

Inside the mind of YeJiang Pan¹ (or what you might find there)

I need to talk to Wang Lei and Wang Zhaozhao. We go out to dinner for a chat. Our shoptalk gets better and better, and we have fun over a good meal. My French friends tell me that's typically Chinese, which makes me laugh: what about them and their obsession with regional cuisine and their vineyards? This summer, business exceeded our expectations. We were caught off guard by our own success. Can't fault that. It's what I want: to transform Vatti, to revolutionise the company and, above all, our image. To modernise it and hitch our brand to the star of the passion, youth and cosmopolitan dynamism that football represents in the hearts and minds of consumers the world over. Sure, the small shareholders rattled us. As *Les Bleus* won more and more, they started getting spooked. Some of them were praying that France would lose... and I can't deny I was tempted too. And then they gave up. Sales went through the roof. And shares collapsed. They didn't get it. Perhaps we left it too late to discuss it with them. We will have to improve dialogue with them to shed some light on the path ahead of us. They'll get it. They'll come back to us. They're already coming back. If not, we'll find a different sort of shareholder, a different calibre of investor. Our fall of over 50% on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in June will soon be behind us. Here we are, with our shares almost back at their level before we launched our partnership with the French Football Federation. As Lao-Tzu wisely put it, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step".

¹ YeJiang Pan, Chairman of Vatti, the Chinese household appliance manufacturer

Our brand has a journey of a thousand miles ahead of it. And we have set out. This summer, with *Les Bleus*, we took that single step. A decisive step. And what a step! As a certain Emmanuel Macron might put it, we are “*en marche*”! Who had heard of Vatti before our famous “championship package”? *Buy a kitchen and, if France win the World Cup, we will refund you every penny.* They made some folks pretty darn happy, *Les Bleus*. In need of appliances, some of our fellow Chinese took a chance on us. They couldn’t get enough of our products, which sold like the proverbial hot cakes. A 30% spike in sales! Families put down several years’ savings on our kitchens and utensils. We pretty much sold out and raked in ¥85 million in profit. Clearly, this success also comes at a cost. We had to keep our word. ¥79 million in purchases means ¥79 million in refunds, cash or coupons. We met the challenge, along with our obligations. But you can’t put a value on the increased visibility. We’ve broken through, and how! Risky maybe, but it was a masterstroke. I’ve been criticised for that in China. And the Western press have had a good laugh. Who cares? You need to know when to take risks. I’m in my forties and on course for change. The same goes for a whole generation, with Jack Ma² and Wang Jianlin³ leading the way. I’ve been in charge for three years, modernising the brand, sprucing it up, overhauling it. That has enabled me to give it an international presence. In China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao, we’ve had undreamt-of growth in a record time. In France, in Europe and all over the world, we have given ourselves Nike levels of visibility! All-new awareness of us among the consumers and buyers of tomorrow in the West, and the status of an international company in the eyes of the consumers of today at home in

China – wasn’t that our ambition? So, we need to give ourselves the means to achieve it.

² Ma Yun, known as Jack Ma, the world’s biggest online merchant, Chairman of Alibaba Group and owner of aliexpress.com

³ Wang Jianlin, owner of the Wanda Group (formerly Dalian Wanda Group)

As it goes, it's not just about my ambition or Vatti's. It's that of China as a whole and of its economy under Xi Jinping's leadership. Hat tip to Mengniu for obtaining the exclusive rights to sell sweets and dairy products in the stadiums. A nice little earner for a Chinese company! The broadcast of their advert during each of the 64 World Cup matches, from start to finish, is a coup. Never before have so many Western consumers in one go been exposed to dairy products from dear old Inner Mongolia! Vivo also did well positioning its smartphones, and Hisense its televisions and refrigerators. Yadea netted a great platform for advertising its electric scooters. This summer, thanks to FIFA, Chinese brands really were out in force on the Russian and global stages. The Sepp Blatter scandal is behind us – the Gianni Infantino era has dawned at FIFA. Sony, Johnson & Johnson and Castrol pulled out and other Western brands turned up their nose. What luck! And what a windfall the World Cup is, not just Russia 2018, but also Qatar 2022. Short of cash, FIFA was in dire straits... With losses of \$369 million in 2016, gaps needed to be plugged. That's how we came into the picture. For Vivo, having been in existence for just nine years, it's a nice little official !400 million sponsorship contract over six years, including the Confederations Cup. But, as ever, the prize goes to Wang Jianlin, who has cemented the Wanda Group's place alongside Coca-Cola, Visa, Adidas and Gazprom as official partner for the next four World Cups! He's right when he says that this is how we will promote the interests, not just of Chinese brands, but also of Chinese football. Wouldn't it be great to bag World Cup 2030? To make China a superpower of global football? To host the World Cup, to win it and – why not? – to one day provide a President of FIFA...

Marie-Gabrielle Cajoly