

FIAT & Richard Gere: Getting Entangled in International Politics with a TV Ad

Marta Ginori (June 24, 2008)



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"It had never been driven by or based on political choices or by a desire to interfere with the internal political system of any country, especially the People's Republic of China." Whose sentence is this? What is it referring to? It sounds like the official excuse of a diplomat or a politician apologizing after



a major gaffe. The strange fact is that it was expressed by a private company, FIAT, trying to apologize because of a TV spot for the new Delta, a car by Lancia, one of its famous car brands.

The incriminating ad has been aired recently, featuring American Hollywood superstar Richard Gere. It starts by showing Gere's hands on the 'walk of fame' sidewalk in Los Angeles. Gere then jumps into the new Lancia Delta and drives to Tibet, where he and a child dressed as a Buddhist monk plunge their hands into fresh snow. Richard Gere is a long-time supporter of the Tibetan Independence Movement. According to FIAT the theme of the ad was personally chosen by Gere.

China invaded Tibet in 1950. In March, its government suppressed a nascent uprising led by Buddhist monks. Since then a major global movement began to call for the boycott of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

Gere's ad brings the whole Tibetan question into the spotlight, involving one of the most important Italian private companies in the matter. FIAT indeed recognized that the ad "could upset the sensibility of the Chinese people," while defending its choice of Mr. Gere because of "his long and distinguished career in the arts." The company also stressed that their choice "should not be understood as an endorsement by the Fiat Group of Mr. Gere's social and political views."

For Lancia CEO Olivier François, Richard Gere is the ideal driver for a car like the new Delta, which combines "glamour and courage, elegance and temperament." Ironically, the advertising campaign's slogan is "The power to be different." Certainly the outcome of this campaign was quite different from what FIAT's marketing department predicted!

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