

# Sourcing beyond China

Reference for evaluating manufacturing in Vietnam, India, Thailand, and Taiwan as alternatives or complements to mainland China — capabilities, lead times, MOQs, cost benchmarks, discovery channels, operational realities.

REVISION <b>2.0</b>	ISSUED <b>May 2026</b>	OWNER <b>Ideambox engineering</b>	COMPANION <b>PDF reference</b>
------------------------	---------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

## ABSTRACT

US-China trade tensions and supply-chain diversification objectives have made sourcing outside mainland China a more frequent project decision. The operational reality of those alternatives differs significantly from the headline "lower cost, lower tariffs" framing — longer lead times, smaller supplier bases, higher MOQs, and materials still often imported from China.

This document covers country capabilities, real cost benchmarks, decision criteria, supplier-discovery channels per country, and the operational differences (lead time, MOQ, communication) that affect project planning.

COUNTRY × CAPABILITY MATRIX — WHERE PRODUCTS GET MADE AT SCALE

CATEGORY	CHINA	TAIWAN	VIETNAM	INDIA	THAILAND
Consumer electronics	●	●	○	○	○
Molded plastics	●	○	○	○	●
Sheet metal · machining	●	●	○	○	●
Textiles · apparel	●	○	●	●	●
Furniture	●	○	●	●	●
Footwear	●	○	●	●	○
Jewelry · ceramics	●	○	○	●	●

● **STRONG** extensive supplier base, broad capability    
  **PARTIAL** growing or niche capability    
 ○ **WEAK** limited or no base

COUNTRY × CATEGORY CAPABILITY MATRIX. FILLED = STRONG SUPPLIER BASE; RING = PARTIAL; EMPTY = WEAK. NOT EVERY COUNTRY MAKES EVERY PRODUCT.

## CONTENTS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Country comparison</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> <p>2. When to source outside China</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> | <p>3. Supplier discovery</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> <p>4. Operational realities</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> |
|---|--|

## 1. Country comparison

Different countries dominate different product categories. Knowing the actual industrial footprint is the difference between a six-week supplier search and a six-month one.

### 1.1 Strengths at a glance

COUNTRY	STRONG CATEGORIES	WEAK CATEGORIES	BEST FOR
China (mainland)	Electronics, plastics, toys, watches, machinery	None significant	Small-volume, fast iteration, electronics
Taiwan	PCBA, precision, medical, machine tools, plastics with engineering polymers	Commodity goods	Engineering hub, IP-sensitive electronics
Vietnam	Furniture, apparel, footwear, agriculture, growing PCBA	Electronics complex, molded plastic	US-tariff avoidance, textiles, furniture
India	Textiles, apparel, jewelry, ceramics, hand-finished	Electronics, molded plastic	Hand-finished, craft, textile mass
Thailand	Auto parts, plastic, jewelry, kitchen, machine tools	Electronics complex	Mid-volume plastic, machined parts
Indonesia	Wood products, footwear, textiles, growing electronics assembly	High-precision	Wood-based, textiles
Malaysia	Semiconductors, electrical, medical devices, palm-based	Mass consumer	Semiconductor assembly, medical
Philippines	Electronics assembly, BPO services	Heavy industry	Mid-tier electronics, services

### 1.2 Lead time + MOQ by country

COUNTRY	FIRST PRODUCTION	TYPICAL MOQ (PER SKU)	RE-ORDER LEAD
China (mainland)	30–45 days	500–2 000 pcs	30 days
Taiwan	35–60 days	100–1 000 (electronics); higher for plastics	30 days
Vietnam	60–90 days	1 000–5 000 pcs	45 days
India	75–120 days	1 000–10 000 pcs	60 days
Thailand	45–75 days	500–3 000 pcs	40 days
Indonesia	60–90 days	1 000–3 000 pcs	45 days
Malaysia	45–75 days	500–2 000 pcs	35 days

### 1.3 Cost benchmarks (USD, indicative)

Costs vary by product complexity, volume, and current FX. These benchmarks are for comparison only.

