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# China Poised to Be Net Importer of Coffee

By HELEN SUN

SINGAPORE -- China, conventionally a coffee exporter, may become a net importer in 2009 with demand outpacing supply, as [Starbucks Coffee Co.](#) and other coffee chains mushroom around the country, tapping a changing lifestyle that is prompting youngsters to opt for the drink.

"China will continue exporting coffee this year, but it's quite certain that the imports will exceed exports," given the steady growth in demand, Qian Jiaying, deputy secretary-general of the China Coffee Association Beijing, said.

The country has been a net importer of coffee since June last year, and imports in November rose 34% from a year earlier to 1,783 metric tons, while exports fell 95% to 61 tons, according to the latest Chinese data. Imports for the January-to-November period totaled 18,687 tons, and exports were 23,144 tons.

A shortage of local supplies may prompt growers to boost output. Over the longer term, the country may become a major player in the global coffee market, although the scope to increase production is limited because of weather. Starbucks, marking its 10-year anniversary in China this month, launched a blend that includes Arabica beans from Yunnan province.

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