

The Power Dynamics of Three Chinese-French Families in Post-colonial Shanghai

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A SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT

Presented to


The Department of Anthropology  
The Colorado College

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2022

Approved: 

Date: April 17, 2022

## **Abstract**

The Chinese-French marriages I investigated revealed a strong ability to balance their cultural capital Shanghai, the biggest city in China. Due to the city's colonized history, French cultural influence continues in Shanghai today. I used the participant observation method and interviews to conduct in-depth ethnographic work with three Chinese women who married their French husbands. By applying Pierre Bourdieu's theories of capital, I evaluate the cultural capital possessed by the Chinese-French families in Shanghai. If the women are experiencing the same unequal family status as the mail-order brides? Differ from mail-order brides, the three Chinese women have the autonomy to choose their husbands, are well-educated businesswomen, and are empowered by Western feminist theory. Based on Bourdieu's theory. I proposed the idea of balancing cultural capital, including foods and languages, in the three marriages. In terms of the power dynamics in the family, two of Chinese-French families were primarily French in daily family conversations, and they all agreed that their French husbands had more authority in their Children's education and determination in food customs. Nevertheless, all three women expressed appreciation toward French culture and satisfaction with their marriages. Moreover, they are proud of a mixture of cultural values in their daily routines. Therefore, I argue that Chinese-French marriages are more beneficial to Chinese women's cultural capital than Chinese marriages.

Keywords: Chinese-French marriages, power-dynamic, cultural capital, social capital

## **Honor Pledge**

*On my honor, I have neither given, nor received, any unauthorized aid on this honors thesis. Honor Code upheld.*

Angela (Lepeng) Wei

## **Acknowledgment**

This thesis becomes a reality with the kind support and help of many individuals. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of them. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my academic advisor Professor Hautzinger who made this work possible. Her guidance and advice carried me through all the stages of writing my project. When I was in China, I could not access academic references from google scholars. She kindly sent me the peer-reviewed paper I needed for this capstone. She taught me anthropological theory and has been helping me improve my writing. I would like to thank all of the anthropology professors at Colorado College because what I learned in their classes guided me on this journey. I would not have reached this stage in my life without the professors help.

I would also like to thank my family members for encouraging me and providing me with opportunities to interview three Chinese women who married French men. She first contacted my aunt and invited her family to our house. I am grateful that she understood my strong interest and majored in Anthropology for my undergraduate degree.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my aunts and her friends. She invited me to have several lunches with her family, her friends, and herself. I appreciate she and her friend's openness to the topic and questions.

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## Introduction

While a group of my friends and I were walking after dinner on Washburn Field at Colorado College, one of them introduced me to the term: “yellow fever.” “Yellow fever” is a term usually applied to white men or non-Asian men who have an apparent racial fetish towards women of Asian descent. Therefore, the negative racial stereotypes-- ‘Lotus Blossom’ or the seductive, treacherous ‘Dragon Lady’-- associated with “yellow fever” depersonalize Asian women in relationships (Zheng 2016). To clarify, white men with “yellow fever” do not include the ones who simply appreciate the appearance of Asian women. In the United States, Asian women are more likely to marry out of their ethnic group than males. In 2015, one-third (36%) of Asian women were married to a different race or ethnicity spouse, compared to 21% of Asian men (Livingston & Brown 2020). According to Fryer (2007), in the U.S, marriages between White men and Asian women are over twice as frequent as those between White women and Asian men. My friend raised the idea to me out of concern because I am an Asian woman who dated a white man in my freshmen year. He was surprised that I did not know the term before and suggested that I research this. I had the academic opportunity to explore “yellow fever” in my anthropological theory class, but “yellow fever” provides an overly simplistic answer to Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai.

In my community, married couples are often Asian women with white men, and the situation is rarely reversed. I first examined my community in Shanghai through the ethnic makeup of their relationships, and from my initial observation, I did not see any trace of “yellow fever.” Due to COVID, all my classes were delivered remotely, and my F-1 student visa did not qualify me to stay in the U.S. Therefore, I came back to my community in Shanghai, China. I had an opportunity to talk with my neighbors about their relationships and witness their daily

lives in 2021. The relationships between the neighborhood's husbands and wives were harmonious. For example, I always saw one couple, an Italian man and a Japanese woman, holding hands and walking dogs together in the mornings and afternoons. They both spent much time caring for their four children were, riding skateboards, and playing on trampolines with the couple in their garden. All the international couples appreciated and respected both cultures. Therefore, I reexamined "yellow fever" to describe all interracial couples, and I decided to conduct ethnographic research on international marriages in Shanghai.

