
- **Weeks of research saved.** No more scrolling through listings and filtering out middlemen. Filter by category or product and get a list of manufacturers in seconds.
- **Contact them today.** Email, phone, website and contact name: send your first quote request right now, without waiting for the next fair session.
- **Direct contact.** Talk to the manufacturers and their export teams, with no middleman taking a margin.
- **Easy comparison.** Company size, years in business, capital, target markets, OEM / ODM: pick the right suppliers before you even write to them.
- **Export-ready suppliers.** These companies already work with foreign buyers: they speak English and know Incoterms, samples and international orders.

1. Prepare before you reach out

Chinese export sales teams receive dozens of inquiries every day. Most are vague (“Send me your catalogue and best price”) and get a copy-paste answer, or no answer at all. Suppliers prioritise buyers who look **serious, specific and easy to work with**. Ten minutes of preparation is what puts you in that group.

Your product brief

Write down these points before contacting anyone. You will reuse them in every message.

Item	What to define	Example
Product	Name, material, size, colour, function. Add a photo or reference link.	Stainless steel water bottle, 500 ml, double wall, powder coated
Quantity	First order quantity, then expected yearly volume	1,000 units first order, about 10,000 units/year
Target price	The unit price you need to be profitable	USD 2.80 to 3.20 FOB
Destination	Country and port or city of delivery	France, port of Le Havre
Standards	Certifications required in your market	LFGB / food-contact, REACH
Customisation	Your logo, packaging, colours, private label?	Laser logo + custom gift box
Timing	When you need the goods in your warehouse	Before 15 November

Look like a real business

- **Use a professional email address** (name@yourcompany.com). A free Gmail or Outlook address works, but a domain address gets faster and better answers.
- **Use a clear signature**: full name, title, company, country, website, phone/WhatsApp.
- **Have a one-line company description ready**: “We are an online retailer of kitchen products in France, selling on our own website and on Amazon EU.”
- **Install WeChat** on your phone. It is the main business messaging app in China. WhatsApp is used by some export teams but WeChat is universal.

Tip: never reveal that it is your very first order

Be honest, but do not present yourself as a beginner. Say “we are testing a new product line” rather than “I have never imported before”. Suppliers adapt their prices and their seriousness to the buyer they think they are dealing with.

2. Build your shortlist with SourceAtlas

Use the filters on the **Suppliers** sheet (Category, Sub-category, Product type, Keyword) to list the companies that make your product. Then read the columns below to keep only the best candidates. Aim for a shortlist of **10 to 20 suppliers**: about one in three will reply with a useful quote.

What each column tells you

Column	What it means	Green flag	Watch out
company_type	Manufacturer or trading company	Manufacturer for custom or large orders	Trading company: fine for small mixed orders, but higher price
main_products	What the company really focuses on	Your product is in the first items	Your product is lost in a long, unrelated list
register_date	Year the company was registered	5+ years in business	Very recent company + very low price
registered_capital	Capital declared (in CNY)	Consistent with the factory size	Registered capital is not always paid-in capital: use it as a hint only
enterprise_scale	Number of employees	51~100 and above for production	1~10: probably an office, not a factory
factory_space production_lines rd_personnel	Real production capacity	Own factory, several lines, R&D team (useful for OEM/ODM)	Empty fields: ask for a video of the factory
target_markets	Regions they already export to	They sell to your region (EU, USA...) and know its standards	Domestic market only: expect compliance issues
trade_forms	OEM / ODM / OBM	OEM or ODM if you want your own brand	See glossary in section 6
payment	Payment methods accepted	T/T, L/C	Only Western Union or personal accounts
lead_time	Usual production time	Matches your schedule	Always confirm: it varies with quantity and season

Visit the supplier's website before writing

Open the address in the **website** column. You will find product photos, certificates and sometimes prices. Mentioning one of their products in your message shows you did your homework.

Manufacturer or trading company?

Both can be good partners. A **manufacturer** gives better prices, more control over quality and real customisation, but often requires higher MOQs (minimum order quantities). A **trading company** accepts smaller and mixed orders, speaks better English and handles logistics, but adds a margin of 5 to 20%. Choose according to your order size, not by principle.

