The Westerner in Chinese Advertisements, the Chinese in Western Advertisements: crossed views on added values

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Representations of the Westerner =
  excellence, high-quality, luxury

Representations of the Chinese =
  wisdom, spirituality, eternity

By using the Other (and by exploiting ignorance of the Other, stereotypes on the Other and common ideas on the Other), advertisement is adding value to the product to create identity: a brand identity, and therefore, the consumer’s identity.
Part 1

Value added by representing the Other in commercial advertisement
Advertisement for *Houshi Boss* briefcases
(Shanghai, May 2005)

“I Believe Muself – HOUSHIBOSS”
“Westernity”:

white, westerner,
wise, confident,
successful, ambitious,
wealthy
“A good health is the key for a perfect home”
“While you cannot change what a product is, you can change what it means”

James Twitchell

To stimulate the purchase, advertisement has:

- to put into scenery a world where consumption is source of positive change and satisfaction, and where purchasing is the core of existence
- to publicize the myth of the middle class as a social accomplishment
The purpose of the White in these Chinese advertisements:

- to embody high-quality, excellence, perfection, and a certain idea of social accomplishment, implying materialist success.
- to serve the propaganda of the middle class as a social accomplishment and an ideal of life.
An added value supposedly missing or lacking for the Chinese, and whose quest would be supposed to perfect an existence still unbalanced: the White way of life.
"These porcelains symbolise the heritage of a eternal China"
“We don’t know the lifetime of a IWC. But we’ve only existed for 140 years”
“Born 120 years ago!”
The Westerner is evolving in a society which has already reached the limits of materialism, and which is looking for a certain idea of happiness, not anymore in consumption (as we can see in China), but mostly in the joy (and therefore in the consumption) of certain values, like spirituality, escaping, free time, “discovery” of the Other.
“Advertisement is the place where are expressed the deep trends of a period, the modern concerns, myths and sensibilities”

“The advertising image offers to see humans models corresponding to the dominating social values. (…) It works thanks to a “mimetic desire” forcing us to look like the model offered. (…) Advertisement reflects the dominating ideology, stereotypes which are often very volatile and episodic.”

Part 2

Commodification of cultures and spectacular “middleclassification” of the world
We are living in a “spectacle market economy”

Guy Debord

- Advertisement contributes to the commodification of cultures.
- Advertisement encourages to show what the Other is expected to be instead of showing what the Other is: it is a performative imaginary.
- Advertisement is inspired by myths of modernity, and inspires them in the same time.
Spectacular “middleclassification”

We can observe, *in terms of representation, icons and spectacle*, the “middleclassification” of China, that is to say: the omnipresence of the middle class as a new social norm.
Advertisements only create a world which is making allusions to reality, where the purpose, the aim is the consumption.
“Necessity to give free rein to the power of imagination, to promote creativity (…) as intrinsic vector of a new art of living, is now more and more urging”

Gregory B. Lee
“Your dream home tailored to your needs”
“The dominating imaginary [in China] is from now on the same as elsewhere. It is likewise poor, and likewise dangerous because of this very poorness”

Jean-François Billetter
Thank you
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