

Entering the Chinese Premium Olive Oil Market: Opportunities and Strategies for Spanish Producers

1. Executive Summary

The Chinese market presents a significant opportunity for producers of high-quality olive oil, driven by increasing consumer affluence, a growing awareness of health and wellness, and the adoption of Western dietary habits. This report analyzes the Chinese premium olive oil market, detailing its current state, consumer preferences, potential distribution channels, regulatory landscape, and effective marketing strategies. The findings indicate a substantial growth trajectory for the olive oil market in China, with a particular appetite for premium imported varieties, especially from Spain. While navigating the regulatory requirements and understanding consumer nuances are crucial, the potential rewards of entering this expanding market are considerable for Spanish olive oil producers. This report provides actionable recommendations to guide market entry and establish a successful brand presence in China.

2. Understanding the Chinese Premium Olive Oil Market

The olive market in China is experiencing substantial growth, with projections indicating a revenue of US\$ 1,998.3 million by 2030, demonstrating a compound annual growth rate of 7.9% from 2025 ¹. Within this market, olive oil stands as the most significant segment, indicating a strong foundation for producers looking to enter this space ¹. Furthermore, data suggests a consistent upward trend in the import of refined olive oil and its fractions, increasing from approximately 9.1 million kilograms in 2023 to a projected 11.133 million kilograms in 2028 ². This increasing reliance on international supply points to a growing overall demand for olive oil within China.

Several key factors are fueling this demand. A significant driver is the rising health consciousness among Chinese consumers. There is an increasing understanding of the health benefits associated with olive oil, such as its high content of monounsaturated fats and antioxidants, aligning with a broader trend towards healthier eating habits ³. This awareness makes premium olive oil an attractive option for consumers seeking healthier cooking oils. Additionally, the growing influence of Western dietary patterns plays a crucial role. As more Chinese consumers become familiar with cuisines that incorporate olive oil, such as salads and pasta dishes, the demand for this ingredient is naturally increasing ⁴.

The expanding middle class and the consequent rise in disposable incomes are also critical factors. With greater financial capacity, consumers are more willing to spend on premium

imported food products like high-quality Spanish olive oil ³. Moreover, the established culture of gifting in China presents another significant avenue for olive oil sales, particularly for premium and imported varieties, which are often perceived as thoughtful and healthy gifts ³. The 750ml bottle size, often presented in attractive packaging, is particularly popular for this purpose ⁹.

Geographically, the consumption of olive oil in China is largely concentrated in the more affluent and internationally influenced first-tier cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, accounting for approximately 80% of the total consumption ⁹. These urban centers have a higher purchasing power and a greater exposure to Western products and lifestyles, making them the most promising initial targets for market entry. Expanding to other affluent cities like Guangzhou could follow as brand recognition and distribution networks grow.

3. Decoding Chinese Consumer Preferences for Premium Olive Oil

Understanding the specific preferences of Chinese consumers regarding premium olive oil is essential for tailoring product offerings and marketing strategies. Origin plays a significant role in the perceived value and quality of olive oil. Spain is recognized as a leading exporter of olive oil to China, and its products are often favored by consumers ³. However, Italian olive oil also enjoys a strong reputation and is gaining popularity ⁴. Emphasizing the Spanish origin of your olive oil can therefore serve as a strong indicator of quality and authenticity, as Chinese consumers tend to associate European olive oil with higher standards ³. Furthermore, imported oils are generally perceived as having higher food safety standards compared to domestic options ⁵.

The preference for extra virgin olive oil is notable among Chinese consumers ⁵. Clearly labeling your product as "extra virgin" and highlighting its superior quality and health benefits will align with consumer expectations. Brand reputation is another crucial factor, with consumers often seeking well-known and exclusive brands as a sign of reliability and premium quality ³. Building brand awareness and trust through consistent quality and effective marketing is therefore paramount. If your olive oil holds certifications such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), prominently featuring these can further enhance consumer confidence and potentially increase their willingness to pay a premium ¹⁰.

In terms of usage, olive oil is increasingly being incorporated into salads and Western-style cooking by Chinese consumers ⁴. Providing recipe suggestions and highlighting the versatility of your oil for these applications can help educate consumers and encourage adoption. As previously mentioned, gifting remains a significant occasion for olive oil purchase. Moreover, there is a growing interest in the health benefits of olive oil, particularly among younger, urban consumers, making health and lifestyle-focused marketing appealing to this demographic ¹⁰. Packaging expectations also play a vital role, especially in the premium segment. The 750ml bottle size is popular for gifting, while 1-liter and 5-liter options cater to household use ³. The increasing popularity of mini bottles (30ml-100ml) for sampling and promotional purposes

should also be noted ¹⁸. Glass bottles are generally preferred for their ability to preserve the flavor and prevent oxidation of the oil, with darker colored glass offering better protection from light ¹⁸. For the luxury market, elegant and visually appealing packaging, including options for gift presentation, is essential to convey the premium nature of the product ³.

