

# China extends export controls on rare earths beyond its borders

Move appears to be a gambit to strengthen its position for trade talks with US: Observers

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BEIJING – China has tightened its grip on rare earths, extending export controls beyond its borders for the first time to cover foreign transfers of products made with Chinese rare earth materials or technology.

Observers say the move appears to be a gambit in China's trade talks with the US, as Beijing uses its leverage ahead of a possible summit between the countries' two leaders in South Korea later in October.

On Oct 9, China's Ministry of Commerce said that, from Dec 1, overseas entities will need Beijing's approval to export products made abroad that contain Chinese-origin controlled materials of at least 0.1 per cent in value.

The step plugs the gaps in rare earth export curbs introduced in April, following US President Donald Trump's Liberation Day tariffs, on materials Beijing says could be used for military purposes.

"For some time, certain foreign organisations and individuals have transferred Chinese-origin rare earth materials, directly or after processing, to military and other sensitive users, threatening China's security, undermining global peace and stability, and harming non-proliferation," a Commerce Ministry spokesperson said on Oct 9.

Licences must also be obtained for products made overseas using Chinese technology related to rare earth mining and processing, the ministry added. But it is unclear how China will enforce these rules.



A truck being loaded with rare earths at the Port of Lianyungang in Jiangsu province in 2013. From Dec 1, overseas entities will need Beijing's approval to export products made abroad that contain Chinese-origin controlled materials of at least 0.1 per cent in value. The step plugs the gaps in rare earth export curbs introduced in April. PHOTO: REUTERS

The ministry also said that, with effect from Oct 9, technology related to rare earth mining, smelting, refining, magnet manufacturing and recycling of rare earth resources may not be exported without permission. The restrictions also cover technology related to the relevant production lines.

Such technology has been restricted for export since 2001, but the new measure aims to clarify

the rules and strengthen supervision.

China wants control over its technology, given that its advantage lies not just in its rare earth deposits, but also in its expertise in separating and refining them for use in manufacturing.

It also announced four other sets of export restrictions related to super-hard materials, rare earth equipment and raw materials, five

types of medium and heavy rare earth elements, and lithium battery and graphite-anode materials, to take effect from Nov 8.

A Commerce Ministry spokesperson said all the listed items had "obvious dual-use properties".

Assistant Professor Stefanie Kam from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, who has researched China's rare earth policy, said China is going on

the offensive to protect its interests.

"(The curbs) are, first and foremost, designed to leverage Beijing's dominance in the rare earth market to be used as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations," she told The Straits Times, adding that they could also be retaliation for American trade measures and tech restrictions.

"They are also defensive in nature, in that they are designed to protect Beijing's domestic industrial needs in rare earths, to be used for supplying the country's robotics, automation and semiconductor manufacturing, and part of China's economic statecraft to achieve its own national economic and security goals," she added.

China and the US have traded tit-for-tat moves since Mr Trump announced tariffs in April, but they reached a truce that lowered tariffs by the US to 30 per cent and those by China to 10 per cent earlier in 2025. The tariff truce is set to expire on Nov 10.

Despite the truce, both countries have continued to beef up their negotiating positions ahead of in-person talks between Mr Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping expected on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in South Korea in late October.

The latest announcement on rare earth curbs expands a licensing regime that started in April.

The export requirements had not just roiled the US defence and auto industries, but also frustrated European importers.

China's Commerce Ministry said on Oct 9 that approval will not be given for export applications to overseas military users, as well as to importers and end users on the export control list, "including their subsidiaries, branches and other affiliates in which they hold a 50 per cent or more stake".

This appeared to be a response to a new rule issued by the US Department of Commerce on Sept 29, which expanded American export restrictions to entities that are 50 per cent or more owned by those on US trade blacklists, seen as targeting China.

Associate Professor Chong Ja Ian from NUS, who specialises in Chinese foreign policy, said China's new restrictions could be a signal to warn other countries, or firms

from other countries, not to cooperate with the US in ways that Beijing claims would harm its interests.

Prof Chong cautioned against over-expectations of the meeting between Mr Trump and Mr Xi, given the volatility in US-China relations. Even if the two leaders do meet, they may change their minds later on, he told ST.

"Trump's apparently successful meeting with (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi did not stop heavy US tariffs on India, just as the tumultuous meeting between Trump and (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelensky earlier in the year seems to have given way to some support."

In the US, the response to the latest curbs was muted compared with April, when China first put controls on rare earth magnets in response to Mr Trump's threat to impose triple-digit tariffs on China.

"It's not nothing at all, but the adrenaline levels haven't soared, and it's not game-changing," said an expert speaking off the record.

But in the longer term, if the US does not make these products, the situation could get extremely difficult for it, experts in the US say.

"I think the immediate impact is limited because the US has had six months to prepare," said Ms Caroline Messacar, strategic markets editor for technology metals at Fastmarkets, a leading cross-commodity price reporting agency.

"But they (the US) have no capacity to produce these materials today," she noted.

Said Mr David Abraham, an American natural resources strategist and the author of *The Elements Of Power*, widely considered the first book to reveal how rare metals shape global power: "This is continuing a strategy to ensure Chinese resources favour Chinese manufacturing, and also uses leverage to cut off valuable resources to other countries."

China is also seeking leverage before negotiations, he added.

While the US has no leverage in rare earths, there are other areas where China is reliant on US technology or resources, he said.