In this paper, I investigate the power dynamics in contemporary Chinese-French marriage through the lenses of Bourdieu's capital theories in Shanghai. I developed my research question: How do we evaluate the power dynamics in recent Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai? Through analyzing and evaluating Bourdieu's capital theories, I provide a more comprehensive answer for Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai. I contacted my aunt because she was my closest person who married a French man. Luckily, she introduced her social networks, the French communities in Shanghai, to me. Based on my research interest, she invited me to have lunch with two other Chinese women who married French men. The Chinese-French marriages are unique among other international marriages in Shanghai because of the French colonial history in China and the Chinese fetishization of French culture and language in the post-colonial period. After deciding to research Chinese-French marriages. The significance of the essay is to deliver new insights into Chinese women's perspective on Chinese-French marriages and provide a thoughtful understanding of Chinese-French families in Shanghai, a finding can apply to some other international marriages or future research on cross-cultural relationships. The audience for my essay is anyone interested in Chinese-French marriages or considering having a French and Chinese marriage or international marriage. I researched academic references for

Chinese and Western marriages to develop my thesis, but ethnographic research on the topic is limited. In academia, I hope my research can empower the voices of Chinese women who engage in Chinese-French marriages or international marriages. Therefore, some Chinese who do not understand international marriage will reduce the simple perception of Chinese women marrying Western men in China. National-wide, I hope to translate this work and publish it on Chinese social media, WeChat, or Weibo, to reduce the biases toward Chinese women who marry foreigners.

The paper is organized in chronological order of research. The first part of the essay is a method of analysis that benefits from the study of ethnography in the second part of the paper. Next, I evaluated Marx's commodity fetishism rooted in "yellow fever," and I argue that "yellow fever" provided a simplistic answer to explain the Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai. Therefore, I shifted to review Bourdieu's theory of capital for Chinese-French marriages. In the third part of the paper, I will list and explain the factors that have caused the rise of Chinese-French marriages in China. Chinese-French marriages' historical and cultural factors revealed that Chinese and French cultural entanglement was produced through historical, economic, and cultural influences in the post-colonial stage. In the last part of the essay, I examine how these factors shaped the power dynamics in contemporary Chinese-French families and discuss how French men and Chinese women balance their social, cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical capital in their marriages. Bourdieu suggested that the set of social, pedagogical, and cultural capital determine the individual's development of their habitus in a particular social field. In other words, habitus is the individual's position in a social field and demonstrates the ability to adapt to different social fields, such as work, school, and friends. In return, the behaviors in social fields would also influence the possessions of capital.



Through analyzing the information gathered from the three Chinese women, I argue that the Chinese women's initial understanding of an unfamiliar population, their French husbands, was based on certain stereotypes. Some White men who date Asian women were first attracted by some component of "yellow fever" at the beginning of their relationship since they had limited cognition of Asian culture and Asian women (Lum 2016). Even though attraction might start with "yellow fever," the exotic attractions come from broad stereotypes of Asian women and do not provide a complete rationale for Chinese-French marriages. I evaluated three Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai through Pierre Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital, including food, linguistic, and pedagogical capital. I suggested that the Chinese women and French men tend to complement each other by balancing their capital. In other words, the most significant difference that set apart unfair relationships of mail-order brides versus more equitable Chinese-French marriages were individuals' abilities to counterbalance forms of "capital" in the latter. Additionally, successful international marriages require respect for individuals and each other's culture and social capital rather than a partial understanding at the beginning.

## **Method of research**

In this thesis, I conducted my research through the voices of three Chinese women—voices rarely presented in the academic anthropological literature—who married French men. All the conversations were recorded in Chinese. Consequentially, I practiced snowball sampling. Snowball sampling emphasizes the relevance of the cases. The best way to practice this sampling method is through recommendations from cases that form a chain of related samples. This approach reflects the pattern of social networks in particular social contexts. In this case, my aunt

provided her social network in her community. Since my aunt's marriage is closely related to the topic I want to study, I had one private conversation with her. She is called Annie, and most of the vignettes in this essay are about her family. Many ethnographers argued that an ethnography is constituted by a combination of information collection methods, such as interviews (Walford 2018). I prepared a list of interview questions about “yellow fever,” her family, French and Chinese cultures, and languages in this conversation. I used the participant-observation method in ethnography to conduct the research and provided the rationale for the sampling methods. This method allows me to join their social events and informally gather information. The opportunity to live and study in the US and Switzerland for the past seven years has given me an outsider's perspective on Chinese and French culture, which has helped me become a better ethnographer. Last year, when I went back to China, sometimes I still felt alienated from Chinese culture. Therefore, conducting this ethnographic research also improved my understanding of Chinese and French culture.