3. Choose the right channel

Your SourceAtlas file gives you up to five ways to reach each supplier. Use them in this order:

Channel	Column	Best for	Typical response
Email	email	First inquiry, quotes, documents, anything you need in writing	24 to 72 h
WeChat	mobile	Fast follow-up, photos, quick questions, building the relationship	Minutes to hours
WhatsApp	mobile	Same as WeChat, if the supplier uses it	Hours
Phone	telephone / mobile	Unblocking a stalled discussion, urgent questions	Immediate, but language barrier
Website	website	Checking products and certificates, contact forms	Variable

Email: the main channel

- Send to the address in the **email** column, addressed to the **contact_person** by name.
- Addresses ending in **@163.com**, **@126.com**, **@qq.com**, **@aliyun.com** are very common in China, even for big factories. They are not a red flag by themselves.
- Send **one email per supplier**, never a group email with everyone in copy. Personalise at least the name and one product.
- If you get no reply after 3 to 5 working days, follow up once by email, then once by WeChat.

WeChat: add a supplier by phone number

In China the mobile number is usually also the WeChat ID. In WeChat, tap **+** → **Add Contacts** and enter the number from the **mobile** column (11 digits, starting with 1). In the request message, write who you are and why you write, for example:

Hello **[contact_person]**, I am **[your name]** from **[your company]**, **[country]**. I sent you an email about **[product]**. Thank you!

Phone: dialing formats

Number in the file	How to dial from abroad	Note
Mobile: 13273771392	+86 132 7377 1392	11 digits, starts with 1
Landline: 0794-3613633	+86 794 361 3633	Drop the leading 0 of the area code
Already international: 86037768356606	+86 377 6835 6606	Remove the 86 and the 0 that follows, then add +86

Timing matters

- **Time zone:** China is UTC+8 all year (no daylight saving). That is 6 to 7 hours ahead of Paris and 12 to 13 hours ahead of New York.
- **Office hours:** about 8:30 to 18:00, with a lunch break around 12:00 to 13:30. Many export teams also answer WeChat in the evening.
- **Best moment to send:** your evening = their morning. The email is at the top of their inbox when they arrive.
- **Chinese New Year** (late January to mid-February): factories close for 2 to 4 weeks, and orders slow down for a month before and after. Plan around it.
- **National Day “Golden Week”** (1 to 7 October): offices are closed.
- **Canton Fair** (mid-April to early May, mid-October to early November): sales teams are at the fair and slower to reply by email.

4. Write a first message that gets answered

A good first message is **short, specific and easy to answer**. Many of your readers use English as a second language and sometimes a translation tool, so write simply.

The 5-part structure

Part	Purpose	Example
1. Who you are	Credibility in one sentence	We are a home-goods retailer based in Lyon, France.
2. What you want	Product + key specs + reference	We are looking for a 500 ml double-wall steel bottle like your model [ref] .
3. The numbers	Quantity, destination, timing	First order: 1,000 pcs, FOB Ningbo, delivery before November.
4. Your questions	3 to 6 numbered questions	1. Unit price? 2. MOQ? 3. Sample cost?
5. Next step	A clear call to action	Please send your quotation by Friday.

Writing rules

- **Short sentences, simple words.** No idioms (“ball park”, “ASAP-ish”), no jokes, no slang.
- **Number your questions.** The supplier will answer point by point and nothing gets forgotten.
- **Give figures**, not adjectives: “1,000 pcs”, not “a big quantity”.
- **Polite but direct.** “Dear Ms. Li” → your message → “Best regards”. Use the name in contact_person (often the English first name + family name).
- **Attach a photo or drawing** when the product is specific. A picture removes most misunderstandings.
- **One topic per email.** Do not mix a new product inquiry with a complaint about another order.

Subject lines that get opened

- Inquiry: **[product]** – **[quantity]** pcs – **[country]**
- RFQ: **[product]**, **[key spec]** – **[your company]**
- Sample request: **[product model]** – **[your company]**

Avoid these mistakes

- “Send me your catalogue and best price.” → classified as low priority.
- A huge first email with 25 questions → nobody answers.
- Announcing an unrealistic quantity (“100,000 units”) to get a low price → your credibility disappears when you order 500.
- Asking for free samples, free shipping and exclusivity in the first message.

