

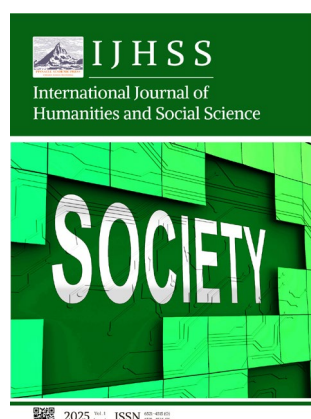
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# China's Coffee Imports from Vietnam: A Comprehensive Analysis from 2015 to Present

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of China's coffee imports from Vietnam spanning the period from 2015 to the present. It begins with a thorough review of the historical development and current status of the coffee industries in both China and Vietnam, highlighting key milestones and market dynamics. Subsequently, the study examines detailed data on import volumes, monetary values, and the product composition of China's coffee imports from Vietnam, drawing from authoritative sources such as customs statistics and trade reports. Furthermore, the paper investigates a range of influencing factors—including evolving market demand patterns, variations in product quality, shifts in consumer preferences, and the impact of trade policies and tariffs—that have shaped the trade relationship. The analysis reveals that while Vietnam has traditionally been a major supplier of coffee to China, recent years have witnessed notable changes in import trends due to a combination of economic, political, and market-driven factors. Ultimately, this research offers valuable insights and serves as a useful reference for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and scholars interested in the current state and future prospects of the China-Vietnam coffee trade.

**Keywords:** China; Vietnam; Coffee imports; trade analysis

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, coffee consumption in China has experienced a remarkable surge, evolving from a niche market into a mainstream lifestyle choice [1]. This growth is driven by rising disposable incomes, urbanization, and changing consumer preferences toward premium and specialty coffee. Additionally, the proliferation of coffee shops and cafes in major Chinese cities has fostered a vibrant coffee culture among younger generations. Against this backdrop, Vietnam—recognized as the world's second-largest coffee producer and exporter, particularly renowned for its robusta beans—has become a critical supplier to China's burgeoning coffee market. Between 2015 and the present, multiple forces have contributed to shifts in the volume, product mix, and trade dynamics of coffee imports from Vietnam to China [2]. These include fluctuations in global coffee prices, evolving demand for different coffee varieties within China, logistical improvements, and the implementation of revised trade agreements and tariffs between the two countries. By providing a detailed and comprehensive analysis of these developments, this paper seeks to offer industry stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers a clearer understanding of the complexities and future outlook of the China-Vietnam coffee trade relationship.

## 2. Overview of the Coffee Industry in China and Vietnam

### 2.1. Development of the Coffee Industry in China

In recent years, coffee consumption in China has been steadily rising, reflecting a growing consumer interest in coffee culture and lifestyle [3]. According to data from the China Coffee Association, the per capita coffee consumption in China has surged from approximately 3 cups per year in 2015 to nearly 8 cups per year in 2024, indicating a rapid expansion of the domestic market. This upward trend has stimulated the growth of various coffee-related industries within the country, including coffee roasting, specialty cafes, equipment manufacturing, and coffee education. Although China possesses several coffee-producing regions, primarily located in Yunnan, Hainan, and some parts of Fujian province, the scale of domestic production remains limited relative to burgeoning demand. For instance, in 2023, China's total coffee production was estimated at around 150,000 tons, while domestic consumption reached nearly 450,000 tons, revealing a substantial supply-demand gap [4]. This disparity necessitates a heavy reliance on coffee imports, particularly from major producers like Vietnam and Brazil, to satisfy the market's needs and sustain the rapid development of China's coffee industry.

### 2.2. Development of the Coffee Industry in Vietnam

Vietnam stands as one of the world's leading coffee-producing countries, renowned especially for its dominant role in the global Robusta coffee market. In recent years, Vietnam's coffee industry has experienced rapid growth and modernization. By 2024, the country's annual coffee production reached approximately 3.2 million tons, securing its position as the world's second-largest coffee producer after Brazil. The majority of Vietnam's coffee output consists of Robusta beans, which represent a significant share of the global Robusta supply, catering to both instant coffee manufacturers and espresso blends worldwide. The impressive development of Vietnam's coffee sector is supported by several key factors, including its favorable tropical climate and high-altitude terrain, which provide ideal growing conditions for coffee plants [5]. Additionally, Vietnam's coffee farms are increasingly adopting large-scale, mechanized plantation management practices and integrating advanced agricultural technologies, such as improved pest control and irrigation systems, to boost yield and quality. The Vietnamese government plays an active role in promoting the industry's growth by implementing supportive policies aimed at modernizing coffee plantations, enhancing quality control standards across the production chain, and facilitating access to international markets through trade agreements and export incentives. These combined efforts have helped Vietnam maintain its competitive edge and expand its influence in the global coffee trade.

