

HOLIDAYBIZ LIFE



A customer buys matcha-flavored desserts at a matcha store in Beijing. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY

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There's a growing niche in China for matcha and related greenish desserts and drinks, such as matcha-flavored layered cake, ice cream and lattes.

As an indication of just how much the flavor has triggered the appetite of appearance- and quality-conscious Chinese consumers, a search of the word "matcha" through Dazhongdianping, a Chinese customer review app that is similar to Yelp, results in about 5,000 specialty stores in Beijing alone. And most reviews from consumers said they like the taste.

"Dessert in matcha flavor are not too sweet, and it tastes better to feel the sweet out of light bitterness. I also like the exquisite look of green desserts, such as matcha cake and ice cream," said Tian Shen, a 27-year-old bank employee in Beijing.

The selling point of matcha comes from its look, taste and function. It takes a series of complicated technologies from picking leaves to grinding, and every production process has certain strict standards, industry experts said.

Matcha, which "originated in ancient China and later thrived in Japan ... is something that can meet the demand of healthy lifestyles, and it can also satisfy the pursuit of positive feeling and experiences from consumers. With an increasing number of Chinese traveling abroad and the integration of different cultures, more Chinese consumers are expected to like matcha food," said Neil Wang, president of consultancy Frost & Sullivan in China.

"Many matcha specialty stores in China are well-decorated, and distinguished decoration styles can

Flavor a good match for China's increasingly sophisticated taste

Not-too-sweet, energy-boosting matcha gaining popularity in desserts and drinks

help to better promote the green, organic and healthy features of food. Beautiful and stylish stores can also attract more consumers and they may like to take pictures and post them on social media, which helps to further promote the stores," he said.

By 2024, the value of the matcha market in Asia, led by Japan and China, is predicted to exceed \$1.5 billion, and the application of matcha in food will become more prevalent, according to Global Market Insights, a US market researcher and consultancy.

Globally, the demand for matcha is around 12,000 metric tons per year. Currently, the total annual output of matcha is around 4,000 to 5,000 tons, and there is a shortage of 7,000 tons to 8,000 tons, according to China Food Newspaper.

Wang of Frost & Sullivan said the younger generation of Chinese consumers is focused on healthy food and drinks. Matcha contains caffeine, but unlike coffee, it won't make people feel nervous, as matcha also contains theanine. The combination of theanine and caffeine helps to alleviate pressure, but still makes people feel energetic.

"Matcha contains a high level of protein, amino acid and chloro-



Two university students make Japanese style matcha for visitors at a tea-tasting contest in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. LI ZHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

phyll, and its content of caffeine and tea polyphenols is relatively low. The complicated technique of producing matcha makes it easier for nutrient absorption, and the high degree of refinement makes it easier to be applied to different food and beverages," Wang said.

"For the matcha sector, China needs to further explore planting techniques, manage the planting

scientifically, and strengthen the training of professional talents. Compared with traditional tea, matcha has natural advantages by leveraging the strength of other consumption goods," he said.

Wuxie, China's first brand that mainly sells Japanese style matcha desserts, opened its first store in October 2014, in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. Now, there are hundreds

of matcha brands and desserts of different styles nationwide, including Guantea, 36 Matchart and Qingchu Matcha.

At many of those stores, matcha-flavored ice cream offers three kinds of flavor profiles, the concentration of matcha can be 30 percent, 60 percent and 90 percent. Most of the sweet offerings on the menus retail at 20 yuan (\$3) to 40 yuan.

Wang Zhibin, director of the American Chinese Food Federation, said for any cuisine, raw food materials are the most important. If he were to label matcha, he said, he would use the terms "fashionable" and "healthy," and he believes its growth prospect is promising.

"Matcha can be applied to various kinds of food. We have held some events to promote matcha desserts and other Chinese food combined with matcha in the United States, and we have seen great interest locally. This can help international consumers to have a better recognition of Chinese food culture," he said.

Wang Jianjun, deputy general manager of the merchandise department of Benlai, an online shopping platform for fresh food in China, said matcha serves as a great example and result of the ongoing

consumption upgrade trend in the country.

"Currently, there are not many matcha-related products sold on Benlai. We would like to introduce more matcha products online, as we believe in its growth potential. Younger Chinese consumers who were born after 1990 and 2000 are more receptive to new products," he said.

Compared with Europe, the United States, Japan and South Korea, Chinese consumers' spending on snack food and their per capita consumption volume is still relatively low; therefore, the market for leisure food still has considerable growth potential, Frost & Sullivan found.