5. Ready-to-use templates

Copy, replace the parts in **[brackets]** and send. Keep the structure, adapt the tone to your style.

Template A – First inquiry (email)

Subject: Inquiry: **[product]** – **[quantity]** pcs – **[country]**

Dear **[contact_person]**,

My name is **[your name]**, purchasing manager at **[your company]**, a **[type of business]** based in **[country]**. We sell through **[channels: website, Amazon, shops...]**.

We found your company through the Canton Fair and we are interested in your **[product / model reference]**.

Our requirements:

- Product: **[description, material, size, colour]**
- Quantity: **[first order]** pcs, then about **[yearly volume]** pcs per year
- Customisation: **[logo / packaging / none]**
- Destination: **[port or city, country]**
- Certifications needed: **[CE, REACH, FDA...]**

Could you please tell us:

1. Your unit price for **[quantity]** pcs, FOB **[port]** (and for **[larger quantity]** pcs)
2. Your MOQ
3. Production lead time
4. Sample cost and sample lead time
5. Your payment terms

We plan to place our first order in **[month]**. Thank you for your quotation.

Best regards,

[Full name] – **[Title]** – **[Company]** – **[Website]** – **[Phone / WhatsApp / WeChat]**

Template B – Short message (WeChat / WhatsApp)

Hello **[contact_person]**, I am **[your name]** from **[your company]** in **[country]**. We are looking for **[product]** for a first order of **[quantity]** pcs. Could you send me your price and MOQ? I can share photos and specs here. Thank you!

Template C – Follow-up after no reply (3 to 5 working days later)

Subject: Re: Inquiry: [product] – [quantity] pcs

Dear [contact_person],

I am following up on my email of [date] about [product]. We are comparing suppliers this week and we would be happy to include your company.

Could you send us your price and MOQ by [day]? If you are not the right person, could you forward this message to your sales team?

Best regards, [your name]

Template D – Sample request

Dear [contact_person],

Thank you for your quotation. Before placing an order, we would like to test [number] samples of [model], [colour / spec].

1. What is the sample cost, including express shipping to [city, country]?
2. Can the sample cost be refunded on our first order?
3. When can you ship the samples?

Our courier account is [DHL/FedEx account number] if you prefer freight collect. Please send us your payment details on a Proforma Invoice.

Best regards, [your name]

Template E – Price negotiation

Dear [contact_person],

Thank you for the samples, the quality meets our expectations. Your price of USD [their price] is above our target. We have received offers between USD [range] for a similar specification.

If we order [quantity] pcs, can you offer USD [your target]? We are also open to adjusting [packaging / payment terms / quantity] to help reach this price.

We would like to confirm our order before [date].

Best regards, [your name]

Template F – Polite decline (keep the door open)

Dear [contact_person],

Thank you for your time and your offer. For this project we have chosen another supplier, mainly because of [price / MOQ / lead time]. We keep your details and will contact you again for future projects.

Best regards, [your name]

Why decline politely?

The factory you decline today may be the one you need in six months. A polite message costs 30 seconds and keeps the relationship alive.

6. The questions to ask and the words to know

15 questions to ask before ordering

Do not ask everything in the first email. Use questions 1 to 5 in the first contact, then the others once a supplier looks promising.

#	Question	Why it matters
1	What is your unit price for [X] pcs and for [Y] pcs?	Shows the price breaks by quantity
2	What is your MOQ? Is it per model, per colour or per order?	MOQ per colour can multiply your order
3	Is the price EXW, FOB or CIF? From which port?	Changes the real cost a lot (see section 10)
4	What is the production lead time after deposit?	Plan your stock and launch date
5	What are your payment terms?	Usual: 30% deposit, 70% before shipping
6	What is the sample cost and is it refunded on the order?	Often refundable from the first order
7	Do you have [CE / REACH / FDA / EN71...] test reports for this product? Issued by which lab?	Mandatory to sell legally in many markets
8	Can you print our logo? What is the extra cost and MOQ?	Customisation often raises the MOQ
9	What is the packaging: units per carton, carton size and weight?	Needed to calculate shipping costs
10	Are you the factory? Can you show us a video call of the production line?	Confirms who you are really dealing with
11	Which countries do you already export to? Can you share references?	Experience with your market's rules
12	Do you have a factory audit (BSCI, ISO 9001, Sedex)?	Required by some retailers
13	How do you control quality? Do you accept third-party inspection?	A "no" here is a red flag
14	What is the HS code of this product?	Lets you calculate import duties
15	What happens if goods are defective?	Agree on it before paying, in writing

