

Shanxi Xinghuacun Fen Wine Factory Co, for example, teamed up with Danish chocolatier Anthon Berg to create the world's first *baijiu*-flavored chocolates last year, and they became a highlight during the 4th China International Import Expo.

Wuliangye and Chinese comic studio Dongmantang unveiled a fantasy comic "Biography of A Drunken Immortal" inspired by *baijiu* on the online platform Tencent Animation and Comics last year.

More than 30,000 people clicked the "favorite" button and it won the best story award at the 14th Xiamen International Animation Festival, standing out from 3,340 works from nearly 40 nations and regions.

*Baijiu*-flavored ice cream is a favorite marketing device. As the size of the ice cream industry increases year by year, *baijiu* ice cream has become a selling point — claiming that buyers can get drunk by eating ice cream, or making it into the shape of a *baijiu* bottle.

The trendy desserts were very popular at first. According to CBNDATA's report, for instance, the 20,000 "blackout drunk," ice creams launched by Luzhou Laojiao and ice cream brand Chicecream (known as Zhong Xue Gao) in 2020, sold out in only half an hour.

But now many hits are hard to find in the market. Some products are limited from the beginning, while some are gradually disappearing off the shelves.

Unlike these short-term products, Moutai's ice cream has prepared for a "protracted war." The company said on its official account on social media platform Weibo that it is doing research and developing new products that meet the needs of young consumers.

In May, Moutai cooperated with dairy producer Mengniu Dairy Co to launch three flavors of ice creams — plum, vanilla and milk — in small



Young consumers usually flinch from *baijiu* because of its strong taste, but Chinese *baijiu* brands are reaching out to young adults with innovations such as *baijiu*-flavored snacks and ice cream. — IC

tubs. Each tub of 75-78 grams contains around 2 percent of Moutai and sells for between 59 and 66 yuan.

At the same time, the high-end spirits maker opened its first two ice cream shops in southwestern Guizhou Province where Moutai is a specialty.

By this month, nine offline flagship stores have been opened in Chinese cities, such as Hangzhou, Guangzhou and Wuhan. People from 19 provinces and cities, like Shanghai, Beijing and Shanxi, can order the ice cream on iMaotai.

Moutai said on Weibo that 10 new stores will open soon, including in Shanghai, Shenyang and Harbin.

Unofficial buying sources can be found on e-commerce platforms, such as Taobao and JD.com, for those who live outside the coverage area. Customers need to pay more than 200 yuan for a tub from the purchasing agent. Economic Weekly magazine reported last month that an agent in Beijing has made about 100,000 yuan out of it.

Many people, including bloggers, have shared their first impression of the ice creams on the Internet after tasting them.

Food blogger "Boss Yao in Beijing," who has 1.12 million followers on Douyin,



The chocolate ice cream spiked with Moutai is one of the top-selling products at Fontaine, a gelato shop on Wukang Road in Shanghai's Xuhui District. — Tian Shengjie

the Chinese equivalent of TikTok, highly praised the trans-boundary product in June. As a dessert chef, she said the milk-flavored one is the best ice cream she has ever eaten.

"MR-White Ice," a blogger with nearly 26 million followers on Douyin, said the ice creams taste good but the high price of such small tubs makes him look like a "sucker."

Many netizens called the high-priced ice cream a rip-off. But when talking about the spirit, they said that although they cannot afford Moutai, they can at least buy Moutai ice cream.

Some people still cannot take the taste of the throat-burning liquor even though it has been diluted with the ice cream. Charlotte Wang, a 29-

year-old woman who doesn't drink, told Shanghai Daily that this was her first time tasting *baijiu* but she thought the ice cream was a drag to eat.

It has also kicked off a nationwide social media craze for homemade Moutai ice cream.

Many companies and corner shops, like tea drink chain Heytea and a gelato shop Fontaine on Wukang Road in Shanghai's Xuhui District, have found a niche in the *baijiu* market. They add the liquor to their products without the endorsement of the *baijiu* producers, producing offerings fascinating many young consumers.

Lee, 26-year-old owner of Fontaine, said the chocolate ice cream spiked with Feitian Moutai is one of the three top-

selling products in the store and each is nearly 50 yuan.

There used to always be long lines stretching outside. Around 500 to 600 scoops of the *baijiu* ice cream could be sold in one day before the store was badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

"In the beginning, I just wanted to run a bar. Three years ago, I started to develop a gelato with Chinese characteristics, and I didn't expect it to sell so well," he said.

"The combination of Moutai and chocolate can make the taste of the *baijiu* less strong, so that novice drinkers can appreciate it as well."

As *wanghong* (Internet celebrity) products, just how long the interest in *baijiu* ice cream and other offerings can last and just how much benefit they can bring to businesses remains to be seen.

But it is undeniable that more young people are tasting *baijiu* for the first time and getting a basic understanding of this traditional spirit through these trendy products.

When it comes to whether *baijiu* needs to be comprehensively reformed for a younger market, Ji Keliang, former chairman of Moutai Group, said on a chat show in 2020 that the reason why young people don't drink Moutai is that they are too young, somewhat ignorant and do not know how to appreciate it.

Although that sounds arrogant, Jack Ma, co-founder of Alibaba Group, thinks the same way. He said at the World Economic Forum in 2018 that after experiencing the hardships of life, today's young people may gradually learn to love *baijiu* by the time they turn 45.

A 55-year-old man surnamed Shen also told Shanghai Daily while eating Moutai ice cream: "Without the impetuosity in my youth and the flattery in the workplace, when I turned 50 years old, I started to enjoy my moments of solitude. It is also when I fell in love with *baijiu* itself."

Time will tell.