

PLASTIC PATHWAYS

China imports and recycles almost half the world's exported plastic waste, but the global reliance on the Asian powerhouse will soon come to an end

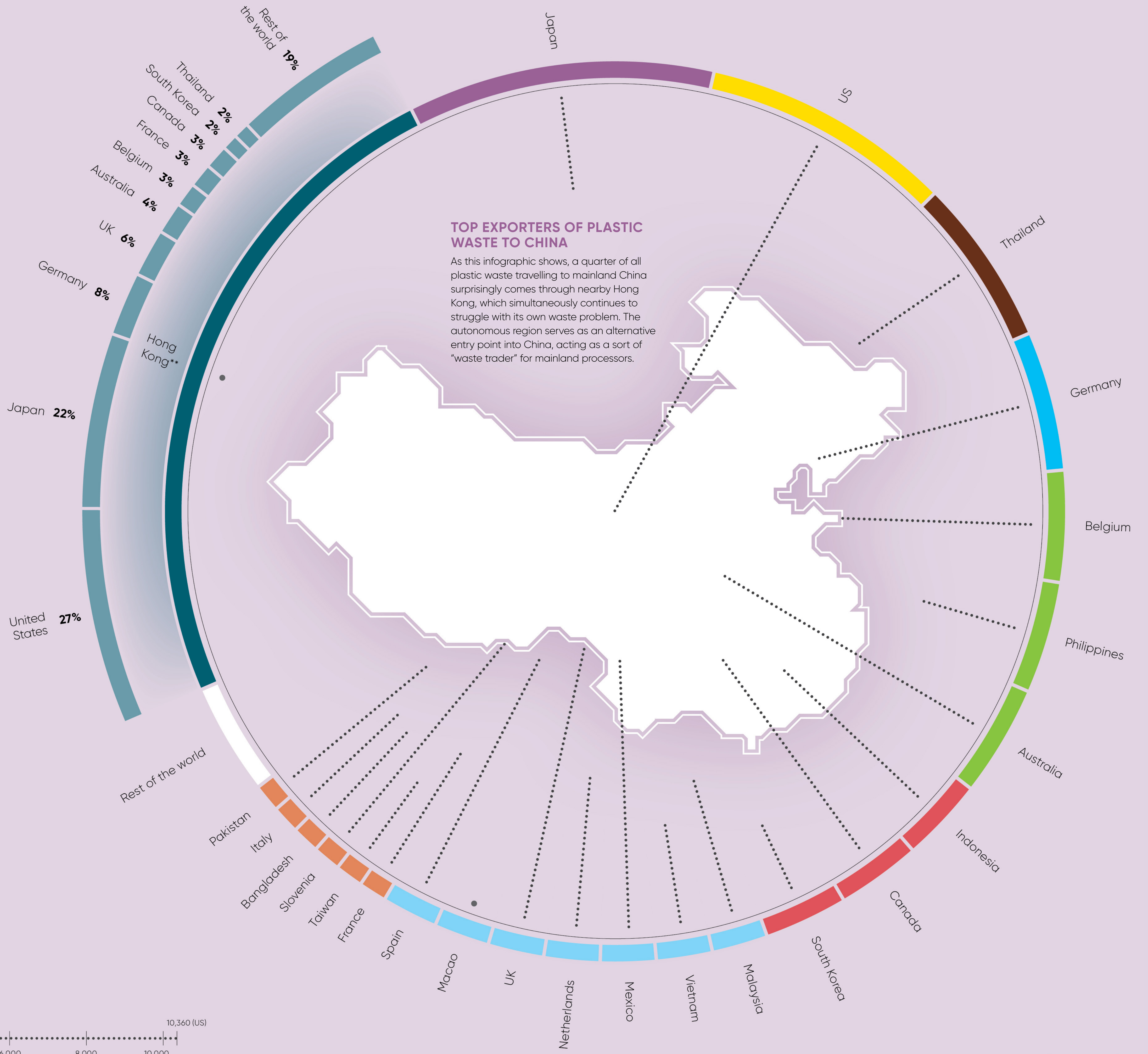
Exporting unwanted recyclables to China will be a thing of the past come 2017, when the government's ban on imported scrap paper and plastics - 24 types of waste, in fact - kicks in.

While the measure is a positive step for Beijing's environmental policy through the reduction of leaked hazardous waste from recycling plants, the impact on the country's and global recycling industries will be profound. In plastic waste alone, China imported and treated \$3.7 billion-worth of material in 2016, according to the International Trade Centre and Comtrade.

Countries that rely heavily on shipping their plastic waste eastwards, such as Germany and the United States, are now scrambling for alternative markets to process their rubbish or deal with the material domestically.

The US-based Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) quickly responded to China's July announcement to the World Trade Organization, claiming the ban would have a "devastating impact" on the sector. With more than 155,000 American jobs directly supported by recycling export activities, ISRI said the consequences would be "catastrophic".

Although not a complete surprise, since China's Green Fence campaign to curb scrap imports in 2013, the proposal will shake up billions of dollars in trade and could hint at further moves by Beijing to cut down on other categories of waste imports in the future.



TOP IMPORTERS OF PLASTIC WASTE

COUNTRIES	QUANTITY IMPORTED IN 2016 (M TONNES)	PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL IMPORTS	AVERAGE DISTANCE OF SUPPLYING COUNTRIES (KM)
China	7.35	48%	4,749
Hong Kong	2.88	19%	4,957
Germany	0.55	4%	7,932
United States	0.42	3%	693
Netherlands	0.4	3%	3,720
Belgium	0.31	2%	518
Malaysia	0.29	2%	8,858
Austria	0.24	2%	536
Italy	0.18	1%	1,070
Taiwan	0.18	1%	6,251
Canada	0.17	1%	1,592
Portugal	0.17	1%	1,493
India	0.17	1%	8,539
Turkey	0.16	1%	2,056
Sweden	0.14	1%	653
France	0.12	1%	731
UK	0.12	1%	787
Indonesia	0.12	1%	11,084
Poland	0.11	1%	837
Czech Republic	0.1	1%	842
Rest of the world	1.09	5%	N/A
WORLD	15.27	100%	4,749

TOP EXPORTERS OF PLASTIC WASTE

COUNTRIES	QUANTITY EXPORTED IN 2016 (M TONNES)	PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL EXPORTS	AVERAGE DISTANCE OF IMPORTING COUNTRIES (KM)
Hong Kong	2.82	19%	0
United States	1.94	13%	10,360
Japan	1.53	10%	2,279
Germany	1.45	10%	5,150
UK	0.81	5%	6,904
France	0.48	3%	3,196
Belgium	0.44	3%	4,731
Mexico	0.43	3%	6,686
Netherlands	0.36	2%	3,708
Spain	0.32	2%	6,263
Thailand	0.31	2%	3,004
Italy	0.23	2%	2,946
Canada	0.22	1%	5,834
South Korea	0.21	1%	1,692
Indonesia	0.2	1%	4,565
Poland	0.19	1%	3,784
Australia	0.18	1%	7,277
Slovenia	0.18	1%	6,128
Vietnam	0.17	1%	2,474
Malaysia	0.16	1%	3,369
Rest of the world	2.33	18%	N/A
WORLD	14.94	100%	N/A

CHINESE IMPORTS OF PLASTIC WASTE