PRODUCT TYPE	CHINA	VIETNAM	INDIA	THAILAND	TAIWAN
PC injection molded part (50 g)	\$0.60–1.20	\$0.80–1.50	\$0.90–1.80	\$0.70–1.40	\$1.00–2.00
Cotton t-shirt (printed)	\$1.50–3.00	\$2.00–3.50	\$1.20–2.50	\$2.00–3.50	n/a
Standard PCBA (4-layer, 50 components)	\$3–7	\$4–9	\$5–11	\$4–8	\$4–8
Sheet metal enclosure (1.5 mm Al, 100 g)	\$1.80–3.50	\$2.50–5.00	\$2.50–5.00	\$2.00–4.00	\$2.50–4.50
Stainless steel kitchen utensil	\$0.80–2.00	\$1.50–3.00	\$1.20–2.50	\$1.20–2.50	n/a
Bluetooth speaker (50 W, plastic)	\$8–20	\$10–22	\$12–25	\$9–21	\$14–28

#### 1.4 Tariff impact (USA, Section 301 list)

ORIGIN	SECTION 301 DUTY	WHEN APPLIES
China (mainland)	7.5–25 %+ on List 1–4	All affected goods
Hong Kong (origin)	Same as China	Per WTO determination 2020+
Taiwan		0 % No List 301 tariffs
Vietnam	0 % (most goods)	Some watch-list categories
India	0 % most goods; +3.5–5 % on some	
Thailand		0 %
Cambodia		0 % Some textile preferences
Malaysia		0 % Generally
Mexico	0 % under USMCA (qualifying)	Rules of origin apply

For US importers, the Section 301 list (<https://ustr.gov>) covers ~\$370 B of Chinese goods at 7.5–25 % duty. The tariff impact often justifies moving to Vietnam or Mexico even at +5–10 % factory cost.

## 2. When to source outside China

The decision is rarely "China vs. another country". Usually "which country for which part of the BoM, given volume and timing".

### 2.1 Makes sense when

#### Reasons that work

- US Section 301 tariffs apply
- Sourcing in country's strong category (textile in VN, jewelry in IN, etc.)
- MOQs match (1 000–5 000 / SKU)
- Setting up own factory or assembly cell
- Multi-year commitment (3+ year horizon)
- IP protection priority (Taiwan)

#### Reasons that don't work

- Expect lower prices across all categories
- Expect lower MOQs everywhere
- Expect easier process / faster iteration
- Need molded plastics or complex electronics at low volume
- Expect supplier-side iteration speed of China
- One-off small first batch

### 2.2 Supply-chain depth audit

Verify where the components actually come from. A "Vietnam-made" product whose ICs come from Shanghai, plastic from Guangdong, and labels from Taipei is still a Chinese supply chain with added freight.

“ Q: Where is your raw plastic sourced from? Q: Where are the ICs purchased? Q: Where is the PCB fabricated? Q: Where is the packaging printed? Q: Where are the labels produced? Q: Which suppliers are local vs. imported? ”

#### WATCH OUT – ASSEMBLY-ONLY VS. FULL SUPPLY CHAIN

Many Vietnamese, Thai, and Indian factories doing electronics are assembly operations using Chinese-sourced components. You've added freight, customs, and lead time without escaping the China supply chain. Audit the BoM origin, not just the assembly origin.

Real diversification means: - PCBs from a local fab (Vietnam now has 5–10 capable fabs) - ICs from authorised distributors with local stock - Plastic raw material from regional petrochemicals - Custom mechanical from regional tool shops

This is rare outside China and takes 12–24 months to set up.

### 3. Supplier discovery

The "Alibaba of [country]" usually doesn't exist. Each country has its own directories, fairs, and channels — most less mature than Alibaba.