Glossary

Term	Meaning
MOQ	Minimum Order Quantity: the smallest order the supplier accepts. Often negotiable for a first order, especially with a higher unit price.
RFQ	Request For Quotation: your formal price request.
PI	Proforma Invoice: the official quote you pay against. Check that every detail (spec, quantity, price, Incoterm, bank) is correct before paying.
EXW, FOB, CIF, DDP...	Incoterms: the rules that say who pays and who takes the risk at each step of the shipment. Explained in section 10.
T/T	Telegraphic Transfer: a bank wire. "30/70" means 30% deposit, 70% balance before shipping (or against a copy of the shipping documents).
L/C	Letter of Credit: payment guaranteed by banks against documents. Secure but expensive; used for large orders.

Term	Meaning
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer: they produce your design, with your brand.
ODM	Original Design Manufacturer: you put your brand on their existing design, with small changes.
OBM	Original Brand Manufacturer: they sell products under their own brand.
QC / AQL	Quality Control / Acceptable Quality Limit: the standard used by inspectors to accept or reject a production batch.
HS code	International customs code of the product, used to calculate import duties.
Lead time	Time between deposit (or sample approval) and goods ready to ship. Shipping time is extra.

7. Verify before you pay

The suppliers in your SourceAtlas file were verified and selected by the Canton Fair to exhibit, which is a good first filter. But contact details change and fraud on payments exists, so always do these checks before sending money.

The 6 essential checks

- **Ask for the business license.** Every Chinese company has an 18-character Unified Social Credit Code. Check the company name and status on the official registry: www.gsxt.gov.cn (National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System).
- **Compare the names.** The company name on the license, on the Proforma Invoice and on the bank account must be the same.
- **Do a video call** from the factory. Ask to see the production line making your type of product.
- **Order samples** and keep one “golden sample” as the quality reference for production.
- **Book an inspection** before paying the balance. Companies like SGS, QIMA, Bureau Veritas or Intertek check the goods at the factory for a few hundred dollars.
- **Start small.** Place a first test order before committing large amounts.

Red flags: stop and check

- The bank account is in a **personal name** or in a **different company name**.
- You receive an email saying “**our bank details have changed**”. This is the most common fraud: call your contact on a known number to confirm.
- The price is **far below** all other quotes.
- The supplier refuses a video call, samples or inspection.
- Pressure: “this price is only valid today”, “pay 100% now”.
- Payment requested by Western Union, cryptocurrency or gift cards.

Put the key points in writing

Before paying the deposit, have the PI or a simple purchase agreement state: specifications, quantity, unit price, Incoterm, lead time, packaging, quality standard (golden sample, AQL), inspection rights and what happens with defective goods.

8. How to order: from deposit to delivery

You have chosen your supplier and approved the sample. Here is what happens next, step by step. Knowing the sequence lets you anticipate each payment and each document, instead of discovering them at the last minute.

The 10 steps of an order

#	Step	Who	What to check
1	Proforma Invoice (PI)	Supplier	Specs, quantity, unit price, Incoterm, lead time, packaging, bank details in the company name
2	Deposit (usually 30%)	You	Pay only to the company account written on the PI. Keep the bank transfer receipt.
3	Pre-production check	Both	Confirm artwork, logo, colours and packaging in writing before mass production starts
4	Production	Supplier	Ask for photos or a short video at mid-production
5	Book the shipment	You or supplier	Depends on the Incoterm (section 10). Give your forwarder the supplier's contact 2 weeks before goods are ready.
6	Final inspection	Inspector	Before paying the balance. Compare with the golden sample.
7	Balance payment (70%)	You	After a positive inspection report
8	Loading and export	Supplier / forwarder	Get the shipping documents (below)
9	Transport and import customs	Forwarder / broker	Customs clearance, duties and import taxes paid (section 11)
10	Delivery	Carrier	Count the cartons and check for damage before signing the delivery note

