



Aussies tap export niche

Jenny Dillon

FRANK Li was young and looking for adventure and thought he should try to rediscover his Chinese roots in the city of Shanghai.

There the Sydneysider tried his hand at a number of things until one day in 2006, he and two Melbourne mates heard Foster's was pulling its operations out of China following on from Lion Nathan's exit a couple of years previously.

Mr Li, accountant Mat Ryan and former sommelier Steven Roadknight were forced to ponder on the prospect of facing life in one of the most exciting cities in the world without recourse to a tasty Australian beer.

And the only resolution seemed to be that they bring some cartons in for themselves.

"I thought, here's an opportunity to set up a business with a product that I enjoy," Mr Li said.

"And the worst-case scenario would be that if we brought in a couple of thousand cases of beer and nobody bought any, we could always

drink them ourselves."

Two years later, their company, JustBeer, formed in a moment of fun, now has not only a legitimate business presence but this week also took out the prestigious Austrade Business Promotion Award at the Australia-China Chamber of Commerce Awards in Beijing.

"We brought in our first carton in 2007, in early June," Mr Li said.

"But we didn't even think about talking to Foster's or Lion ... we just went to a wholesaler and ordered a thousand cases.

"We had our launch party at a local bar, then two weeks later one of [the] Foster's senior managers was in Shanghai and saw our beers in the same bar and asked how they got there."

The result saw the evolution of a successful working relationship with the two brewers and, most importantly, the continued presence of Australian beer in Shanghai.



Need: Frank Li, Mat Ryan and Steven Roadknight went into business for a beer