



# CHECKPOINT

Global Trade, Leadership & the Road Ahead



## February 2026 Edition

Global trade is often framed in terms of speed — faster decisions, faster logistics, faster growth. Yet the most durable partnerships I've seen, across markets and cultures, are built very differently. They are built deliberately, over time, through trust, presence, and consistent execution.

At GTC INC, we see our role as both a trade partner and a guide. We help companies navigate unfamiliar terrain, understand market dynamics, and move forward with clarity and intention. Like a long-distance run, global expansion requires pacing, preparation, and the willingness to adapt to changing conditions as they arise.

That perspective is what inspired the structure of **CHECKPOINT**.



Outside of my work in global trade, I've spent many years as a long-distance runner, completing marathons and ultraruns across different landscapes and conditions. Endurance running has a way of clarifying what actually matters: staying aware of the terrain, respecting the distance ahead, and knowing when to pause, recalibrate, and keep moving forward. Progress comes not from sprinting, but from steady, thoughtful effort over time.

This monthly newsletter follows that same rhythm. Each edition follows the arc of a long-distance journey, moving through key kilometer points — moments to orient ourselves, take stock of what's happening in global markets, and look ahead to what's coming next. You don't need to be a runner to follow along; the framework simply reflects how meaningful progress is made in business, leadership, and life.

**CHECKPOINT** is designed as a monthly pause — a place to reflect, assess, and recommit before continuing the long run. We're glad to have you with us at the start line.

— **John Raymond Malinowski**

President, GTC INC. - 'Global Trade Connect'

# 5 KM Markets in Motion

**Several themes are becoming increasingly clear across global markets:**

The current global trade environment remains unsettled. Shifting policy signals, evolving tariff frameworks, and unpredictable trade actions in major economies continue to introduce uncertainty for manufacturers and buyers alike. In response, many companies are reassessing risk and seeking partners who value stability, transparency, and rules-based, fair trade.

Against this backdrop, **manufacturing partners in Asia are actively seeking trusted Western representation**, not just distributors. They want long-term market builders who understand local regulations, buyer psychology, and go-to-market execution — and who can help navigate changing policy landscapes with care and credibility.



At the same time, **technology-enabled manufacturing**, particularly in dental, medical, and industrial sectors, continues to accelerate. AI-driven workflows and automation are no longer “emerging”; they are becoming standard expectations for competitiveness and scale.

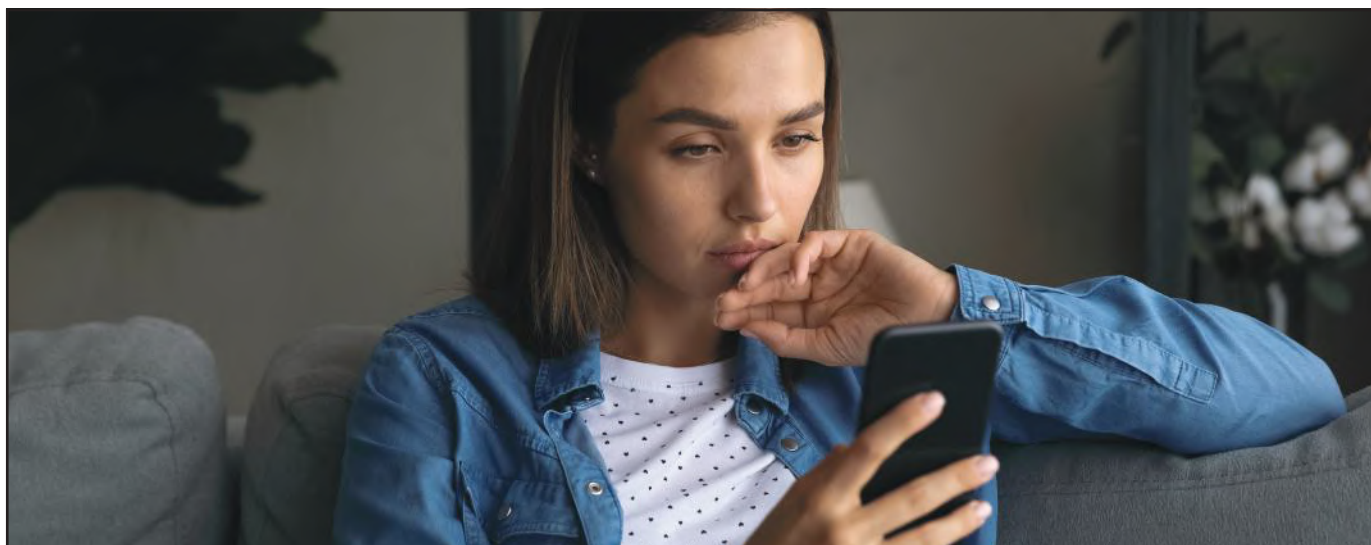
**Latin America and North America remain priority expansion zones**, especially for companies looking to diversify exposure while maintaining proximity to large end markets. These regions continue to benefit from strong consumer demand, established regulatory frameworks, and growing interest from international manufacturers.