Shipping documents you must receive

Document	What it is	Why you need it
Commercial Invoice	The final invoice for the goods	Customs uses it to calculate duties. The value must be the real price paid.
Packing List	Content, number, weight and size of each carton	Customs inspection and checking your delivery
Bill of Lading (B/L)	Transport document for sea freight. For air freight: Air Waybill (AWB).	Proof of shipment. The original B/L can be required to collect the goods.
Certificate of Origin	Proves the goods were made in China	Required by some countries, sometimes to benefit from a lower duty rate
Test reports / certificates	CE, REACH, FDA, EN71... for your product	Customs or market authorities can ask for them

Choose your transport mode

Mode	Typical transit time	Best for	Cost level
Express courier (DHL, FedEx, UPS)	3 to 7 days door to door	Samples, very small orders (under ~100 kg)	Highest per kg, but simplest
Air freight	5 to 10 days door to door	Urgent or high-value goods, ~100 to 500 kg	High
Rail (China to Europe)	about 18 to 25 days	Europe only, between air and sea	Medium
Sea freight LCL (shared container)	30 to 50 days door to door	From about 1 to 15 m ³	Low
Sea freight FCL (full container)	25 to 45 days door to door	From about 15 m ³ : a 20 ft container holds ~28 m ³ , a 40 ft ~58 m ³ , a 40 ft High Cube ~68 m ³	Lowest per unit

Calculate your volume and weight before asking for a freight quote

- **Volume (m³)** = carton length × width × height (in metres) × number of cartons. Example: 50 × 40 × 30 cm = 0.06 m³; 100 cartons = 6 m³.
- **Air and express are charged on the higher of real weight and volumetric weight.**
Volumetric weight (kg) = L × W × H in cm ÷ 6,000 for air freight, ÷ 5,000 for most express couriers.
- The supplier gives you carton size and weight: it is question 9 of section 6.

9. Freight forwarder or supplier: who should ship?

Once the goods are ready, someone has to organise the transport, the export and import customs and the delivery. You have three options.

	The supplier handles it	Your own freight forwarder	Express courier
Incoterm	CIF, DAP or DDP	EXW, FCA or FOB	DAP or DDP (door to door)
How it works	The supplier books the transport with its own forwarder and includes the cost in the price	You hire a forwarder who collects the goods in China and brings them to you	The supplier hands the parcel to DHL, FedEx or UPS
Advantages	Very simple: one price, one contact	Transparent prices, you control the shipment, you can group several suppliers in one shipment, customs handled for you	Fast, simple, tracking included
Risks	Hidden margin on freight. With CIF: high "local charges" at arrival that you must pay. With DDP: risk that the value is under-declared at customs.	Requires a bit more coordination	Very expensive above ~100 kg. Import duties and taxes can be charged on delivery.
Best for	A small test order, if you have no forwarder yet	From your first real order. The recommended option.	Samples and very small orders

Our recommendation

- **Samples:** express courier.
- **First real order and after:** buy **FOB** and use your own freight forwarder. This is how professional importers work.
- **No forwarder yet and a very small order:** DDP is acceptable, but ask for the full door-to-door price in writing, including duties and taxes.

How to choose a freight forwarder

- Ask **2 or 3 forwarders** for a quote on the same shipment. Large international networks and smaller local forwarders specialised in China imports both work well.
- Ask for an **all-in, door-to-door price**: pick-up in China, export customs, main freight, destination charges, import customs clearance and delivery. Duties and taxes are paid on top, at their real cost.
- Check that they handle **customs clearance** in your country (or work with a customs broker) and that they can advise you on your HS code.
- Check their reputation: reviews, years in business, membership of a professional network (for example FIATA or a national forwarders association).
- Ask about **cargo insurance**. It is cheap (often well under 1% of the goods' value) and covers loss or damage during transport.

Template G – Freight quote request (to a forwarder)

Subject: Quote request: [LCL / FCL / air] from [Chinese city] to [your city]

Hello,

We are importing goods from China and we would like a door-to-door quotation:

- Goods: [product description], HS code [if known]
- Pick-up: [supplier address / city], ready on [date]
- Incoterm with the supplier: FOB [port] / EXW
- Volume and weight: [number] cartons, [m³] m³, [kg] kg
- Delivery address: [your address], [business / private address]
- Value of goods: USD [amount]

Please include all costs: origin charges, freight, destination charges, customs clearance, delivery and insurance. Please also give us an estimate of import duties and taxes and the transit time.