## 3. Analysis of China's Coffee Imports from Vietnam from 2015 to Present

### 3.1. Import Volume and Value

As shown in Table 1, China's coffee imports from Vietnam experienced a consistent upward trajectory in both volume and value between 2015 and 2019. During this period, the growing demand for coffee in China, combined with Vietnam's expanding production capacity and competitive pricing, contributed to a substantial increase in imports—from 25,000 tons in 2015 to a peak of 39,000 tons in 2019. The corresponding import value rose from 60 million to 100 million US dollars, reflecting not only higher volumes but also improvements in product quality and diversification. However, starting in 2020, both the volume and value of imports began to decline. This downturn can be attributed to several factors, including global market disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, shifts in China's domestic consumption patterns, and adjustments in trade policies between the two countries [6]. By 2024, the import volume had dropped back to 25,000 tons, with the import value decreasing to 70 million US dollars, signaling a significant contraction in bilateral coffee trade. These trends underscore the evolving challenges and dynamics in the China-Vietnam coffee trade relationship [7].

**Table 1.** Trends in China's Coffee Imports from Vietnam (2015–2024).

Year	Import Volume (tons)	Import Value (million US dollars)
2015	25,000	60
2016	28,000	70
2017	32,000	85
2018	35,000	90
2019	39,000	100
2020	36,000	95
2021	33,000	88
2022	30,000	80
2023	28,000	75
2024	25,000	70

(Data source: China Customs Statistics).

### 3.2. Product Structure of Imports

China's coffee imports from Vietnam predominantly consist of coffee beans, with Robusta coffee beans making up the majority share due to Vietnam's specialization in Robusta production. These raw coffee beans play a crucial role in meeting the large-scale demand of China's coffee processing and roasting industries. In addition to raw beans, a smaller but growing portion of imports includes processed coffee products such as instant coffee, which cater to consumers seeking convenience and ready-to-drink options. For instance, in 2024, coffee beans accounted for approximately 90% of the total coffee import volume from Vietnam, while instant coffee and other processed products represented around 10%. While the proportion of raw coffee beans has remained relatively stable over recent years, evolving consumer preferences in China are driving a gradual increase in demand for higher-quality, value-added processed coffee products. This shift is influenced by factors such as rising incomes, urbanization, and a growing appreciation for specialty and convenience coffee varieties. As a result, the market for premium instant coffee, ready-to-drink beverages, and other processed coffee forms is expected to expand steadily, encouraging further diversification in China's coffee imports from Vietnam.

## 4. Influencing Factors of China's Coffee Imports from Vietnam

### 4.1. Market Demand in China

With the continuous popularization of coffee culture across China, the overall demand for coffee has been steadily rising. More importantly, the structure of this demand is undergoing significant transformation as consumers become increasingly discerning about the quality, flavor profiles, and variety of coffee they consume. Historically, the Chinese market's strong preference for instant coffee drove high demand for Vietnam's Robusta coffee beans, which are well-suited for instant coffee production due to their robust flavor and higher caffeine content. However, recent years have seen a marked shift with the rapid growth of the fresh-ground and specialty coffee segments. This shift has led to a surge in demand for high-quality Arabica coffee beans, prized for their nuanced flavors and aromatic qualities, which better cater to evolving consumer tastes seeking premium and artisanal coffee experiences. Since Vietnam's coffee industry predominantly focuses on Robusta bean production, this changing landscape in China's coffee consumption has directly influenced the volume and composition of coffee imports from Vietnam. Consequently, Vietnamese exporters face increasing pressure to adapt to this new demand pattern, either by diversifying their product offerings or by improving the quality and processing techniques of their existing coffee lines to remain competitive in the Chinese market.

#### *4.2. Product Quality of Vietnamese Coffee*

In recent years, concerns have arisen regarding the quality of some Vietnamese coffee exports. Driven by the pursuit of higher profits, certain Vietnamese coffee producers and exporters have resorted to cutting corners in their production and processing methods, which has resulted in a noticeable decline in product quality. Issues such as excessive pesticide residues, inconsistent bean quality, and irregular processing standards have been reported in some batches of Vietnamese coffee beans. These quality problems have increasingly raised alarms among Chinese consumers and importers, who are becoming more discerning and demanding stricter quality assurance and food safety standards. As a consequence, the reputational impact has led some Chinese importers to reduce their reliance on Vietnamese coffee, opting instead to diversify their sources by increasing imports from other coffee-producing countries with established reputations for higher-quality products, such as Brazil and Colombia. This shift not only reflects the heightened emphasis on quality within China's coffee market but also underscores the urgent need for Vietnam's coffee industry to enhance its quality control mechanisms and adopt more sustainable and transparent production practices to maintain its competitiveness.