Perhaps most importantly, **relationship capital matters more than ever**. In periods of global uncertainty, buyers and sellers are prioritizing partners who bring clarity, integrity, and follow-through — and who are committed to free, fair, and sustainable trade relationships.

For companies prepared to take a disciplined, long-term approach, the opportunity landscape remains strong, even amid volatility.

As a father of three young adults, I often find myself thinking often about the information environment they are growing up in. When I was their age, news was not perfect, but it was generally trusted. Reporting was slower, more measured, grounded in verifiable facts, and anchored by a shared understanding of journalistic standards.

Today, that shared foundation feels fractured..



## Then

- Slower reporting
- Clear editorial standards
- Fewer sources, higher trust

## Now

- Speed over verification
- Opinion blended with news
- Algorithm-driven amplification

*Sources: Edelman Trust Barometer; Reuters Institute; Pew Research Center*

*Who is shaping the story — and why?*

News is increasingly shaped by political alignment, commercial pressure, algorithmic incentives, and social media amplification.

Many stories are framed not simply to inform, but to provoke reaction. As a result, I often find myself watching or reading multiple outlets covering the same event — not to compare opinions, but to reconstruct the facts. That process has become exhausting, and for many people, deeply unsettling.

### **Trust in media: a global issue, not a local one**

Public confidence in news media has declined across regions — though the degree and drivers vary by country.





## Canada

- Fewer than half of Canadians report high trust in the media overall.
- Surveys show that **over 60% of Canadians say it has become harder to distinguish reliable news from misinformation**, especially online.
- Trust tends to be higher in local news than national outlets, and significantly lower for social media as a news source.



## Europe

- Research from the Reuters Institute shows declining engagement with traditional news across much of Europe, particularly among younger audiences.
- While press freedom is widely valued, many Europeans express skepticism about accuracy, bias, and tone — often describing news coverage as overly negative or agenda-driven.



## Asia

- Global studies consistently show that while a majority of people across Asia believe freedom of the press is important, **far fewer believe media in their own countries operate independently or impartially**.
- Trust levels vary significantly by country, but skepticism toward both traditional media and social platforms is common, particularly among younger, digitally native audiences.



## Global perspective

- The Edelman Trust Barometer continues to show that **media is trusted less than business and many other institutions** in numerous countries, including Canada, the United States, and Mexico.
- Across regions, people increasingly feel they must “verify for themselves” rather than rely on a single source.

This erosion of trust is not accidental, nor is it the result of a single factor.

## What’s driving the decline in trust?

### Research points to several overlapping causes:

- Economic pressure on journalism, particularly the decline of local newsrooms and investigative reporting
- Political polarization, which encourages outlets to tailor narratives to specific audiences
- Platform-driven incentives, where speed, outrage, and engagement often outweigh verification
- The rise of social media as a news distributor, without consistent editorial standards
- Blurred lines between journalism, commentary, and influence

The result is an environment where information is abundant, but confidence is scarce.

## Why this matters for leaders and decision-makers

For executives, entrepreneurs, and globally engaged leaders, this isn’t just a civic concern — it’s a strategic one.

Poor information leads to poor decisions. Overreacting to headlines can be as damaging as ignoring real signals. In global trade, leadership, and investment, clarity depends on disciplined information habits, not passive consumption.

Just as companies diversify supply chains to reduce risk, leaders must diversify information sources — and develop the ability to interpret nuance, context, and bias.

# What to do about it: practical guidance

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**In an era where certainty is rare, judgment becomes a leadership skill.**

**1. Go to primary sources when possible**

Speeches, official statements, filings, and original data often provide more clarity than commentary built around them.