The research benefits from the participant-observation method in various aspects. First, the flexibility and adaptability of the method enable me to investigate the topic through dynamic data collections and upcoming research questions. Second, as a community member, I can participate in my subjects' daily lives, which is also the goal of “social shrinkage.” In ethnography, “social shrinkage” suggests that the researchers participate in their subject's daily life without influencing their behaviors (Harrison 2018 68). Therefore, most of the time, I did not intervene in their natural flows of conversations, and I observed their actions based on space and time. Third, while the topic is novel, I have previously been exposed to Chinese and French cultures. I lived in China for 14 years, and for five years, I studied in the French part of Switzerland, during which I also visited France five times. I am a senior at Colorado College,

majoring in Anthropology and minoring in Environmental studies. In conversations with the Chinese women, I was already familiar with some French and Chinese cultural contents in terms of food and languages. I listened to them talk about unexpected topics relevant to international marriages, such as a tax on foreigners and extracurricular activities for their children. Fourth, I have some background knowledge about international marriages because many of my friends are from international families. However, they were from different western countries, and I wanted a focused study. Before conducting this research, I had the opportunity to collect background information from other White men and Asian women couples of different nationalities in my neighborhood. They provided me with a comprehensive picture of international marriages worldwide before conducting my research on the three Chinese women.

After I decided to use this method, I formulated a list of questions to answer the research question. My first research question was: Is “yellow fever” embodied in Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai? Therefore, the list of questions I designed for my aunt were about her opinions on “yellow fever,” languages, cultural differences, and pedagogical ideologies in her family. Although I shifted my research interest from “yellow fever” to successful Chinese-French marriage based on my aunt’s responses, the answers that I gathered from this interview also answer my current research question: How do we evaluate the power dynamics in contemporary Chinese-French marriage through the lenses of Bourdieu’s theories of capital in Shanghai? She said she was interested in participating in the research project, and she asked me how she could help me with this research. She offered to send me a survey to other Chinese women married to French men, and she could organize a party to invite me and her friends. Based on research needs, I chose to have an in-depth conversation with her friend and her. Then, she invited me to her lunch with two friends. In Shanghai, my aunt and her two friends held

weekly meetup lunches to enjoy Chinese dishes that they did not eat at home, and they gave suggestions to each other because they all faced similar difficulties in their families. For example, they complained about their fights with their husbands caused by cultural differences. These lunches are alternative solutions to cultural differences in Chinese-French families in Shanghai.

Therefore, I have the same set of interview questions based on related topics, except the question about “yellow fever.” However, these were not the only questions were answered by the three Chinese women who married French men. For example, I asked the three women how they met their husbands and how old were their children to gather basic information. My aunt introduced her two Chinese friends who also married French men to me: Livie and Maggie. A week later, I invited her to our house party. The participant-observation method collected data at a house party and a lunch event with her friends.

My aunt Annie has been my mother’s cousin. She is an average-looking Chinese woman, based on Chinese beauty standards who married her French White husband, seven years ago. She is about 5 feet 2 inches tall. After graduating from college, she worked at The Dow Chemical Company in Shanghai, an American multinational chemical corporation. Her husband is 12 years older than her. They have two children: a 6-year-old girl and a 3-year-old boy. The whole family lived in Shanghai and went back to France once a year before the COVID-19 pandemic. Her husband worked at a French company that provides swine-flu vaccines for pigs in China. They chose to live in Shanghai because they have higher salaries and receive better services through the company. For example, since he is an employee dispatched abroad, the company offered his family a vehicle and a driver. My Aunt’s friend, Livie, is shorter than my aunt. She went to college in France, but she met her husband in Shanghai. They have two children: a 6-year-old

and a 3-year-old girl. Her two children went to the same Ballet class as my cousins. The other friend, Maggie, married a French Cambodian man, and they have a six-year-old girl. She is slim and tanned. She met her husband while she was selling wool scarves.