Best regards, [your name] – [company] – [phone]

10. Incoterms made simple: who pays what

Incoterms are international rules (current version: Incoterms 2020) that define, for each step of the shipment, **who pays** and **who takes the risk** if something goes wrong. A price without an Incoterm means nothing: “USD 3.00” can mean at the factory gate or delivered to your door. Always write it in the PI, followed by a place: “FOB Ningbo”, “DDP Lyon”.

There are 11 Incoterms. These 6 cover almost every order from China:

Step	EXW	FCA	FOB	CIF	DAP	DDP
Export packing at the factory	Seller	Seller	Seller	Seller	Seller	Seller
Export customs in China	Buyer	Seller	Seller	Seller	Seller	Seller
Transport to the Chinese port	Buyer	S/B*	Seller	Seller	Seller	Seller
Main freight (sea or air)	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Seller	Seller	Seller
Transport insurance	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Seller (min.)	Seller's risk	Seller's risk
Arrival port charges	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Seller	Seller
Import customs, duties and taxes	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Seller
Delivery to your door	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Buyer	Seller	Seller
Risk passes to the buyer...	At the factory	When handed to the carrier	On board the ship in China	On board the ship in China	At your door	At your door

Blue = paid by the supplier (seller). Yellow = paid by you (buyer). *FCA: depends on the place named (factory or forwarder's warehouse).

Incoterm	In one sentence	Our opinion
EXW – Ex Works	You collect the goods at the factory and handle everything, even Chinese export customs.	Avoid: export customs in China is hard to manage as a foreign buyer. Prefer FCA or FOB.
FCA – Free Carrier	The supplier clears export customs and hands the goods to your carrier at an agreed place.	Good alternative to EXW, especially for air freight.
FOB – Free On Board	The supplier delivers the goods loaded on the ship in the Chinese port. You pay the rest.	The best choice with your own forwarder. The most common Incoterm.
CIF – Cost, Insurance & Freight	The supplier pays freight and minimum insurance to your port, but the risk is yours from loading in China.	Watch the arrival charges, often inflated. Insurance coverage is minimal.
DAP – Delivered At Place	The supplier delivers to your address. You pay import duties and taxes.	Typical for express couriers.
DDP – Delivered Duty Paid	The supplier delivers to your door, duties and taxes paid.	Simplest. Fine for samples or tests, but less control and risk of under-declared value.

A “cheap” price can hide costs

Never compare an EXW price with a DDP price. Ask all suppliers for the **same Incoterm** (FOB is the easiest), then add your freight and import costs yourself. Section 11 shows how.

11. Customs, duties and your real landed cost

When your goods arrive, they must be cleared through customs. You (or your forwarder or customs broker on your behalf) declare them and pay **import duties** and, in most countries, **import VAT or sales tax**. Rules depend on your country: this section gives you the method, then check the details with your customs authority or your forwarder.

The 5 things to know

- **Find the HS code** of your product. The first 6 digits are the same worldwide. Your supplier or forwarder can suggest it, and your country's official tariff tool gives the exact duty rate (for example TARIC in the European Union, the Trade Tariff on gov.uk in the UK, the HTS in the USA).
- **Duties are a percentage of the customs value.** In the EU and the UK, the customs value includes the price of the goods plus freight and insurance to the border (CIF value). In the USA, duty is generally calculated on the price of the goods only (FOB value).
- **Import VAT or sales tax** is added in most countries (for example in the EU, the UK, Canada or Mexico). If your company is VAT-registered, it can usually be recovered.
- **Register as an importer.** In the EU and the UK, you need an **EORI number** (free, from your customs authority). In the USA, larger shipments need a customs bond, usually arranged by your customs broker. Other countries have their own importer registration: ask your forwarder.
- **Extra duties may apply to Chinese products** (for example in the USA, or anti-dumping duties in the EU on some products). Rates change often: always check before you order.

