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China Paid More for Fewer Spirits Imports Through September

Import volumes fell 9.4% to 71.9 million liters, yet the bill rose 19.6% to $1.378 billion

Tuesday, November 3, 2026



China imported fewer distilled spirits by volume from January to September, but it spent much more on those purchases, according to figures reported on Tuesday, November 3, by Beijing Business Today and republished by Eastmoney.

The report, which attributed the balance to the alcoholic beverages import and export section of the China Chamber of Commerce of Import and Export of Foodstuffs, Native Produce and Animal By-Products, said China imported 71.9 million liters of spirits during the first nine months of the year. The total value of those imports reached $1.378

billion.

Compared with the same period of 2025, import volume fell 9.4%, while nominal import value rose 19.6%. The two moves point in opposite directions. China bought less spirit in physical terms, but the overall bill increased.

Based on the rounded totals in the report, the implied average import value reached about $19.17 per liter. That was roughly 32.0% higher than a year earlier. The figure does not show whether the increase came mainly from higher prices, a shift toward more expensive categories, changes in quality, or a different mix of supplying countries. It only shows that the average amount paid per liter increased sharply.

That gap between volume and value is likely to draw attention from exporters and suppliers watching the Chinese market. A decline in liters imported can point to weaker demand in part of the trade, slower inventory turnover, or a change in buying patterns. At the same time, a higher total bill means importers were still paying more overall, either because unit prices rose or because the mix of products moved toward higher-value shipments.

The figures also underline the limits of headline import totals. Customs data can show how much product crossed the border and how much importers paid for it, but they do not directly measure retail sales, final consumer demand, or performance by brand. They also do not show from this summary how much of the change came from major categories within spirits, such as whisky, brandy, vodka, rum, gin, tequila, or other distilled drinks.

For producers selling into China, that distinction matters. A rise in the average value per liter can be positive for premium exporters if buyers are shifting toward higher-end products. But the same pattern can also appear if lower-priced segments weaken more quickly than premium segments, reducing total volume even as average values rise. Without a more detailed category breakdown, the reported totals cannot separate those effects.

The report did not provide a country-by-country split in the summary carried by Eastmoney, nor did it break out performance by specific beverage category. It also did not indicate how much of the value increase reflected underlying contract prices, exchange-rate effects in invoicing, or changes in logistics and related costs. The reported value was in U.S. dollars.

The data nevertheless show a clear change in the shape of China’s spirits imports through September. The market imported less liquid overall than in the same nine months of 2025, yet each liter carried a much higher average value. For exporters, distributors, and investors, that means the import bill alone gives only part of the picture. The same set of numbers can signal weaker volume demand and stronger value concentration at the same time.

Beijing Business Today identified the industry chamber section as the source of the balance, and Eastmoney republished the report on Tuesday, November 3. The figures covered January through September and compared that period with the first nine months of 2025.