4. Identifying Potential Importers and Distributors in China

The import and distribution landscape for gourmet foods in China includes a variety of specialized companies that cater to the growing demand for high-quality international products ²². For European businesses looking to enter this market, understanding the available channels and identifying suitable partners is a key step ²³.

Among the prominent distributors specializing in premium imported foods is **Sinodis**, a leading company that supplies dairy, bakery, and gourmet products to hotels, restaurants, and high-end retailers ²². Their focus on premium imported goods, including European products, makes them a strong potential partner for a Spanish olive oil producer ²². Other significant food distributors in China include **JD Fresh**, known for its robust cold-chain logistics, and **COFCO**, the largest state-owned food distributor with an extensive network ²². While their primary focus may not be exclusively on gourmet items, their scale and reach could offer broader market access. Further investigation into specific divisions or channels handling premium products within these larger organizations would be beneficial.

Additional distributors mentioned in the research include **Xiamen C&D Corporation Limited**, **Chengdu Xindadi Co., Ltd.**, **Shanghai SY Food Distribution Co., Ltd.**, **Hunan Jinjian Cereals Industry Co., Ltd.**, **Shenzhen Pagoda Industrial Group**, **New Hope Group**, and **Zhengzhou Sinri Food Co., Ltd.** ²². While their specializations vary, some may handle imported or higher-end food products. **China Best Food Group Ltd.** is also identified as a leading food import and export business with experience in various food categories ²⁴.

Several prominent foodstuff importers with significant import volumes include **SHANGAHI BHOOMI TRADING**, **GUANGZHOU SHIPMATCH COMM SERV**, **GUANGZHOU HEYI SUPPLY CHAIN TECHNOL**, and **HAVI LOGISTICS SERVICES HONGKONG LIMITED** ²⁵. Exploring their potential interest in premium olive oil would be a worthwhile endeavor.

To effectively identify and evaluate potential partners, Spanish olive oil producers can leverage resources such as the EU SME Centre, which provides support services for market entry ²³. Participating in food trade fairs in China can offer direct interaction with potential importers and distributors ²³. Exploring cross-border e-commerce platforms might also provide initial market entry and insights into consumer demand ⁹. Additionally, online business directories specializing in food imports and exports can be valuable tools for identifying relevant companies ⁹.

Table 1: Potential Importers and Distributors in China

Company Name	Website	Specialization/Notes
Sinodis	sinodis.com	Premium imported foods (dairy, bakery, gourmet)
JD Fresh	fresh.jd.com	Fresh produce, seafood, meat, dairy (extensive cold-chain)
COFCO	cofco.com	Grains, oils, processed foods (largest state-owned distributor)
Xiamen C&D Corporation Limited	N/A	Agricultural products, grains, packaged food
Chengdu Xindadi Co., Ltd.	N/A	Fresh vegetables, fruits, grains
Shanghai SY Food Distribution Co., Ltd.	syfood.com.cn	Seafood, meat, dairy
Hunan Jinjian Cereals Industry Co., Ltd.	N/A	Agricultural products
Shenzhen Pagoda Industrial Group	pagoda.com.cn	Fresh fruits (focus on high-quality, imported)
New Hope Group	newhopegroup.com	Poultry, livestock, dairy
Zhengzhou Sinri Food Co., Ltd.	sinrifoody.com	Frozen foods (meat, seafood, ready-to-cook)
China Best Food Group Ltd.	china-bestfood.com	Seafood, fruits, vegetables (importer & exporter)
SHANGAHI BHOOMI TRADING	N/A	Foodstuff importer
GUANGZHOU SHIPMATCH COMM SERV	N/A	Foodstuff importer
GUANGZHOU HEYI SUPPLY CHAIN TECHNOL	N/A	Foodstuff importer
HAVI LOGISTICS SERVICES HONGKONG LIMITED	N/A	Foodstuff buyer

5. Targeting High-End Grocery and Specialty Retailers

The luxury retail food sector in China offers a direct route to consumers who are willing to pay a premium for high-quality imported products. Several high-end supermarket chains across major Chinese cities cater specifically to this discerning clientele ²⁶.

In Beijing, prominent retailers known for their selection of imported goods include **April Gourmet** and **Jenny Lou's**, which are popular among expatriates and affluent locals ²⁶. **BHG Marketplace** and **City Shop**, often located in upscale shopping malls, also offer extensive selections of luxury goods and imported produce, although at a premium price point ²⁷. **Ole' Supermarket**, with multiple locations in Beijing, is an upscale brand under CR Vanguard,

specializing in small-sized and fresh imported products, including a wide range of wines and liquors ²⁶.

