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China paid $1.17 billion for imported wine despite a 5.2% drop in volume

January-through-September shipments fell by about 8.6 million liters from a year earlier, pushing the implied average value up 11.5%

Thursday, November 19, 2026



China paid more for imported wine in the first nine months of the year even as it bought less by volume, according to market reports released Wednesday, November 18. The figures point to a higher average value per liter and suggest that stronger

spending did not come from a broad rise in imported volumes.

AskCI, a Chinese market information provider, reported that wine imports from all suppliers reached 157 million liters from January through September, down 5.2% from the same period a year earlier. Over the same span, the value of those imports rose 5.7% to $1.171 billion.

Based on AskCI’s rounded series, that means China imported about 8.6 million fewer liters than a year earlier while paying about $63.1 million more. The implied average value was about $7.46 a liter, up 11.5%.

That increase in average value does not by itself measure inflation. It can also reflect shifts in the mix of products imported, including the balance between bottled and bulk wine, changes in supplier countries, and currency effects. The published figures describe nominal import value rather than price changes at retail.

The September reading was stronger than the cumulative trend. AskCI said China imported 18.3 million liters in September, up 24.6% from a year earlier, and spent $159 million, up 61.4%.

But the annual increase in September did not mean imports were still rising from one month to the next. Foodmate, another Chinese industry publication, reported on November 18 that September volume was about 0.7 million liters below August, a decline of roughly 3.7%. That contrast shows how a sharp increase from a year earlier can coincide with a monthly pullback when the comparison base in the prior year was weak.

Read on its own, the September result could suggest a rapid recovery in buying. The January-through-September totals show a more restrained picture. Even after the strong annual gain reported for September, cumulative import volume remained lower than a year earlier, while the value of those purchases continued to move higher than the physical volume.

For wine exporters, that pattern matters because China remains a closely watched import market. A smaller volume combined with a larger import bill can indicate that buyers are favoring higher-value products, trimming lower-priced purchases, or adjusting inventories selectively rather than expanding demand across the market.

The figures cited by both publications are secondary reports rather than a direct copy of the original customs table. AskCI said its November 18 release drew on data in its database. Foodmate, in a separate November 18 report on major alcohol imports, cited the China Alcoholic Drinks Association and customs information. The underlying customs table cited in those reports could not be independently verified.

The two publications also differed slightly in the precision of their cumulative volume data. Foodmate published a January-through-September total of 157.4 million liters, while AskCI rounded the figure to 157 million liters. To avoid mixing series with different rounding, the calculations for liters lost, dollars added, and average value per liter are based on AskCI’s rounded total.