

Moutai now pleasing palates in S Africa

Bar, restaurant clients learn to appreciate the strong fragrance, flavor of historic *baijiu* brand

By DONALD BADISA SEBERANE

China's Moutai, one of the world's top distilled spirits and the subject of a profound liquor culture handed down for the past hundreds of years, is now finding new fans in South Africa.

Nabeel Nielsen is a businessman engaged in the garment trade between China and South Africa. While he was in China, he had his first experience of the Chinese *baijiu*. The liquid's special flavor and fragrance was a great surprise and made a very good impression on him.

He was told by his Chinese friends that one of the *baijiu* brands enjoying great popularity is Moutai from Guizhou, which is honored as the state liquor and which he should try at his first opportunity.

That opportunity arrived last November, when Moutai entered the South African market. Nielson brought several friends to visit a Chinese restaurant for a taste test of the liquor.

As with others in South Africa, Nielson was initially struck by the mysterious and strong fragrance when the Moutai bottle was opened.

The liquor's scent actually started gaining an international reputation a century ago when Moutai was featured at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition.

On Feb 20, 1915, the exposition was held in San Francisco in the United States. It was considered the largest international fair worldwide in the early 20th century, attracting more than 200,000 participants.

At the time, Guizhou province recommended the sample liquors from the two workshops of Chengyi and Ronghe under the name of Moutai Winemaking Company as exhibits.

Compared with other delicately packed liquors from other countries,



A Moutai brand promotion delegation received a warm welcome upon its arrival in the city of Capetown, South Africa, on Nov 15, 2017. Hundreds of local Moutai fans, holding banners and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with slogans such as "I love Moutai", rushed to shake hands and take photos with members of the delegation.

SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Moutai liquor was stored in pottery and was seldom requested by visitors. Approaching the end of the expo, one of the Chinese representatives got an idea and pretended that he had accidentally dropped one bottle of Moutai liquor, with it smashing on the floor.

Suddenly, the fragrance of the liquor permeated the hall, attracting all the members of the panel. After rounds of tastings, they agreed that Moutai liquor was one of the best drinks in the world and Moutai received the gold award.

In 2017, the pre-tax revenue of Moutai reached 76.4 billion yuan (\$11.9 billion), realizing a net profit of 26.4 billion yuan and accounting for 72 percent of the *baijiu* industry's foreign exchange earning across China.

A long process still needs to take place before Chinese liquor finds a major following in Africa. Yet the experience usually starts from the aroma of the liquor, which provides a unique sense of satisfaction as it helps to release the sense of flavor in the mouth.

Gregory September is a professor at a university in South Africa. After he tasted the liquor, he said Moutai is different from any liquor he has ever experienced. Although it has a high alcoholic content, it has an unexpectedly mild taste.

He has a strong interest in Chinese culture and said he often hears his Chinese friends talk about liquor and ancient poets creating poems after drinking. After tasting the liquor, he seems as if he got into the mysterious feeling himself.

It is worth mentioning that Moutai also now has a presence at local bars, and is becoming more popular there.

Ronald Fangoma is an owner of a bar in Johannesburg. He said many clients showed strong interest in the liquor, which comes packed in white porcelain bottles.

Many customers come back for frequent visits to the bar after tasting the liquor. Many even come from other provinces, beckoned by the call of Moutai.

Fangoma said that his bar is beginning to make cocktails with Moutai and he looks forward to seeing what surprises it will bring.

Chinese liquor takes high spirits to another new market

By PAN ZHONGMING

panzhongming@chinadaily.com.cn

Since entering the South African market in November last year, Chinese liquor giant Moutai's products have grown in popularity, thanks in part to Chinese expats and curious locals wanting to taste the latest tittle.

The South African agent of Kweichow Moutai Group has extensively sought new ways of gaining market penetration for what is considered the national drink of China.

Served to foreign dignitaries at state banquets, the strong white spirit is

extremely popular in China, so much that domestic supplies often fall short of demand. Despite this, Moutai has not stopped its push to expand into overseas markets.

South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique were chosen as the first markets for Moutai's African strategy, with the company determined to launch its products across the continent. To begin with, Moutai is mainly targeting Chinese expats, business people and tourists in Africa.

"The move is our first step into the African market and demonstrates Moutai's answer to the government's

Belt and Road Initiative," said Li Baofang, chairman and general manager of the group, when Moutai made its debut in South Africa last November.

Moutai liquor is now available in five-star hotels, Chinese restaurants and local bars, serving high-end consumers, Chinese patrons and locals, said Anson Zhu, an agent for South Africa's Moutai wholesale retailer.

"We are not only targeting the large market of Chinese consumers, but we are also seeking to cultivate the smaller market of local consumers," said Zhu, adding that the liquor can be purchased for sale at supermar-

kets, hotels, restaurants and bars.

Retailers can order samples of Moutai to taste before buying to ensure the liquor is genuine, according to the retail agent.

"This is a way to stop fake Moutai liquor entering the market," Zhu said. "We must ensure what we sell on the market stand for Chinese quality."

The wholesale price for a bottle of Moutai is about 2,600 rand (\$204.6) and each bottle is labeled with a special code to ensure it is genuine.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic ties between China and

South Africa. In that time, many South Africans have visited China and experienced its national drink.

Zhu said many South Africans drink Moutai differently from Chinese people, preferring to sip it like a whisky, instead of glugging the whole glass in one go. A shot of Moutai costs around 200 rand.

The company hopes the experiences it gains from South Africa can be applied across the continent.

"This is quite a unique market and we believe it has the potential to spread the flavor of Moutai among African people," Zhu said.