Shanghai boasts a strong presence of luxury supermarkets as well. **Olé** has several locations, claiming that a significant percentage of its products are imported ³⁰. **City'super**, originating from Hong Kong, is another high-end chain known for its vast selection of international products, including premium goods, fresh seafood, and imported fruits ²⁶. **Hema Fresh**, operated by Alibaba, combines high-quality groceries with a digital platform, featuring premium sections with organic and imported goods ²⁶. Membership-based stores like **Sam's Club** and **Costco** also have a presence in Shanghai, offering a range of imported groceries ³⁰. In Guangzhou, specialty food stores like **Jusco**, a Japanese supermarket and department store, offer a good supply of organic and imported food products ³⁴. **Corner's Deli** is another option with a variety of organic and imported items available ³⁴.

Table 2: Key High-End Grocery and Specialty Store Chains in Major Chinese Cities

Retailer Name	City	Focus/Characteristics
Ole' Supermarket	Beijing	Upscale, imported goods, fresh produce, gourmet delicacies, fine wines
City'super	Beijing	International products, quality goods, organic and health-conscious products
BLT Supermarket	Beijing	High-end groceries, imported goods, emphasis on freshness and quality
Jenny Lou's	Beijing	High-quality imported goods, Western groceries, organic products, imported wines
The Food Hall	Beijing	Luxury items, curated selection of gourmet foods and premium brands
Hema Fresh	Beijing	Tech-enabled, high-quality groceries, premium imported and organic sections
April Gourmet	Beijing	Imported groceries, wide variety of foreign products
Ole' Supermarket	Shanghai	Upscale, imported goods
City'super	Shanghai	High-end, premium goods, fresh seafood, imported fruits

Sam's Club	Shanghai	Membership-based, high-quality and high-value products from top brands
Costco	Shanghai	Membership-based, wide range of products including imported foods
Hema Fresh	Shanghai	Tech-enabled, fresh food focus, imported goods
Jusco	Guangzhou	Japanese supermarket, organic food products, imported pastas and sauces
Corner's Deli	Guangzhou	Specialty food store, organic foods, imported frozen berries and vegetables

Establishing relationships with these retailers can be achieved through various approaches. Working with established importers and distributors who already have connections with these chains can be an efficient strategy. Direct outreach to the purchasing departments of these retailers may also be feasible, particularly once your brand has some recognition in the Chinese market. Participating in relevant food trade shows held in China can provide valuable opportunities to meet directly with retail buyers and showcase your premium olive oil.

6. Navigating the Regulatory Framework for Olive Oil Exports to China

Exporting food products to China requires strict adherence to a comprehensive regulatory framework. A fundamental requirement for all overseas food manufacturers, processors, and storage companies intending to export to China is registration with the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) ²³. This regulation, enforced through GACC Decree 248 since January 1, 2022, mandates that all such facilities must be registered. Additionally, exporters themselves are required to register with GACC under Decree 249 ³⁸. Therefore, as a Spanish olive oil producer, you will need to complete the registration process as both a manufacturer and an exporter to gain the necessary permissions to sell your product in China.

The EU-China agreement on protecting geographical indications, which came into force in March 2021, could be beneficial if your olive oil holds a recognized geographical indication. This agreement aims to protect iconic EU agri-food names against imitation and usurpation in China, potentially adding value and consumer trust to your product ²³.

The process for GACC registration as a manufacturer involves several steps ⁴⁰. Initially, you will need to register an account with China Customs. Following this, you will need to obtain application permission and then fill in the basic information of your company. Submitting supporting documents, including certifications and details about your production process, is a crucial step. A declaration of conformity and official confirmation, signed by the legal

representative and stamped by the company, along with the competent authority's signature and stamp, is also required. The responsible official will then push the electronic application to China Customs, which will conduct the approval. Upon successful registration, your company will receive an export number to China. The exporter registration process (Decree 249) also involves submitting company information online through the GACC system ³⁸.

Customs clearance necessitates the preparation of essential documentation ⁹. This includes the certificate of origin, an official health certificate from Spain, the manufacturer's ingredient list, a packing list, invoice, contract, and bill of lading. For the first time importing olive oil, a comprehensive test report that includes hygienic and mandatory indicators as prescribed by China's national food safety standards is also required ⁴². Ensuring all documentation is accurate and complete is vital to avoid delays or potential rejection of your shipment at Chinese customs ⁴³.