Figure 1: This is a picture of my aunt (Annie) and my uncle attending an afternoon tea event in the Chinese New Year. As shown in the image, my aunt ordered lemon tea, and my uncle had a cup of coffee.

## **Anthropological theories**

### **Defining “yellow fever” through Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism**

I explored the historical and cultural concept of “yellow fever” in my Anthropology Theory class; I wrote a research paper arguing that “yellow fever” is a fetishization that turns Asian mail-

order brides into commodities, thus alienating their dignity and worth as humans. The industry of mail-order brides is providing Asian women to marry men in Western countries, but some agencies offer brides from Eastern European countries. Also, the business of mail-order brides is operating through Western masculine hegemony (Starr and Adams 2016:953-975). International dating websites are the most common accessible channel for “ordering,” and “online-chatting” mail-order brides. In 2010, the industry earned more than 2 billion dollars (Wayne 2011). During the Fiscal year 2019, 15,386 Asian women officially immigrated to the United States as brides to American men (Anonymous 2021). According to the Bureau of Consular Affairs of the U.S Department of State, the designation of a K-1 nonimmigrant visa provides opportunities for foreign-citizen fiancée (including mail order brides) to travel to the U.S and get married to their husbands within 90 days (about three months) of arrival.

In preliminary work for this thesis, Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism proved to be a valuable paradigm for me to investigate the mail-order bride industry as a commercial branch that embodies the ideology of “yellow fever.” Mail-order Brides comprise a retail industry that incorporates “yellow fever” because women on the websites were treated as goods and labeled through age and height. Some Mail-order brides are introduced into the “Marriage Market” with prices and are referred to as commodities. Even before this transaction, the matchmakers and these white men had already developed a way of examining these women by labeling them. After they came to live in the U.S, they were stigmatized. At three times higher risk of experiencing family abuse than the whole U.S population (Situ-Liu and Liu 2019:74-95). Following Marx’s argument that the fetishization of commodities creates relationships between products and the producers that replace the relationships between people, I examine the phenomenon of Caucasian men seeking out Asian wives. In terms of mail-order brides, the attraction between the mail-

order brides and their consumers was only developed through the popularity of “yellow fever” in Western society. I imagine that the producers are Caucasian men who have “yellow fever,” and they created the market for the products, the mail-order brides.

Moreover, Taussig interprets Marx’s theory, the fetishism of commodities, in social contexts: he believes the fetishism of commodities “unmasks something crucial about the human reality that is concealed by the mysticism of commodities culture” (Taussig 2010). I suggest that humanizing elements in the mail-order brides are lacking because individuals’ personalities were not revealed in the online chats. The websites were not designed to embody emotional exchange. The deconstruction of the fetishism of commodities is a way to facilitate social progress. Therefore, mail-order brides generate barriers to positive social change through the nature of power dynamics in the industry and the cultural reproduction of “yellow fever.” I explain that the ambivalence in the fetishism of commodities can generate both faith and skepticism. However, knowing fetishism and the value of social relationships in commodities would lead actors to struggle with their previous understanding of commodities for exchange values (Taussig 2010 229-231).