#### 3.1 Directories by country

COUNTRY	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	NICHE
China	Alibaba.com	GlobalSources, Made-in-China, HKTDC	DHgate (small volume), 1688.com (domestic)
India	IndiaMart.com	TradeIndia, Alibaba (limited)	ExportersIndia
Vietnam	VietnamExport, Vtown.vn	Alibaba (limited)	ECVV Vietnam
Thailand	Thaitrade.com	ThaiExportProduct, Alibaba	Made in Thailand
Taiwan	TaiwanTrade.com	GlobalSources, HKTDC	Taiwan Trade Online
Indonesia	IndoTrading	Alibaba (limited)	Tridge
Malaysia	TradeMalaysia	Alibaba (limited)	Made in Malaysia
Philippines	DTI Trade	Alibaba (limited)	FAME 88 (handicrafts)

#### 3.2 Trade shows

SHOW	CITY	FOCUS	SCHEDULE
Canton Fair	Guangzhou	All categories	April + October (3 phases each)
Global Sources Fairs	Hong Kong	Mainland electronics	April + October
HKTDC	Hong Kong	Mix HK/China/Taiwan	March + Oct
Hong Kong Electronics Fair	Hong Kong	Electronics	April + October
Saigontex / VIFA Expo	Ho Chi Minh	Vietnam textile/furniture	April + Sept
India Furniture Fair	Mumbai	Indian furniture	Jan
BIG+BIH	Bangkok	Thai goods	April + Oct
Taipei Computex	Taipei	Taiwan electronics	June
METALEX	Bangkok	Thai machine tools	Nov

#### 3.3 Realistic response rates from cold contact

<b>60-80 %</b> CHINA Alibaba-active suppliers	<b>30-50 %</b> INDIA IndiaMart	<b>10-30 %</b> VIETNAM Alibaba	<b>5-15 %</b> COLD EMAIL Anywhere, non-platform
---	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	---

## 4. Operational realities

The mechanics of running a project outside China differ enough that founders who treat the second country as "just like China" lose months on basic operational mismatches.

### 4.1 Communication

COUNTRY	LANGUAGE FLUENCY	WORKFLOW CHANNELS	TIME ZONE
China (mainland)	English (commercial), Mandarin	WeChat, email	UTC+8
Taiwan	English (industrial sectors)	Email, traditional Chinese	UTC+8
Hong Kong	English fluent	Email, WhatsApp	UTC+8
Vietnam	Limited English; Vietnamese	Zalo, WhatsApp, email	UTC+7
India	English fluent	Email, phone, WhatsApp	UTC+5:30
Thailand	Mixed English	Line app, email	UTC+7
Indonesia	Mixed English	WhatsApp, email	UTC+7/+8

### 4.2 Process differences

COUNTRY	QUOTE RESPONSE	SAMPLE ITERATION	PRODUCTION ITERATION
China (mainland)	2–5 days	1–2 weeks per round	4–6 weeks
Taiwan	5–10 days	1–2 weeks	5–7 weeks
Vietnam	7–14 days	2–3 weeks	6–9 weeks
India	7–21 days	3–4 weeks	8–12 weeks
Thailand	5–10 days	2 weeks	5–7 weeks

### 4.3 Materials, tooling, IP

#### – Materials

Audit BoM origin (see sidebar above). If components come from China, the chain isn't really diversified.

#### – Tooling

Default contract ownership varies by country. Write tooling ownership into every contract.

#### – IP

Trademark protection in target market matters more than where the product is made. Register where you sell, not (only) where you manufacture.

#### – Currency hedging

China RMB is loosely pegged to USD; VND, INR, THB float more. For multi-year contracts, hedge or quote in USD.

### 4.4 Cultural notes

#### – China

Direct, transactional; volume = leverage. WeChat for everything.

#### – Taiwan

More formal email; longer relationships expected; respect for engineering.

#### – Vietnam

Hierarchy matters; decisions slower; relationships built over visits.

- **India**

Negotiation-heavy; English fluent but written agreements critical.

---

- **Thailand**

Polite indirectness; "saving face" matters; relationship-driven.

---

- **Japan**

Highest formality; quality-obsessed; relationships glacial but durable.

**FINAL NOTE.** for most early-stage hardware projects, China for the first batch + optional diversification on the second batch is the right answer. Going non-China for batch 1 adds a multiplier of effort that most founders can't afford early on. The teams that successfully diversify are usually those with > \$5 M annual revenue and >3 years of supplier experience.