**2. Diversify your information intake**

Consuming multiple reputable outlets with different editorial lenses reduces the risk of absorbing a single narrative uncritically.

**3. Be aware of incentives — including your own**

Media outlets respond to incentives. So do readers. Being conscious of what confirms our existing beliefs is essential.

**4. Treat information like strategy, not entertainment**

Leaders don't outsource judgment. They test assumptions, ask questions, and resist emotional framing.

**5. Model critical thinking for the next generation**

For parents, leaders, and educators, the goal isn't cynicism — it's discernment. Teaching young people how to think about information matters more than telling them what to believe.

## The CHECKPOINT perspective

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Low trust in media does not mean truth has disappeared — it means responsibility has shifted. In today's environment, clarity is earned through effort, patience, and perspective.

As with leadership and global trade, the long run favors those who slow down, cross-check, and act with intention rather than impulse. The goal isn't to find a perfect source — it's to build a disciplined process for understanding the world as it is, not as it's presented.

At this stage of the run, form matters more than speed.

## Sources & supporting research

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- **Pew Research Center**

Trust in news organizations and information sources (U.S., global comparisons)

- **Statistics Canada**

Confidence in institutions and media

- **Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism**

Digital News Report (Europe, global)

- **Edelman Trust Barometer**

Media trust across regions

- **Pew Research Center (Global Attitudes)**

Press freedom and public confidence

# 15 KM GTC INC Associate Profile Spotlight | Europe

## Europe

📍 Prague, Czechia

**Nico Cortes** — GTC INC Associate

At GTC INC, global trade starts with trust, communication, and cultural understanding. Strong cross-border relationships are rarely built from a distance — they are built by people who know how to connect, listen, and represent values consistently on the ground.

That's why we're pleased to spotlight **Nico Cortes**, our Prague-based associate supporting European engagement within the GTC INC network.



I first met Nico last summer while visiting Prague with my family. His ability to connect naturally with people from different backgrounds — and to build trust quickly and authentically — was immediately clear. Those same skills are foundational to successful international business.

Nico is a co-founder of **100 Spires City Tours**, widely known through Real Prague Guides on YouTube and Instagram. The business has earned consistent **4.9–5.0 star reviews** and a **TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award (2025)** by prioritizing credibility, clarity, and genuine value — a model that translates directly to cross-border trade and long-term market development.



### **For European companies working with GTC INC, Nico brings:**

- Strong cultural and communication fluency
- Practical experience in trust-based business development
- An intuitive understanding of international clients and expectations
- An on-the-ground European perspective grounded in real operations

Born in Bolivia to a Czech family, educated in Singapore and the United States, and now based in Czechia, Nico naturally bridges markets, cultures, and conversations — an increasingly valuable capability in today's global trade environment.

Tourism may have been the entry point, but **connection, trust, and clarity** are the real strengths Nico brings to GTC INC's relationship-driven approach to global trade.