Strict labeling requirements are in place for all pre-packaged foods sold in China ²³. All labeling information must be provided in simplified Chinese characters ⁴⁵. Key information that must be included on the label includes the product name, a detailed list of ingredients in descending order of weight, the date of production, the best before date, the country of origin (Spain), the name and address of your Chinese importer or distributor, storage conditions, and the net content of the product ⁴⁴. Furthermore, nutritional information labeling is mandatory for most pre-packaged foods ⁴⁴. Importantly, the GACC registration number must be clearly marked on both the inner and outer packaging of the olive oil ³⁶.

Non-compliant labeling is a significant reason for food import rejections in China, so meticulous attention to these requirements is essential ⁴⁷.

Regarding financial aspects, importing olive oil from Spain is subject to tariffs and taxes. A customs duty of 10% is typically applied, along with a value-added tax (VAT) of either 13% for virgin olive oil or 17% for refined olive oil ⁴². It is crucial to factor these costs into your pricing strategy to ensure competitiveness and profitability in the Chinese market. Consulting official sources for the most current tariff rates is advisable, as these can be subject to change.

7. Developing a Strategic Market Entry and Marketing Plan

To successfully introduce your premium Spanish olive oil into the Chinese market, a well-defined market entry and marketing plan is crucial. Positioning your brand effectively will involve leveraging your Spanish origin, emphasizing the high quality and health benefits of your product ⁵⁰. Highlighting any unique aspects of your olive varieties or your production process can further differentiate your brand.

Given the digitally advanced nature of Chinese consumers ⁵¹, a robust digital marketing strategy is indispensable. Establishing a strong presence on popular Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin (TikTok) will be vital for brand building and engaging with potential customers ⁵². Exploring social commerce opportunities through

platforms like Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu) can also be effective ⁵². Collaborating with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) or influencers who specialize in food and lifestyle content can significantly boost your product's visibility and credibility ²¹. Furthermore, considering listing your product on major e-commerce platforms like Tmall and JD.com can provide access to a vast online consumer base ⁹.

The power of storytelling in food marketing should not be underestimated ⁸. Sharing the narrative behind your olive oil production, emphasizing your heritage, commitment to quality, and Spanish traditions, can create an emotional connection with consumers ²¹. Transparency regarding your production stages and any quality certifications you possess can further build trust ⁸.

In terms of pricing and distribution, it is advisable to adopt a pricing strategy that reflects the premium quality of your olive oil and accounts for the logistics costs associated with importing ⁹. Initially targeting high-end retail channels can help establish your brand's premium image ⁵⁰. Carefully selecting import and distribution partners who understand the premium food market and have established relationships with your target retailers is essential. Finally, given the significance of gifting in Chinese culture, developing attractive gift packaging options and potentially tailoring marketing campaigns around gifting occasions like the Chinese New Year can be a successful strategy ³.

8. Conclusion and Actionable Recommendations

The Chinese market for premium olive oil presents a compelling opportunity for Spanish producers. The projected growth, coupled with increasing health awareness and disposable incomes, creates a favorable environment for high-quality imported products. However, success in this market requires a strategic approach that addresses regulatory requirements, understands consumer preferences, and implements effective marketing strategies.

To capitalize on this opportunity, the following actionable recommendations are provided:

1. **Conduct In-Depth Market Research:** While this report provides a comprehensive overview, further research focusing specifically on your brand's unique selling points and the competitive landscape within the premium segment is recommended.
2. **Develop a Detailed Market Entry Strategy:** Outline your specific goals, target audience within China, and the resources you will allocate to this market.
3. **Initiate GACC Registration Immediately:** Begin the process for both manufacturer and exporter registration to ensure compliance with Chinese import regulations. Seek assistance from resources like the EU SME Centre or specialized service providers if needed.
4. **Ensure Accurate Export Documentation:** Familiarize yourself with all required documents for customs clearance and establish a system for their accurate preparation.
5. **Create Compliant Chinese-Language Labels:** Invest in professional translation and design services to develop labels that meet all Chinese regulatory requirements for content and language.
6. **Identify and Evaluate Potential Partners:** Thoroughly research and vet potential importers and distributors who have experience with premium food products and a

strong network within your target retail channels.

7. **Explore High-End Retail Opportunities:** Target the identified high-end supermarket chains and specialty stores in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai as initial points of entry.
8. **Develop a Comprehensive Digital Marketing and Branding Plan:** Create a China-specific digital marketing strategy that leverages popular social media platforms, KOL collaborations, and potentially e-commerce marketplaces. Emphasize your Spanish origin, product quality, and health benefits in your messaging.
9. **Consider Participating in Trade Fairs:** Explore relevant food trade shows in China as a platform to showcase your product, network with industry professionals, and meet potential partners and buyers.
10. **Seek Ongoing Guidance:** Utilize resources like the EU SME Centre for continued support and updates on regulations and market trends in China.

By diligently following these recommendations, your Spanish olive oil production company can effectively navigate the Chinese market and establish a successful and sustainable export business.

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