Never under-declare the value

Some suppliers offer to write a lower value on the invoice "to save on duties". Refuse. It is customs fraud, the importer (you) is the one who is liable, and the goods can be seized with fines. Also, do not rely on low-value parcel exemptions: they have been removed or reduced in several markets, including the USA and the EU.

Calculate your landed cost

The **landed cost** is the real cost of one unit once it is in your warehouse. This is the number to compare with your selling price, not the factory price. Example with illustrative rates (1,000 bottles, sea freight to the EU):

Item	Calculation	Amount (USD)
Goods, FOB price	$1,000 \times 3.00$	3,000
Sea freight + insurance to the EU port	Forwarder quote	615
Customs value (CIF)	$3,000 + 615$	3,615
Import duty (example rate 2.7%)	$3,615 \times 2.7\%$	98
Customs clearance + arrival charges	Forwarder quote	150
Delivery to your warehouse	Forwarder quote	200
Total landed cost	$3,000 + 615 + 98 + 150 + 200$	4,063
Landed cost per unit	$4,063 \div 1,000$	4.06
Import VAT (example 20%, recoverable if VAT-registered)	$(3,615 + 98) \times 20\%$	743

Rule of thumb

For sea freight, the landed cost is often 15 to 40% above the FOB price, depending on the product's volume, value and duty rate. Bulky, cheap products are the most affected: always calculate before ordering.

12. Follow up and manage your suppliers

Track your contacts

When you contact 10 to 20 suppliers, it gets confusing quickly. Add a few columns next to your shortlist (or in a separate sheet) and update them every time:

Supplier	Date contacted	Channel	Status	Price / MOQ	Sample	Next action
Company A	02/10	Email	Quote received	USD 3.10 / 500	Ordered	Test sample
Company B	02/10	Email + WeChat	Follow-up sent	–	–	Call on 09/10
Company C	03/10	Email	Declined (MOQ)	USD 2.70 / 5,000	–	Keep for later

Compare quotes fairly

- Compare on the **same Incoterm** (FOB vs FOB, never FOB vs EXW).
- Add up the **real cost**: unit price + customisation + packaging + sample + shipping + duties.
- Score **responsiveness and clarity**: a supplier who answers precisely now will usually communicate well during production.

Build the relationship

- Use the same contact person. Thank them, and tell them when the products sell well.
- Pay on time. Good payers get priority in production during busy seasons.
- Place your orders well before Chinese New Year: everyone rushes to ship in December and January.

Your one-page checklist

Before contacting

- ☐ Product brief ready: specs, quantity, target price, destination, certifications, timing
- ☐ Professional email, signature and WeChat account set up
- ☐ 10 to 20 suppliers shortlisted in SourceAtlas (company_type, main_products, target_markets, trade_forms)
- ☐ Website of each shortlisted supplier checked (products, certificates)

First contact

- ☐ Personalised email to the contact_person, short and with numbered questions (Template A)
- ☐ Sent at the end of your day = morning in China
- ☐ Follow-up after 3 to 5 working days by email, then WeChat (Templates B and C)

Selecting

- ☐ Quotes compared on the same Incoterm and real total cost
- ☐ Certifications and test reports received
- ☐ Samples ordered and tested, golden sample kept (Template D)
- ☐ Price negotiated with facts (Template E)

Before paying

- ☐ Business license checked on gsxt.gov.cn
- ☐ Same company name on license, PI and bank account
- ☐ Video call of the factory done
- ☐ All terms written on the PI or purchase agreement
- ☐ Inspection booked before paying the balance

Ordering & shipping

- ☐ Same Incoterm on every quote (FOB recommended) and written on the PI
- ☐ Volume (m³) and weight known, transport mode chosen
- ☐ 2 or 3 door-to-door quotes from freight forwarders, insurance included
- ☐ HS code, duty rate and importer registration (EORI or local equivalent) checked
- ☐ Landed cost per unit calculated and compared with your selling price
- ☐ Commercial invoice, packing list and B/L or AWB received

Good luck with your sourcing!

Every supplier in your SourceAtlas file was verified and selected by the Canton Fair, China's largest trade fair. You now have the method to contact them like a professional buyer and to order with confidence. Start with your shortlist today.

Disclaimer: this guide is general information, not legal, tax or financial advice. Contact details come from public Canton Fair supplier data and may change; always verify a supplier before paying.