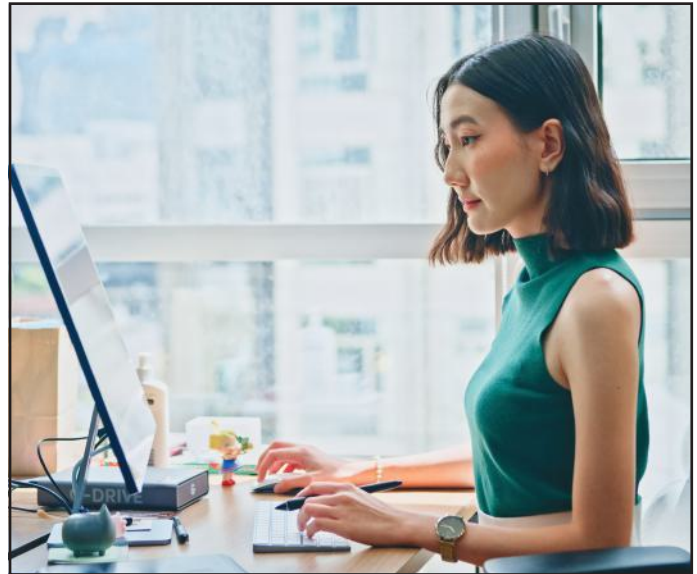
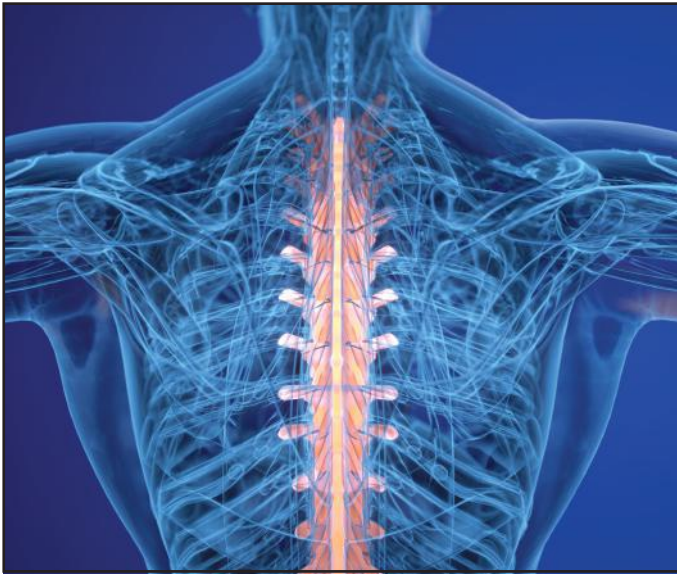
**Welcome to the GTC INC associate network, Nico.**

Growth Through Connections. 

# 21.1 KM Halfway Point— Executive Checkpoint:

## 5 Simple Ways to Reduce Neck & Shoulder Strain

As the demands of work, travel, and decision-making accumulate, performance becomes less about speed and more about form. Long hours at a desk, extended screen time, frequent flights, and sustained stress place quiet but cumulative strain on the neck and shoulders. Left unaddressed, these patterns can affect comfort, focus, and long-term effectiveness.



**The following habits are simple, practical ways executives can reduce unnecessary strain and protect performance over time:**

**1. Bring the smart phone or computer screen to your eyes — not your head to the screen**

Forward-head posture significantly increases load on the neck and shoulders. Position screens so your eyes naturally meet the top third of the display, and periodically draw your head back into neutral alignment over the spine.

**2. Use transitions as posture resets**

Standing up, starting a call, or moving between meetings are natural moments to reset posture. Gently roll the shoulders back, lengthen the spine, and take one steady breath before continuing.

**3. Avoid prolonged static positions**

Remaining still for long periods often creates more strain than movement. Brief posture changes or standing breaks every 30–60 minutes help reduce muscle tension and fatigue.

**4. Travel with intention**

During flights or long drives, avoid sustained forward-leaning positions. Support the lower back, keep feet grounded, and periodically return the head and shoulders to neutral alignment.

**5. Treat posture as performance**

Just as endurance athletes manage form to conserve energy, executives benefit from posture awareness as a performance strategy. Small, consistent adjustments help preserve energy, clarity, and long-term resilience.

At this point in the run — and in leadership — protecting form isn't about comfort. It's about **staying effective for the distance ahead.**



Global trade has entered a phase where **uncertainty is no longer episodic — it is structural**. Policy positions shift quickly, alliances are re-examined, and trade tools once designed to encourage cooperation are increasingly used as instruments of leverage. For CEOs and export-oriented businesses, this is not simply a political issue; it is a leadership challenge.

At the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos, **Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney** captured this moment succinctly. He described the current environment not as a gradual transition, but as a “rupture” in the post-war global order — one in which economic integration no longer guarantees stability and where over-reliance on any single partner or corridor can expose firms to sudden risk. Carney emphasized that success in this environment requires being principled in values, yet pragmatic in execution, with a deliberate focus on diversification and resilience rather than assumption-based planning.

McKinsey’s geopolitical research reinforces this assessment. In its analysis of global trade corridors, the firm notes that **more than 30% of global trade value could be exposed to corridor-level volatility by 2035**, depending on how fragmentation, diversification, or baseline scenarios unfold. Trade between geopolitically distant partners is particularly vulnerable, while firms that proactively diversify sourcing and market access are better positioned to absorb shocks.



In periods of structural uncertainty, leadership is less about prediction — and more about positioning. Direction and discipline matter more than speed.