"The demand for healthy, safe and high-end leisure snacks will continue to expand in China. Fueled by the growing consumption upgrade trend, the scale of snack food in the country will increase steadily," Wang of Frost & Sullivan said.

"Higher-end leisure food will account for a larger market share, which will help to boost the prices and volume of the overall market. Particularly, the growth rate of leisure food through e-commerce platforms and specialty stores will be faster than that of traditional supermarkets," he said.

This year, the market size of street stalls and food service kiosks in China is expected to reach \$13.96 billion, followed by the market scale of India, and ahead of the United States, Thailand and Mexico, according to market researcher Euromonitor International.

By 2023, the market size of street stalls and food service kiosks in China is forecast to reach \$19.48 billion, adding 40 percent over the level of 2019, Euromonitor International found.

Guizhou's Tongren sees bright future in its green tea leaves

By ZHU WENQIAN

Green tea has long been the favorite drink in Southwest China's Guizhou province. Now, the region has started to brew something new — matcha, and the sales are burgeoning. The province aims to sell its matcha products to Starbucks, export more products to Japan and further expand the domestic market.

Tongren, a city located in northeast Guizhou, hopes to become a global culture and trade center of matcha, by leveraging its advantages of a subtropical climate, clean air and rich variety of high-quality teas.

So far, Tongren has built special bases of 6,700 hectares and two manufacturing lines of matcha, a finely ground powder of specially grown and processed green tea leaves. Since the establishment of its production lines in May 2018 through the end of last year, they had created matcha output of 200 metric tons, worth 5.6 million yuan (\$833,000).

"As a popular and important future growth trend of the tea industry, matcha boasts high added value and strong market demand," said Xu Daigang, deputy director of tea development at the agriculture and countryside bureau of Tongren.

"Tongren has ecology, scale and resources advantages in producing matcha. We would like to continue to raise our competitiveness in the tea industry, and extend the industrial chains, making the matcha production sector become a new growth engine," he said.

Tongren, with a long tea planting history, now exports its matcha products to Japan, South Korea and some countries in Africa. In China, it sells to dealers and companies in Zhejiang, Guangdong and Fujian provinces, as well as Shanghai.

Currently, the output of tea in Tongren ranks second in Guizhou province, following Zunyi, and more than 500 indicators of the tea produced there have reached or exceeded European Union standards.



Matcha-flavored cake and drinks are sold in a cafe in Xidan Joy City in Beijing. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY

"At Mount Fanjing, a tea plantation in Tongren, the air quality is 10 to 15 times cleaner than the clean air standard proposed by the World Health Organization," said Fu Chua-

nyao, president of Guizhou Tea Culture Research Association.

Some renowned retailers, including Swire Pacific Group, Nongfu Spring and A.S. Watson Group,

have also set up branches in Tongren.

By 2022, Tongren aims to build 10 matcha manufacturing lines and achieve an annual output of 4,000 metric tons, and output value of more than 1.6 billion yuan, according to a local government proposal issued last year.

In March, the local government posted a new statement about speeding up the growth of the matcha sector. Tongren will strengthen the management and maintenance of tea plantations, and further promote automatic picking to lower costs and raise efficiencies.

In addition, the city will reinforce its efforts to attract investments, and establish more investments in the research and development of new matcha products, including matcha food, beverages and cosmetics. At airports, high-speed railway stations and major sightseeing spots, the local government plans to set up more matcha experience and retail stores, the statement said.

Gui Tea Co Ltd, a major green tea

producer in Guizhou, has tea production bases in Fenggang, Jiu'an, Gui'an and Leishan in the province. It aims to be a major player in the effort to produce matcha, and its matcha products are exported to Japan and the United States.

"Matcha is a latecomer that has a high starting point and is catching up fast. I believe that matcha will be a top choice for the domestic food sector to upgrade and innovate. One cup of matcha equals the nutrient elements provided by 30 cups of green tea," said Hu Qingshuang, general manager of Gui Tea.

Wuyutai Tea, one of Beijing's oldest distributors, earlier visited the matcha production base of Gui Tea and may consider further cooperation.

"Now we also sell matcha ice cream at our stores, without any additives. At Wuyutai store in Wangfujing and Qianmen areas in Beijing, people from long queues to buy matcha ice cream, and it has become a scene," said Zhao Shuxin, president of Wuyutai Tea.