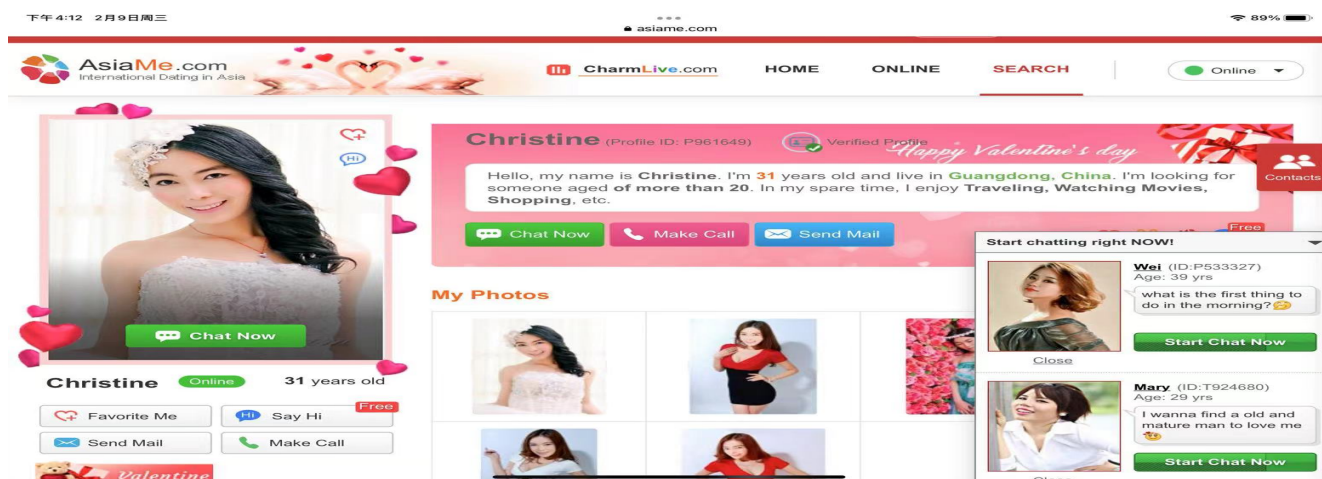


Figure 2: This is a screenshot from a website that provides mail-order, brides from China (<https://www.asiame.com/my/overview.php>)

## **Shifting from “yellow fever” to successful Chinese-French marriages**

My aunt is the first person I contacted because she was married to a French man for seven years. Since we had not seen each other for four years, she suggested having lunch together. One hot and rainy day in July 2021, we had lunch in a Western franchised restaurant. My aunt told me her friends also warned her while dating my uncle. She was looking for a person to get married to. Her friends were concerned that my uncle was not in a committed relationship with my aunt. My aunt stated that Chinese people’s understanding of foreigners in China was limited most of the time, so we were stereotyping them. The three women who married French, including my aunt, also had the stereotype that before they met their husbands, they expected romantic relationships with them. For example, all of them thought that French men were very romantic. However, they did not believe their husband was as romantic as expected. She continued, “I think my relationship with my husband is very respectful and equal, and I believe it is probably because of Western feminism.” Her answer completely rejects the unequal power dynamics embodied in “yellow fever.”

After talking with the three Chinese women, I claim that “yellow fever” is embodied only at the start of their relationship. Since white men came to China for jobs, they learned about China and the qualities and appearance of Chinese girls through Western media. Therefore, they have developed specific “stereotypes” of Asian women. My aunt asked many of her White friends who dated Asian girls about Asian girls' appearance. The White men replied that they think Asian girls' looks are “exotic (Lum 2016).” Also, after these White males dated the Asian women, they learned background knowledge of Asian cultures and appreciated the appearance of Asian women. When these couples are seriously dating, they have more factors to consider for their future. I argue that even though these White men my aunt talked to were attracted by



“yellow fever” at the beginning of their relationship, they were balancing their weaknesses and strengths in their marriages relative to their culture.

In terms of power dynamics in relationships, the mail-order brides experienced unequal power dynamics caused by global inequality and colonial history. The extreme poverty of these developing countries and immigration opportunities are some reasons for the marriages (Robinson 1996, 54-56). At the beginning of their relationship, mail-order brides developed the customer and product with their husbands, and they were very unfamiliar with Western culture. Moreover, many have not acquired the language abilities to survive in Western societies. Therefore, they were very dependent on their husbands (Lum 2016).

I argue that three Chinese women have more rights and power in their marriages because their families live in Shanghai. Differing from the mail-order brides, the three Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai revealed more equal power dynamics because they could balance the form of capital. The three Chinese women are very well-educated and economically independent. Moreover, they all help their husbands to assimilate into Chinese society and provide Chinese social networks because they offer much assistance to their husbands at work and during social events. For example, at the lunch event, my aunt and her friends were discussing how to complete the tax forms for their husbands. My aunt also researched and found housing for her family. Moreover, she was applying for a Chinese green card for my uncle. Since my uncle does not have a Chinese driver’s license, my aunt drives her family on holidays. My uncle was also introduced to my other close relative and my aunt’s friends in other industries, so he had the opportunities to network with them.

From the perspective of the Chinese wives, they also benefit from the forms of cultural capital their husbands bring. Their French husbands become their local guides during their

annual visit to France. While my family visited France, our 30,000 euros were robbed in Lyon, France. I was curious if the three families had any safety concerns while traveling in France. All of them said that they did not have any problems. My aunt believed that their family was not being deemed as foreigners or visitors because of her husband. The three women were invited to the French community in Shanghai. My aunt attended many social events organized by the community, such as weekly afternoon tea parties.