# What CEOs & Business Professionals Are Experiencing

In *'How CEOs Are Responding to Geopolitical Uncertainty'*, McKinsey describes a consistent pattern among senior leaders: many feel they are **“surfing rather than running on firm ground,”** forced to distinguish signal from noise without the benefit of historical precedent. One executive described the challenge as identifying which geopolitical developments truly matter to their business — and which are distractions — while maintaining the confidence of teams and partners.



## From analysis to action: the “geopolitical nerve center”:

One of the most actionable recommendations emerging from McKinsey’s work is the establishment of a **geopolitical or tariff “nerve center.”** This is not a bureaucratic structure, but a focused, cross-functional team that tracks trade policy changes, models scenarios, and enables faster, coordinated decisions across operations, finance, supply chain, and leadership.

McKinsey identifies multiple high-impact workstreams such a team can coordinate, including tariff optimization, supplier diversification, product classification accuracy, inventory planning, and long-term footprint strategy. Companies using this approach are better able to preserve cash, reduce exposure, and maintain optionality as conditions evolve.

## Why leadership, culture, and language matter more than ever:

Yet strategy alone is not sufficient.

Both McKinsey’s research and real-world case studies show that **70% or more of international ventures fail not because of product quality or logistics, but due to cultural misunderstandings, misaligned expectations, and communication breakdowns.** In periods of heightened uncertainty, these human factors become even more pronounced.

## Leadership teams operating across borders must:

- Interpret nuance in communication styles
- Navigate differing approaches to hierarchy, decision-making, and trust
- Communicate clearly in a shared working language, often under pressure

This is where **executive coaching and language-aware leadership development** play a critical role. Coaching helps leaders slow down thinking under stress, recognize cultural blind spots, and adjust communication in ways that preserve trust — even when external conditions are unstable. It also strengthens leaders’ ability to guide teams through ambiguity without resorting to over-control or reactive decision-making.

McKinsey’s leadership research consistently highlights that organizations investing in leadership capability and cultural intelligence experience **fewer internal conflicts, faster decision-making, and stronger collaboration,** particularly in international environments.

# Executive Reflection: Getting Unstuck in Uncertain Times

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Periods of structural uncertainty create more than external volatility — they often produce internal stagnation. Leaders can become overly cautious, reactive, or locked into familiar thinking patterns precisely when adaptability matters most.

Recent research from McKinsey highlights several leadership practices that help organizations regain momentum when progress stalls. These principles are especially relevant for executives navigating today's fragmented global environment.

## Five practices that help leaders move forward:

- **Build psychological safety:** Teams contribute better ideas when they feel safe to challenge assumptions, learn from missteps, and speak honestly under pressure.
- **Adopt a creative mindset:** Reframing strategic challenges as creative problems — not just analytical ones — encourages curiosity, experimentation, and new options.
- **Disrupt entrenched patterns:** Stagnation often comes from familiarity. Introducing fresh perspectives or re-examining long-held routines can unlock overlooked opportunities.
- **Lead with empathy:** Understanding how stakeholders across cultures and functions experience uncertainty strengthens trust, alignment, and collaboration.
- **Accept unpredictability as part of progress:** Innovation rarely follows a straight line. Leaders who normalize learning and experimentation adapt more effectively as conditions evolve.



## The CHECKPOINT perspective:

In uncertain terrain, getting unstuck isn't about having perfect answers — it's about creating the conditions where better questions, insight, and movement can emerge.

## Source & Inspiration:

Adapted from insights published by McKinsey & Company, The McKinsey Publishing Guide to Getting Unstuck (2025).

## Meet our GTC INC Global Trade Specialist & Leadership Team:

### Behind GTC INC: Trade, Leadership, and Trust:

GTC INC is a global network of trade specialists and executive leadership coaches. Our team operates across regions and industries, supporting organizations as they navigate market entry, cross-border partnerships, and leadership challenges in complex and evolving global environments.



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**Jason Jang**  
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**John Raymond Malinowski**  
Saskatoon, Canada 🇨🇦

# 📍 40 KM The Final Push: Partner Spotlight | GenCore

As a marathon moves into its final kilometers, every stride matters. In global trade, this is the moment when partnerships with strategic technology providers begin to define outcomes — not just proposals. For **GTC INC**, one such partner shaping the future of dental care is **GenCore**, a South Korea-based innovator in advanced dental manufacturing systems.

