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# Fly By Jing Will Launch In Target, Whole Foods, Costco After Private Equity Funding

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When Sichuan chili crisp brand Fly By Jing started in 2018, its founder set out to expand the idea of how complex and artful Chinese food is. But she didn't plan for it to transform into a vehicle to reconnect with her own identity.

While navigating viral growth in 2020, running the condiment startup took her on a personal journey as well — one that led to her reclaiming her birth name of Jing, after having moved around growing up and going by Anglicized version, Jenny, for most of her life.

That realization came smack in the middle of 2020, as Gao was dealing with a mounting waitlist topped by co-manufacturing issues over in her native Chengdu. But Gao and her Fly By Jing came out stronger for it. The former Kickstarter brand ended 2020 up more than 1,000%, and has continued to make big waves. Its signature product, which is filled with high-quality chilis sourced from from Gao's native Chengdu, became the top-selling hot sauce on Amazon within six months of its launch on the online marketplace, which means it was outselling conglomerate-backed mega-brands including Cholula, Tabasco, and Frank's RedHot.

"I wanted to shine a light on this 5,000-year heritage," Gao recalled during [a live interview on Forbes' Instagram account Thursday](#). "How do we create more space for diversity in the food industry?"



Jing Gao is a Chengdu-born chef who started commercializing a premium chili crisp sauce in 2018. FLY BY JING

All the rapid expansion means bigger manufacturing orders and growing the team from just Gao to 10, which doesn't come cheap. Prelude Growth Partners, a New York City based private equity firm led by two women, came in to invest. Prelude, a minority investor in Fly By Jing, usually writes checks between \$10 million and \$40 million, and has previously backed chickpea-based brand Banza and skincare line Summer Fridays.

The capital will help Fly By Jing expand its product assortment beyond the pantry aisle, as well as prepare for a big rollout in grocery stores this fall. Fly By Jing's lineup, which also includes a dumpling sauce and a dry Mala spice mix, will start selling at Target, Whole Foods, Sprouts, Thrive Market and Fresh Direct. Costco is also on the docket.

"I reached a level where I was holding myself back," Gao explains. "We want to become a household name that is as ubiquitous as Heinz ketchup."

*Gao discusses her capital raising strategy, how traditional grocery should diversify its aisles and better support founders of color, and more during the live interview. [You can watch it here.](#)*

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