vinetur

Chinese baijiu makers court younger drinkers with lower-alcohol mixes

Output at large producers fell 4.7% in the first half, pushing distillers toward smaller bottles, mixed drinks, neighborhood stores, tourism ventures

Monday, November 16, 2026



Chinese baijiu producers are trying to reach younger drinkers with lower-alcohol mixes, smaller-format products and tourism experiences as the traditional market for the spirit comes under pressure.

The shift was on display in Renhuai, a city in Guizhou province that is home to Kweichow Moutai and many other distilleries. At the fourth Zunyi Sauce-Aroma Baijiu Festival on Oct. 16, producers and industry officials said the sector needs to move beyond selling more bottles and focus instead on how consumers use baijiu in daily life.

Qin Shuyao, head of the China National Association for Liquor and Spirits Circulation, said on Oct. 16 that the industry is going through a major adjustment. Output among large baijiu makers fell 4.7% from a year earlier in the first half of 2026, Qin said, while listed companies in the sector faced rising pressure on revenue and profit.

Qin said the industry can no longer rely mainly on business banquets and formal social occasions, settings that have long supported baijiu sales in China. He said producers need to adapt to more casual gatherings and to consumers who are drinking for personal enjoyment rather than social obligation.

Baijiu, often translated as white liquor, has for generations been part of business dinners, holiday meals and family celebrations in China. Toasting with the spirit has often carried social meaning, including respect and solidarity. But producers now say that model does not fully match the habits of younger consumers, who are paying closer attention to price, quality and how well a product fits their lifestyle.

That is changing product development. In Renhuai and the broader Zunyi area, some smaller brands are blending sauce-aroma baijiu with fruit juice to soften its strong taste and make it easier for newcomers to try. Jiang Liangliang, a local beverage brand, is among those using fruit flavors to create a lighter drinking experience. Chen Jun, who runs the brand, said the products are aimed at consumers looking for a more relaxed style of drinking, with particular attention to women.

Established producers are making similar moves. Guizhou Jinjiao Liquor Industry has opened more than 10 neighborhood stores and developed mixed drinks based on sauce-aroma baijiu, according to the report. Customers can combine the spirit with fruit

juices and other ingredients to create drinks that suit their own tastes.

Industry officials also pointed to other shifts in demand, including greater interest in lower-alcohol beverages, smaller bottles and faster retail delivery. Together, those changes suggest that baijiu makers are adjusting not only recipes and packaging but also the occasions in which the drink is consumed. For the wider beverage business, that could signal a broader move in spirits toward casual consumption, convenience and experience-based sales, rather than dependence on formal occasions alone.

Producers are also looking beyond the drink itself for new revenue. In Renhuai, distilleries and tourism officials are working to turn baijiu production sites into more varied visitor destinations. Factory tours and brewing demonstrations remain part of the offer, but organizers have added music, games and interactive tasting areas to make the experience less narrowly focused on buying liquor.

At the festival on Oct. 16, organizers introduced travel routes linking several baijiu tourism districts. Visitors could join interactive games, listen to music and try mixing drinks in designated areas. The idea is to present baijiu as part of a broader leisure trip rather than the only reason to visit.

Ding Wenjie, a representative of a tourism association from Guilin in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, said he was visiting Zunyi for the third time. On earlier trips, he said, the focus had been mostly on touring distilleries and purchasing liquor. This time, he said, the range of cultural and tourism activities was much wider, and baijiu had become one part of the travel experience.

The economic stakes are significant for the region. Zunyi recorded 8.28 million visits related to baijiu tourism from January to July, generating 16.05 billion yuan, or about $2.40 billion, in spending, according to the city’s culture and tourism bureau. That spending includes not only liquor purchases but also dining, lodging and cultural activities.

For distilleries, that creates another way to offset weaker growth in traditional sales. Visitor experiences can bring in money directly while also exposing consumers to brands in a different setting. That may be especially important as producers try to build

relationships with younger adults who may be less interested in strong spirits served at formal meals and more open to mixed drinks, travel and social activities built around brands.

Renhuai’s position gives it an advantage in that strategy. The city is one of China’s main centers for sauce-aroma baijiu, a style associated with the Chishui River area and with long fermentation and brewing traditions. Producers there are now trying to use that heritage not only as a mark of authenticity but also as a foundation for tourism and new forms of consumption.

The changes do not mean producers are abandoning traditional baijiu. Instead, they are trying to make it more accessible by changing the format, the flavor profile and the setting in which it is consumed. In practice, that means a spirit long tied to formal rituals is being recast for neighborhood stores, mixed-drink counters and tourism routes.

Whether those efforts can reverse the industry’s slowdown remains unclear. But the direction is becoming more visible: baijiu makers are responding to weaker production figures and pressure on earnings by widening their business model, blending liquor sales with hospitality, retail convenience and lower-intensity drinking occasions.