GenCore's flagship platform, the **M AI°** milling machine, combines high-precision milling with AI-driven calibration and intelligent workflow automation. Designed for 5-axis milling applications, this technology enhances consistency, surface quality, and speed in producing dental restorations such as crowns, implant frameworks, and custom prosthetics — all while reducing manual setup time and variability.



**Lukas Yoon** - GENCORE Assistant Manager  
**Chang-Young Yoon** - GENCORE CEO

In addition to M AI°, GenCore's MilFix systems provide complementary capabilities for precise finishing and material versatility, helping dental labs and clinics deliver highly accurate, comfortable restorations with remarkable efficiency. Together, these platforms represent a shift in how dental products are made — from artisanal processes to reproducible, technology-enabled systems that support higher quality and better patient outcomes.

At GTC INC, our mission is not simply to bring advanced products to market. We're committed to **elevating the dental experience** for clinicians and patients alike. For many people, visiting the dentist is a source of anxiety or avoidance — dental fear affects a significant portion of the population, and in some studies nearly one-third of adults report anxiety around dental treatment.

This fear isn't only emotional; it has real consequences for oral health outcomes and quality of life. Better technology that reduces procedure time, improves fit and comfort, and supports predictable results can help change perceptions and attenuate barriers to care.

GenCore's technology addresses these challenges by enabling clinicians to deliver high-quality restorations more consistently and efficiently — a meaningful step toward making dental visits more comfortable, reliable, and patient-centric.

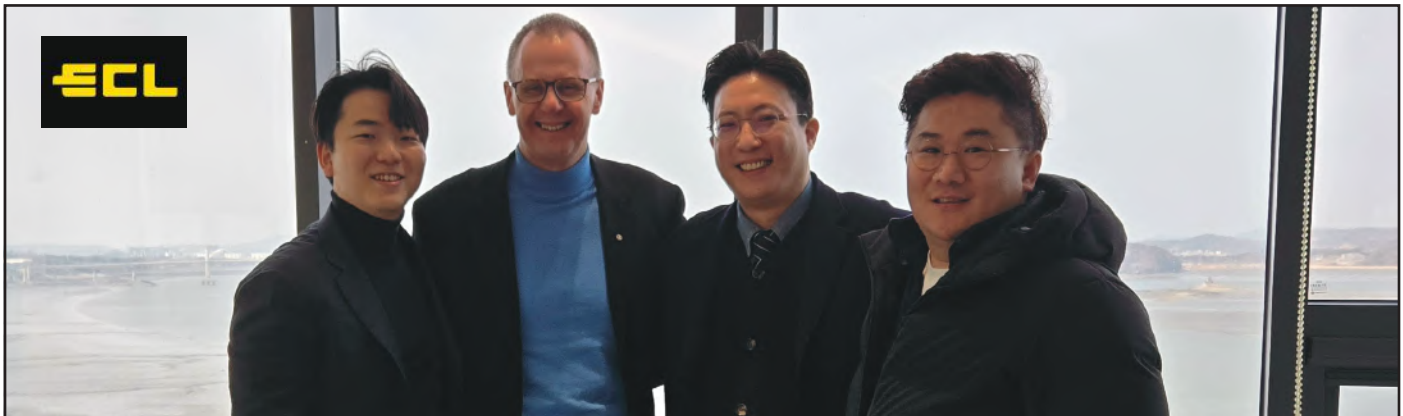


At this stage of the run, momentum is built not only through insight or awareness, but through **execution and innovation**. Partnerships like GenCore's do more than move markets — they help reshape experiences, aligning with GTC INC's long-run commitment to solutions that matter.

## Did you know?

- 30% of adults report anxiety about dental visits
- Dental fear remains a leading cause of delayed care
- GENCORE precision manufacturing solutions translate directly into better comfort, fit, and confidence for patients.

During two and a half weeks on the ground in South Korea, a number of everyday observations stood out to me — small details that, taken together, say a lot about the culture, pace, and mindset behind the country's growing global influence.