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• Additional reporting by Bhagyashree Garekar

## TTSH to train TCM students from NTU on integrative patient care

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From 2027, junior doctors shadowing senior physicians on their rounds at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) will be joined by undergraduates studying traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

They will be final-year students of the four-year Bachelor of Chinese Medicine programme at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The hospital is joining forces with the university to combine Western treatments with Eastern therapies in exploring the role of TCM as a complementary modality.

Through the collaboration, called the Prevention and Recovery through Integrative Medicine, the institutions will look into the role of TCM to manage pain, relieve symptoms and support rehabilitation.

The partnership was inked on Oct 9 at the 23rd Singapore Health and Biomedical Congress, held at the Singapore Expo.

In his keynote address, Senior Minister of State for Health Koh Poh Koon said the partnership will not only align clinical and academic efforts to enhance patient care, but also "provide cross-training for TCM and Western medical students, and advance research and evidence-based practices in integrative medicine".

"This collaboration will equip more clinicians with skills to meet the growing demand for integrative care approaches," added Dr Koh, who is also Senior Minister of State for Manpower.

Under the partnership, final-year TCM students will undergo clinical rotations at TTSH from 2027. They will observe how TCM and Western medicine coexist in patient care while learning practical knowledge tailored to Singapore's healthcare.

This partnership will strengthen the training of TCM practitioners, said Professor Benjamin Seet, group chairman of the medical board (research) and co-chair for the Academic Partnership Office at NHG Health.

Citing the 2022 National Population Health Survey, Dr Quah Teik Joo, who heads complementary in-



(From left) TCM students Aw Xi Han and Chandraratne Aiko Tiranya Kumari shadowing Dr Quah Teik Joo, who heads complementary integrative medicine at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, on Oct 7 as he checks on stroke patient Tan Kay Chuan, 60, who receives acupuncture twice a week. Under a new partnership, final-year TCM students from NTU will undergo clinical rotations at TTSH from 2027, to observe how traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine coexist in patient care. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

tegrative medicine at TTSH, said about one in five adult Singaporeans uses TCM services annually and about 40 per cent of them use TCM and Western medicine concurrently.

"When it comes to acupuncture specifically, it has been scientifically proven to help in pain management via effect on nerve pathways and hormonal changes," he added.

Dr Quah, who is also a senior consultant of general medicine, said inpatient treatment using TCM is currently limited to acupuncture, which is offered in TTSH, Ren Ci Community Hospital

and TTSH Integrated Care Hub.

Associate Professor Linda Zhong, director of biomedical sciences and Chinese medicine at the School of Biological Sciences in NTU, said the aim is to combine biomedical science research and TCM training to treat patients.

Second-year TCM students Aw Xi Han and Chandraratne Aiko Tiranya Kumari, both 20, joined Dr Quah on his rounds at TTSH on Oct 7, getting a glimpse of what awaits them during their final-year attachment.

Ms Aw said she took up TCM "because it is the least invasive and has a long history of maintaining holi-

stic balance to ensure the health of a patient".

For Ms Aiko, her love for Chinese culture inspired her to study TCM. "I hope I will be able to help the elderly extend their health expectancies, instead of having them spend their last 10 years being sick," said Ms Aiko, who speaks fluent Mandarin.

Besides NHG Health, TCM services are also integrated with Western medicine in the other two public healthcare clusters – SingHealth and National University Health System.

A National University Hospital spokeswoman said acupuncture is

provided through its Anaesthesia, Pain Management and Acupuncture Clinic under the Department of Anaesthesia.

"A dedicated team of Western-trained physicians and accredited acupuncturists provide consultations and acupuncture therapies for both referred and walk-in patients. The services offered include acupuncture, cupping therapy, electro-acupuncture and TCM consultation and assessment," she said.

The treatments are offered to support pain management and musculoskeletal conditions. Acupuncture therapy is also used to

help in the recovery from stroke paralysis and peripheral neuropathy.

SingHealth has been offering acupuncture at several of its institutions for more than 25 years, including Singapore General Hospital, Changi General Hospital and Sengkang General Hospital.

Professor Lim Shih Hui, a senior consultant in neurology at the National Neuroscience Institute, told The Straits Times that SingHealth is also actively collaborating with various educational and medical institutions to advance research and enhance treatment delivery in acupuncture.

"The National Cancer Centre Singapore is collaborating with Zhong Hua Medical Institute, Thong Chai Medical Institution and Nanyang Technological University's Chinese Medicine Clinic on cancer research and education.

"And the National Neuroscience Institute is exploring dementia research opportunities with a local TCM medical institute," he said.

"Additionally, SingHealth has established a partnership with Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan covering TCM education, research and services."

On Oct 9, a partnership agreement was signed between NHG Health and DFI Retail Group, in a multimillion-dollar relationship to make preventive care and everyday health and wellness products more accessible to the public.

Prof Seet said NHG Health is known for its innovative products, which range from products for skin healing and rehabilitation to diagnostic kits and speciality nutrient-rich foods for the elderly.

"We actually want to concentrate on making products that reach the people in the community, rather than just writing scientific papers that get published but do not move beyond that. So being able to work with retailers that actually reach more people through evidence-based interventions and products is a key part of this collaboration," he said.

NHG Health and DFI Retail Group will explore co-developing health and wellness programmes, strategies and services for Asia in the long run. These include screening tools, as well as nutritional and integrated care solutions.

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