

□ Nanjing -

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The mascot for the Second Youth Olympic Games was unveiled at the Nanjing Olympic Sports Centre on 29 November 2013.

The yuhua stone that inspired the creation of Lele quickly gained popularity among the public.

Kuang Daoqiu, Deputy Secretary-General of Nanjing Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee (NYOGOC) and Director of Marketing Department, said the Nanjing 2014 mascot arose from the profound cultural heritage of Nanjing and embodies local characteristics, which would become yet another introduction of Nanjing.

Mr. Kuang said the “birth” of the Nanjing 2014 mascot was the joint efforts of 1.2 million youth from across China and thanks them and everyone involved in the solicitation of the mascot.

He then participated in the following Q & A session:

Q. The public have been looking forward to the unveiling of Nanjing 2014 mascot. Could you please tell us about its design ideas and concept?

A. Lele was inspired by the yuhua stone, which comes in all sizes and shapes and naturally represents the power of nature. It sends out the message of the spirit of being “close to nature and returning to nature”.

As a type of ancient viewing stones, it has rather high recognition both home and abroad and has been praised as a “national treasure from Heaven”. To choose yuhua stone as the mascot demonstrates to the world the unique charms of Nanjing as a modern green city that embraces “being close to nature and green development” which greatly corresponds to the standpoint of Nanjing 2014 that advocates a natural and healthy lifestyle among global youth.

The name Lele refers to the sound of stones banging and happiness in Mandarin. In ancient days, people frequently banged stones as a form of entertainment as they quarried or built the roads, the word ‘le’ therefore signifies pioneering.

The slogan for the First Youth Olympic Games in Singapore was ‘Blazing the Trail’, whereas “Lele” signifies how youth forges ahead courageously in their exploration of the Youth Olympic Movement at Nanjing 2014, thus creating a “Nanjing model” of the YOG and ultimately bringing youth around the world together to this very special place that is Nanjing.

Q. Many people are curious how did the mascot came into being?

A. The solicitation and launch of mascots have become a routine during the preparation of major events and it is not easy to break free of such convention and being original and innovative.

We have therefore been thinking, before starting the task concerning the mascot, how to fully reflect the concepts of Nanjing 2014 within such convention, especially the initiative of “youth and vigour, participation and sharing”.

We all know the YOG belongs to the youth of the world and emphasises communication over competition; a mascot should therefore truly reflect these characteristics. We eventually chose a National Advertising Art Design Competition for College Students as a platform to get the youth from around the country to provide us with their ideas while providing them a chance to showcase their talent on the Olympic stage.

According the biennial competition rules of the National Advertising Art Design Competition for College Students, the competition was supposed to only take place again next year, we were therefore not very confident about participation in the solicitation of the mascot. However, we were overwhelmed by the participation and enthusiasm of the university students of China. Within in six months, a total of 1.2 million students from 27 competition zones in the country, which comprise 903 tertiary and secondary institutions from 32 provinces, cities and autonomous regions, participated in the competition, setting a record for the competition.

After two rounds of selection process, namely school and competition zones, the organising committee for the National Advertising Art Design Competition for College Students received 2,850 pieces of finalist work. Five pieces of work were shortlisted after preliminary appraisal and reappraisal by the judges.

We believe that since the Games belong to the youth, then they should have the final decision in the selection of the mascot. We therefore held a vote for the five pieces of shortlisted work as selected by the organising committee for the National Advertising Art Design Competition for College Students in July, where the youth representatives were to vote for the mascot and the winning mascot would be submitted to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for approval.

The approval process was an equally difficult one, because the IOC had to carry out global

research on the design and name of the mascot to avoid any legal issues. Furthermore, it had to ensure the mascot would not cause any racial, cultural or religious disputes; we therefore had to compromise under these requests. After a number of rounds of modification, the final image and name of the mascot as we see has been confirmed.

Q. As we know, Lele contains a profound cultural heritage. What is your take and understanding of it?

A. Mascots are the most primitive cultural products of mankind. We all know it is a survival instinct to avoid risks and dangerous situations. However, when forces of nature are in play, people often find themselves caught up in all kinds of unknown or sudden disasters. In the search for inner peace, they entrusted some specific people or objects with their wishes for peace and happiness, hoping such people or objects would save them from disasters and ensure their safety.

This is a widespread cultural phenomenon that is manifested differently in different environments.

In Chinese culture, we have always emphasised ‘luck, longevity, health and tranquillity’, and have thus created many auspicious animals and beasts such as the dragon, phoenix, crane, deer and qilin. These auspicious animals and beasts are revered by generation after generation of Chinese.

As history unfolds and society progresses, people become more dominant, the irrational bordering superstitious way of worshipping of mascots gradually died out. However, the simple faith in pursuing safety, success and happiness survives. As a carrier of such faith, mascots therefore remain active in many aspects of social life.

Q. Mascots and sports events have a strong bond. Why do you think sports events favour mascots?

A. I agree that mascots and sport events have a strong bond. “Waldi”, a dachshund that appeared at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, was the first-ever mascot in the Olympic history. Ever since then, mascots have become an indispensable element in all major games and events, including the Olympics. The adorable and lively mascots play a critical role in

popularising the Games, promoting the images of the host city and nation as well as encouraging public participation.

Following the commercialised development of sports games, particularly after the emergence of branding in recent years, the purpose of mascots is further highlighted. Generally speaking, the elements that constitute the visual identity system of the brand of a game include emblem, slogan and mascot, all of which are static apart from the mascot.

The personalised mascot has a strong personality and great vitality, which to a great extent shapes the spirit of a game and brings the audience closer to the game. Furthermore, it plays an active role in promoting the image and creating the brand of the host city.

Q. As the person in charge of Nanjing 2014 brand management, how do you distinguish the mascot and the brand?

A. The most widespread application of the concept of modern-day mascots is doubtlessly seen on organisational identity. With greater emphasis being placed on branding, be it production, operation or even non-commercial social events, a distinct and popular identity is of utmost importance to the success of a business or organisation. We understand that brand is a complex system that comprises multiple elements, and the outmost layer of such system is the visual identification elements, which include designs and colours.

The concept of a brand may be the most exquisite and the most innovative. However, without good visual elements as its communication carrier, it will remain unknown to the public. Strong visual elements are therefore a stepping stone to a successful brand.

Mascots occupy a unique position among all the visual elements of a brand. Be it a cartoon character, animal, plant or nonliving thing, the mascots are personalised.

When shaping the brand personality, that is, its personal characteristics, mascots have unparalleled effects compare to other visual elements, such as Chicky of KFC, Ronald McDonald of McDonald's, the penguin of Tencent and the little sunflower of Sunflower Group. While fully reflecting the spirit of the brands they represent, these mascots bring the consumer much closer and therefore play an immeasurable role in enhancing brand loyalty.