**ECL Headquarters — Geumcheon-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea (left to right):** Don Kim (Business Development Manager, ECL), John Raymond Malinowski (President, GTC INC), Andrew Shin (CEO, ECL), and Eric Kim (Business Development Manager, ECL). 'ECL has established a new standard in logistics services that customers can depend on

### Popular Korean cultural trends observed include:

- **Coffee culture isn't just popular — it's enormous:** At the end of 2022, South Korea had **more than 100,000 coffee shops nationwide**, a number that nearly doubled from just a few years earlier and now surpasses the combined count of major convenience stores. Koreans drink an astonishing amount of coffee — with average **annual consumption more than double the global average** — and **cold coffee, like iced Americanos**, remains popular even in winter months.
- **Long padded jackets are both practical and stylish:** Particularly in colder weather, long padded coats are everywhere — blending warmth with fashion in a way that feels uniquely Korean. They're functional, trend-aware, and ubiquitous.
- **Physical touch is more reserved:** When Western visitors reach in for a hug, it's sometimes met with polite restraint — a reminder that warmth and respect can be expressed differently across cultures.
- **Phones are omnipresent:** Smartphone usage is intense. It's common to see people walking while looking down at their screens — a behavior particularly noticeable in a highly connected, tech-forward society.
- **Global brands get misunderstood:** Despite global familiarity with companies like Hyundai, Kia, LG, and Samsung, I was struck by how often people outside the region assume these brands originate elsewhere. South Korea's rise as a leader in technology and innovation is real — and still underappreciated in some markets.
- **Gift-giving and hospitality matter:** In business contexts, it's common for hosts to cover meals and offer small gifts as gestures of respect and appreciation — traditions that underscore the cultural emphasis on building and sustaining relationships.
- **Meals emphasize balance over bread:** Traditional meals focus on rice, vegetables, and proteins, and you notice slimmer population profiles compared with Western norms — a small reflection of lifestyle and dietary patterns.
- **Drive and competitiveness run deep:** Students and professionals alike demonstrate exceptional discipline and work ethic. In a highly competitive environment, effort, education, and persistence are deeply valued — qualities that show up clearly in business and innovation.

These observations are just that — personal reflections from the field. But they help explain why South Korea continues to punch above its weight globally: a culture that moves fast, values connection, embraces innovation, and still preserves its own distinct rhythms and forms of expression.

## South Korea — Top Trading Partners by Export Value (USD)

- |                                |                           |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. 🇨🇳 China — \$133.0B         | 7. 🇮🇳 India — \$18.7B     |
| 2. 🇺🇸 United States — \$128.4B | 8. 🇸🇬 Singapore — \$18.2B |
| 3. 🇻🇳 Vietnam — \$58.3B        | 9. 🇦🇺 Australia — \$15.6B |
| 4. 🇭🇰 Hong Kong — \$35.0B      | 10. 🇲🇽 Mexico — \$13.6B   |
| 5. 🇹🇼 Taiwan — \$34.0B         | 11. 🇨🇦 Canada — \$10.35B  |
| 6. 🇯🇵 Japan — \$29.6B          |                           |

## Closing Notes

The views and observations shared in this edition of **CHECKPOINT** reflect the personal perspectives and professional experiences of the author. They are intended to encourage reflection, dialogue, and understanding around global trade, leadership, and cultural engagement.

This edition of **CHECKPOINT** was developed with the support of AI-assisted drafting and image-generation tools. All viewpoints, interpretations, and final editorial decisions reflect the judgment and experience of the author.

GTC INC does not endorse any political party, political ideology, or religious belief. We are committed to inclusivity and respect for all cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. Our work is guided by a belief in free, fair, and sustainable trade, and in the value of products, partnerships, and leadership practices that contribute positively to overall quality of life.

Comments or feedback are welcome.  
Please feel free to contact us at [contact@globaltradeconnect.net](mailto:contact@globaltradeconnect.net).

## Our Mission

**GTC Inc.** is a Canadian-based international trade and market-entry firm built on trust, clarity, and strong relationships. We connect manufacturers, distributors, and buyers across global markets, serving as a strategic bridge between regions and cultures.

We support sourcing, distribution, negotiation, and market expansion, working closely with partners to align objectives and build long-term success. Our integrated approach combines trade representation with executive communication, leadership coaching, and cross-cultural insight to strengthen negotiations and collaboration.

Led by a Canadian team with over 100 years of combined international trade experience, GTC Inc. delivers practical expertise and relationship-driven execution worldwide.





## Your trusted partners



### Connect with GTC INC

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