

Cheering for China Before Games Even Start

Marketers Launch
Songs, Campaigns;
Pepsi's New Red Can

By GEOFFREY A. FOWLER

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BEIJING -- For multinational marketers on the Olympics' home turf, cheerleading for China is just part of the Games.

"Chinese people are getting red!" goes the refrain of the Olympics song "Red Around the World," created by world-wide Olympics partner [Coca-Cola](#) Co. "We have been waiting for this moment for a long time," it continues. Since being introduced late last month, the song has been downloaded more than 24 million times from Coke's Chinese Web site.



A scene from a Coke ad in China, featuring Chinese Olympic athletes Liu Xiang and Guo Jing Jing.

[McDonald's](#) Corp. is asking customers to chant its Olympics refrain: "I'm loving China win!" The company has had nearly 1.3 million people register to become part of the cheering team in a nationwide contest, which is using an "American Idol"-like format to select cheerleaders for China's team during the Games.

[PepsiCo](#) Inc. isn't even an official Games sponsor but has joined in on the flag-waving anyway. In the fall, the company turned its iconic blue can into red in China, China's national color. It also launched an ad campaign featuring people in funny situations yelling, "I love China!"

At a time when activists and some politicians in the West aren't decidedly loving China, and the global Olympic torch relay is beset by protests, sponsors have stood firmly behind the Beijing Games. At its annual shareholders meeting on Wednesday, Coke fended off criticism from Tibetan and free-speech groups who want Coke to use its influence to improve China's human-rights record. The company's chief executive, E. Neville Isdell, said he didn't believe "stopping the torch relay is in any way over the long run going to be the right thing to do."

SING-ALONG



Above, from left, Jean Francois Dekimpe, Coca-Cola's vice president for marketing in China; Lin Xi, who wrote the lyrics; and composer Marc Lui.

[Listen to Coca-Cola's "Red Around the World,"](#) sung by Jackie Cheung. Coca-Cola's translation of the lyrics is below.

Bravo! Bravo! Chinese people are getting red / popular!
Bravo! Bravo! Get refreshed!
Bravo! Bravo! Chinese people are getting red / popular!
Bravo! Bravo! Get refreshed!
For this moment (For this moment)
We are pursuing the best (We've never felt this way before)
This great feeling
We have been waiting for this moment for a long time (We've been waiting for a long time)
Clap your hands if you're excited (Clap your hands if you're excited)
The happiness is in our hands (The happiness is in our hands)
The heroes/athletes in the bird nest.
We are creating a new universe, and becoming good friends
To make us proud
We have been striving.
We have achieved our dreams.
We have been waiting for this moment for a long time (We've been waiting for a long time)
Release your passion (Release your passion)
Grab the refreshing taste (Grab the refreshing taste)
Let the five Olympic rings hold us together
With our hearts together, hand in hand, let's getting red/popular around the world!

Source: Coca-Cola Co.

VIDEOS

Watch the ads from [Coca-Cola](#) and [McDonald's](#).

Chinese see these Games as a serious affair. "Chinese people have gone through a lot in the past," said Phyllis Cheung, director of marketing for McDonald's in China. "They have very, very strong patriotism. Everywhere, you see people are excited."

A January survey conducted by WPP Group PLC's Ogilvy Group and Millward Brown in cities along the Chinese portion of the torch relay found that 72% said the Games made them proud of China; 15% said they were actually excited to see who would win.

"Nationalism is not a strategy," said Michael Wood, the China chief executive of [Publicis Groupe](#) SA's Leo Burnett ad agency, which works for both McDonald's and Coke in China. "It is a shared value, when executed in the right way by the right brand, can create a powerful connection with people."

McDonald's said its cheer is part of a wider effort to make the brand's restaurants into places for people inside China to celebrate -- and even gather to watch -- the Games.

"We are an international company, no doubt about that," said Ms. Cheung. "What we are doing is being locally relevant, rather than getting into the arena of playing up nationalism."

Coke, which has about 150 people working on Olympics marketing and operations in China, built its song around the fact that red is both the color of China and of its own brand. Moreover, the word "hong" in Chinese means both red and popular, so the song could be understood as either "Red Around the World" or "Popular Around the World."

While Coke has sponsorship agreements with athletes from around the world, including the National Basketball Association star LeBron James, much of its marketing inside China revolves around Chinese athletes, such as hurdler Liu Xiang and diver Guo Jing Jing, who have built popular sentiment for the hope that Chinese athletes could lead the medal count this summer. A survey by Asian advertising consultancy R3 found that Chinese consumers recalled Coke's promotions more than the next seven sponsors combined.

Andres Kieger, Coke's director of integrated marketing in China, demurs at the idea that Coke is appealing specifically to a Chinese sense of nationalism. The red song "is about inspiring people and opening up to the world to join and celebrate," he says. "This isn't meant as a patriotic song. It is meant as an emotional song. Red is the color of a lot of good things."

Coke has made Olympics songs for past Games, though they usually featured less market-specific themes than "Red Around the World." During the 1988 Calgary Games, it commissioned a song called "Can't You Feel It?" and assembled a "world chorus" to sing it. In 2004, it sponsored a



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song performed by Greek singer Despina Vandi called "Come Along Now." A music video for it features no flags or Olympic rings, just plenty of scenes of the sultry Ms. Vandi dancing, sometimes in a bikini. The idea was to "spread messages of optimism, happiness and celebration," the company says.

McDonald's, too, has led a cheering campaign before. During the Atlanta Games in 1996, it ran a campaign called "U.S. wins, you win," in which customers could get free prizes if they collected game pieces that matched with medals won by American athletes.

Nationalism can turn against foreign brands, too. Last week, a Chinese blogger called for a boycott of Coke after he found a photo from a Coke ad in Germany showing three Buddhist monks riding a roller coaster with the slogan "Make It Real" -- even as Tibet and Tibetan monks are at the heart of a wrenching national conflict. Thousands of other bloggers picked up on the issue, reposting the image throughout China's Internet. Coke says the ad is five years old and apologized if use of the image "has caused any offense."

The challenge now for many multinational companies isn't figuring out how to appear patriotic in China, but what message to send in the rest of the world.

"Initially people imagined they would have one global marketing campaign for the Olympics. Now the theory is that you need a separate campaign for China versus the rest of the world," said Greg Paull, the principal of R3, which consults on Olympics advertising in China. "For the sponsors that stay the course, there is more upside in the relationship they build with their consumers in China than downside globally."

Mr. Wood, at Burnett, said that the Chinese may not be any more patriotic than any past Games host. Rather, he says, the booming Chinese market is just getting much more attention.

"Recognizing the commercial importance of China, you are seeing messages that are skewed more specifically to Chinese people," he said.

Publicis media-buying agency ZenithOptimedia estimates that advertisers will spend an extra \$3 billion on the Olympics this year -- of which \$900 million will be spent in China. China is already the fourth-largest market in the world for Coke, and in the top 10 for McDonald's.

--Juliet Ye in Hong Kong contributed to this article.