#### *4.3. Trade Policies between China and Vietnam*

Trade policies between China and Vietnam play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of coffee imports. Overall, the bilateral trade relationship remains stable, supported by a series of relatively favorable trade agreements and policies that have facilitated the steady growth of coffee trade between the two countries. For instance, preferential tariff rates and streamlined customs procedures have helped reduce costs and improve the efficiency of coffee imports from Vietnam into China. However, during certain special periods, shifts in trade policies or regulatory measures can have notable impacts on import activities. Changes such as adjustments in tariff rates, the introduction of stricter quarantine and inspection protocols, or modifications in certification requirements may increase import costs or complicate import procedures. These factors can temporarily constrain the volume of Vietnamese coffee entering the Chinese market. For example, heightened quarantine inspections to prevent the spread of pests or diseases have occasionally led to delays at customs, disrupting supply chains. Such policy fluctuations underscore the importance of close coordination between the two countries to maintain smooth trade flows and support the sustainable development of the China-Vietnam coffee trade.

### **5. Challenges and Opportunities in China's Coffee Imports from Vietnam**

#### *5.1. Challenges*

The continuous decline in both the import volume and value of Vietnamese coffee in recent years presents a significant challenge for the bilateral coffee trade. If this downward trend persists, it could adversely impact Vietnamese coffee exporters by reducing their market share and revenue from one of their key export destinations. Moreover, the decline may also disrupt the stable supply chains of Chinese coffee-related enterprises that heavily rely on Vietnamese coffee beans, potentially leading to increased procurement costs or supply shortages. Compounding this challenge is the intensifying competition from other major coffee-producing countries such as Brazil and Colombia. These countries have been steadily expanding their presence in the Chinese market by offering high-quality Arabica and specialty coffee products that appeal to the evolving tastes of Chinese consumers. Their strong brand reputation, consistent quality, and diversified product offerings have enabled them to capture an increasing share of China's coffee import market, thereby making it more difficult for Vietnamese coffee to maintain its competitive position. To address these challenges, Vietnam's coffee industry may need to focus on improving product quality, enhancing supply chain reliability, and innovating in coffee processing to better align with changing consumer preferences and market demands.

### 5.2. Opportunities

Despite facing various challenges, there are significant opportunities for Vietnamese coffee in the Chinese market. The rapid expansion of e-commerce in China has revolutionized traditional sales channels, creating more diverse and direct pathways for coffee products to reach consumers. Vietnamese coffee exporters can leverage popular online platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, and Pinduoduo to connect directly with Chinese consumers, effectively reducing reliance on intermediaries, lowering transaction costs, and boosting brand visibility and recognition. Moreover, the growing influence of social media and digital marketing provides Vietnamese brands with powerful tools to engage younger, tech-savvy coffee drinkers, cultivate brand loyalty, and expand their market presence. In addition to exploring new sales channels, Vietnam's coffee industry can unlock further growth potential by focusing on improving product quality through advanced cultivation techniques and stricter quality control. Developing a broader range of premium and specialty coffee products that align with the evolving tastes and preferences of Chinese consumers—who increasingly favor high-end, artisanal, and ethically sourced options—will be essential. By combining innovation in product development with strategic marketing and quality enhancement, Vietnamese coffee exporters can capture greater market share and drive sustainable growth within China's dynamic coffee market.

## 6. Conclusions and Suggestions

### 6.1. Conclusions

From 2015 to the present, China's coffee imports from Vietnam have undergone a notable process of initial growth followed by a gradual decline. During this period, both the import volume and value have experienced significant fluctuations, reflecting changing market dynamics and external influences. The product structure of these imports has been dominated primarily by raw coffee beans, particularly Robusta beans, which constitute the bulk of Vietnam's coffee exports. Several key factors have influenced these import trends, including shifts in market demand within China, variations in the quality of Vietnamese coffee products, and evolving trade policies between the two countries. Currently, while China's coffee imports from Vietnam face various challenges—such as intensified competition from other coffee-producing nations and increasing consumer demand for higher-quality coffee—there are still promising opportunities. These opportunities arise from the rapid growth of e-commerce, the rising popularity of specialty coffee, and the potential for Vietnam to upgrade its product quality and diversify its offerings to better meet the sophisticated preferences of Chinese consumers.

### 6.2. Suggestions

For Vietnam, it is crucial to strengthen quality control throughout the entire coffee production process—from cultivation and harvesting to processing and packaging—to significantly improve the overall quality and consistency of its coffee products. Meeting the growing demand for high-quality coffee in the Chinese market requires not only better quality assurance but also innovation in product development. This includes actively exploring new product lines such as premium and specialty coffee varieties tailored to the expanding fresh-ground coffee segment in China, which appeals to increasingly sophisticated consumers.

Meanwhile, China's relevant regulatory bodies and industry stakeholders should enhance bilateral cooperation with Vietnam in areas such as coffee quality supervision, standard-setting, and technical exchanges. Through such collaboration, the two countries can jointly promote improvements in Vietnamese coffee quality, helping Vietnam better align with China's stringent import standards and consumer expectations. Furthermore, Chinese coffee-related enterprises have the opportunity to deepen partnerships with their Vietnamese counterparts by engaging in joint ventures, knowledge sharing, and coordinated marketing efforts. These collaborative initiatives can facilitate market expansion,



improve supply chain efficiency, and foster the sustainable and healthy development of China-Vietnam coffee trade.

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