

career laden with possibilities and expectations. Normally speaking, a freestyle skier is active into their 30s.

### Love for motherland

Gu's strengths, coming from her age and good living habits, allow her to compete in multiple events. She could walk away with three Olympic medals in Beijing as she is competing in big air, freestyle halfpipe and slopestyle.

Second, Gu's love for her motherland has earned a huge base of new Chinese fans.

With a Chinese mother and American father, she has captivated China since switching allegiance from the United States in 2019. During the Beijing Winter Games, she has won honors for China.

Brands in stationery, fashion and home appliance industries are "very interested" in Gu endorsements, said Lu.

Third, Gu's personality is adding to her appeal.

In Beijing, she was asked how to deal with debates on her nationality and identity.

"I think sports can unite us all together, rather than being a divisive force. I don't think sports should be linked with nationality, for we are here exactly in the hope of exploring human limitations," Gu replied.

Gu words or "golden sentences" are being widely spread in social media and are adding to her positive acceptance.

"Every time before I did a new trick on the snow, I am afraid. But now I am more afraid of not even trying or setting limits for myself. Fear has kept me going and fighting," she has said.

Her attitude fits the Olympic and sport spirit and is echoed by netizens in China and globally, including many young people.

Personality is a key "feature" of a sports star. It helps brands to target specific groups of consumers. Among NBA stars, Nike signed cooperation deals with both Michael Jordan and "the Worm" Dennis Rodman at almost the same time. Compared to Jordan's personal charisma which attracted normal people, Rodman's maverick personality was likely to influence relatively niche targeted groups, Qiu told Shanghai Daily.

Fourth, Gu has a diverse lifestyle compared with other sports people.

Besides being a ski prodigy, she is a grade-A student, Vogue cover girl, social media celebrity, and is often called a genius girl.

People are naturally interested in her education and the reasons behind her success at such an early age. Related stories are spreading extensively online, reaching out to wider circles of consumers beyond only sports fans.

But Gu is not alone, despite the current



Luckin issued an early invite for Gu Ailing to endorse its coffee. — Ti Gong

wave of interest and the clamor of willing sponsors.

Olympic teams and athletes, like China's short track speed skating team, Su Bingtian and Yang Qian, are earning more fans and endorsement contracts these days, said agencies.

For example, Xiaomi invited Su, the first ever Asian-born sprinter to break the 10-second barrier for 100 meters in track and field, to endorse its flagship smartphone with "fast and powerful" features.

The Tokyo Olympics and Beijing Winter Olympics have heightened the focus on Chinese sport stars who are often seen as national heroes with rising social influence.

In 2022, the revenue in China's winter sports industry will reach 71.4 billion yuan (US\$11.1 billion), up 20 percent year-on-year. The major target groups of the industry are aged between 27 and 39 and have considerable consumption power, according to ii-Media Research.

Revenue from the female sports market will grow rapidly within the next few years, according to Deloitte, from a surging demand that blends sports and fashion.

Sports stars have positive and healthy images compared with entertainment stars who are prone to rumor and scandal, said Lu and other marketing insiders.

China is on a fast track to becoming a major player in the sports endorsement industry. It has tremendous potential. Qiu, on the other hand, believes that the business is still waiting for long-term triumphs and "win-win" situations such as Nike and Jordan.

Industry officials should consider how to maintain sports stars' exposure and expand their influence when there are no sporting events happening, Qiu added.



Gu Ailing figurines, priced at 259 yuan, have sold out online. — Ti Gong

### Gu's 'commercial empire'



Note: As of early February, 2022

<b>FASHION &amp; BEAUTY</b>
IWC Schaffhausen, Tiffany & Co., Louis Vuitton, Victoria's Secret, Brunello Cucinelli, Kiehl's and Estée Lauder
<b>SPORTS</b>
Anta, Faction Skis, Oakley, Goski and Therabody
<b>FOOD &amp; HEALTH</b>
BY-HEALTH, Red Bull, Mengniu Dairy, Genki Forest and Luckin Coffee
<b>3C TECHNOLOGY &amp; AUTO</b>
Midea, China Mobile, Beats by Dre and Cadillac China
<b>OTHERS</b>
JD.com, 3Trees, Bank of China, PICC, Xiaohongshu, Quark App, Kohler and VISA

Source: Jiemian



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