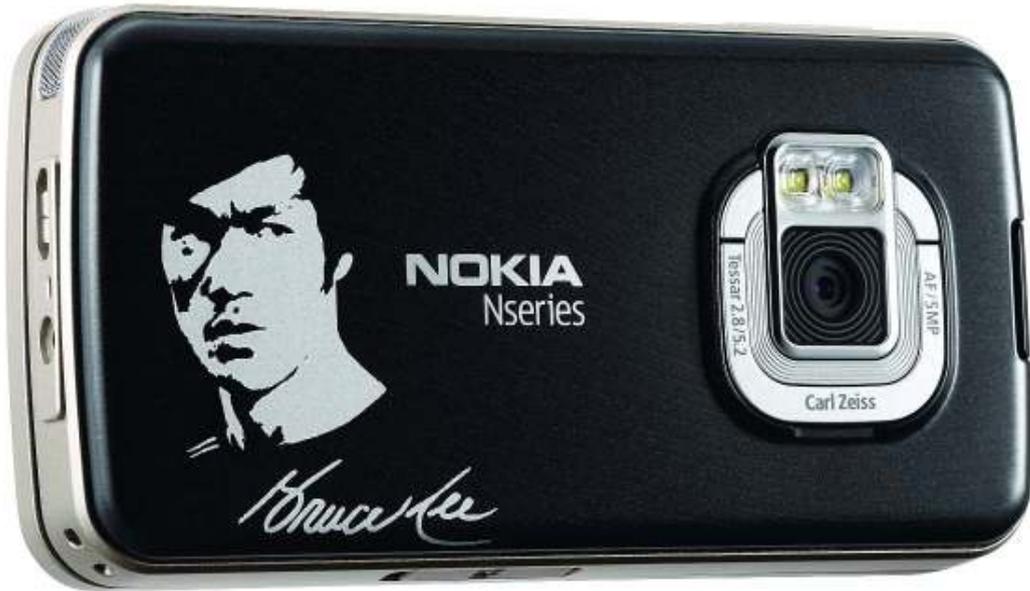


A CREATIVE COMING OF AGE

Two views on the evolution of creative talent and the country's entrance on to the global stage



Overall, the advertising scene in China is still a bit of a bull in a China shop. While it's true there's plenty more youthful energy and enthusiasm than cynicism about, the shattered crystal left behind can still be fairly unseemly.

But China is also in a constant state of fast-forward, whether it is shinier buildings, better baguettes or vastly improved 3D rendering. And while advertising gems were nearly impossible to find five years ago, they tend to show up more and more frequently today.

In fact, there are now campaigns in what was seen as the land of adaptation — at least for MNCs — that have not only originated in China, but are actually exported regionally, and even globally. Motorola, until recently, was the prime example.

I think there are a few things at work here. First of all, people within the industry are maturing really quickly. Their computers have flattened the world of knowledge gathering, opening up vistas to nearly everything.

At the same time, now that China has firmly settled into its official position of the next big thing, clients often send their highly regarded number two managers here. They are usually hungry to move the needle, make their mark and accomplish something that sends them back home on top.

And thirdly, global CMOs are finally beginning to understand that those Western-centric concepts with the wry, ironic wit, don't always travel as well as they previously imagined. So the world's biggest market is more



often running advertising that's produced by and for the world's biggest market. Which means larger budgets are more often considered, while world-class directors and production house reels are being requested instead of dismissed. And agencies are getting more and more chances to put one in the back of the net.

The adidas Olympic campaign, arguably China's best integrated yet, was obviously for a special occasion with a special budget. But these days, you also see nearly every car and every sports brand trying much harder to produce stronger conceptual work. You have a Bruce Lee-inspired video for Nokia that has become an international metal magnet. And you see China as the country with the largest number of entries at this year's Spikes.

So while it's true ad-making here is a work in progress, the operative word is progress.

Doug Schiff is executive creative director at OgilvyOne Beijing

When people think China, it is "Made in China" rather than "Created in China". We're all waiting for the first truly global brand to emerge from China's shores. But while we wait, we shouldn't miss the quiet creative revolution taking place elsewhere in ad land. Home grown brands may not be winging their way out of the PRC and across the globe, but big creative ideas in the form of innovative global brand campaigns are.

It wasn't always like this. China has traditionally been an importer of creative ideas. Before, the most China advertising agencies could expect when working on global brand was an adaptation brief — adapting the VO and copy without losing too much of the idea in translation. Not exactly a big creative opportunity to showcase your talents to the world. So what triggered the change, shifting China as importer of ideas to exporter?

Firstly, the opportunity changed. When I joined BBH China four years ago, China's rise was making daily headline news across the globe. The marketing opportunity for global brands entering or already in the market was too big to miss or get wrong in China. As such a new phase was ushered in; working on much sexier "Create it for China" briefs.

Better briefs, better work, but also better talent. The opportunity to work on briefs for some of the world's biggest brands in the fastest growing market has attracted an increasing flow of experienced talent to China's shores. Such worldly talent, working



alongside China's home grown best, all learning and feeding off each other, is a mix that has proved creatively potent for the industry with creativity breeding creativity. With meaty creative challenges from global brands and the right talent mix to deliver, China's creativity is certainly coming of age. A surprising 80 per cent of BBH China's work is now being exported to the region for the likes of Johnnie Walker, Mentos, LG and Minute Maid. The "Create it for China" brief has been replaced by "Create it for China and the region too".

With the global recession causing global marketers to seriously review their costs without losing the quality of work, it stands to reason that with its relatively priced costs and creative rise, China is set to become not just a creative hub for the region, but one of the biggest exporters of creative advertising for the world.

Anna Thomas is account director at BBH China

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