From an outsider's perspective, although the three Chinese women believe they were on the same standing as their husbands in their families, they give away more rights to speak their native languages and educate their children. They internally accept the idea of "Francophilia" (Prof. Hautingzer suggested the term that describes anyone who believes French culture and language is better than other cultures or languages) produced in Chinese culture and promoted by their husbands. The later sections elaborate on the Chinese-French family power dynamic in the concept of cultural capital.

### **Applying Pierre Bourdieu's theories of capital**

Instead of labeling and stereotyping women, Chinese-French marriages are highly individualized. Therefore, matching and balancing the forms of "capital" is crucial to the health of marriages. Here, balancing means maximizing one's strengths and minimizing weaknesses in marriages. According to Bourdieu, capital is not constrained by its economic terminology, and he argues that capital has different forms: economic, social, cultural, linguistic, and symbolic capital. The various forms of capital are interrelated, and financial capital serves as the foundation for the other forms of capital. While economic capital provides the owner with immediate goods and services, the social capital of social relationships can also be helpful to the

owner at the appropriate moment. Cultural capital is pedagogical or cultural knowledge, and symbolic capital is characterized as social honors or recognition, advancing its owner's social mobility (Moberg, 2019).

Since the three Chinese-French families have similar economic statuses and I would like to highlight cross-cultural differences, I only discuss cultural and social capital. While pedagogical and linguistic capital is included in the cultural capital, the Chinese-French families sustain their distinctions by emphasizing the two forms of capital. The three Chinese-French marriages reveal robust entanglement among their social, symbolic, and cultural capital. Throughout their marriage, French men were able to enter Chinese cultural life and Chinese social networks. Cultural capital is heavily internalized, which affects individuals' social mobility. Because my aunt spoke French and learned French cultural and linguistic knowledge, she was able to join her husband's social cycle and receive social recognition.

Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu proposed his understanding of marriage and marriage strategies. "Marriage strategies were determined by a combination of the principles of male supremacy and primogeniture and those principles which, through the adopt, tended to rule out marriages between overly unequal families based on an implicit 'cost analysis' aimed at maximizing the material and symbolic profit to be derived from the matrimonial transaction within the limits of the family's economic means." From my understating, Bourdieu states that males have more opportunities to choose partners and retain the right to select women through their similar socioeconomic backgrounds. However, these three Chinese-French marriages I studied were mutually initiated. Although we still live in a patriarchal society, these Chinese women married to French have more autonomy and rights than women married to Chinese

men. Instead of maximizing material profit, the Chinese-French families heavily benefit from balancing different forms of capital derived from the two cultures.

## **The historical and cultural factors of Chinese-French marriages**

### **Cultural exchange due to the French colonization of Shanghai**

Western powers heavily influenced the history of Shanghai. Compared to other parts of China, Western culture is no stranger to Shanghai people. I believe it is also a potential reason for Chinese women to marry French men. Through talking with the three women, they showed high interest in and were open-minded toward French culture. The foreign concessions are interracial settlements formed in 1843 under the Treaty of Nanjing after Qing the dynasty lost the First Opium War to England. While the Chinese government retained its land sovereignty in the concessions, the municipality of French settlements was entrusted with the ruling power and even enjoyed the status of an autonomous legal entity free from monitoring monitored by the Chinese government (Mou 2015). Nowadays, European-styled architectures in these Concessions are Shanghai's tourist attractions located in the center of Shanghai. Most foreigners still live in this area because of the preserved Western cultural environment. Coffee shops and clubs are dominating the streets in Concessions. Many young people in Shanghai love visiting there because they can experience Western cultures without going abroad.



Figure 3: This is a picture of the Bund, taken at night. It is the most famous tourist attraction place in Shanghai. Photo credit to adobe stock

The local Chinese admired foreigners in Shanghai from 1937 to 1945 (Second Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945 in World War II). According to my great grandmother, Chinese people used to look up to French, American, and British because their governments granted their use of modern technologies. During World War II, the concessions protected the Chinese refugees because these concessions represented the three countries' political power. Unfortunately, not everyone had access to the Concessions, and most residents were affected by World War II. My great-grandmother's relatives married a family in Concessions, and her relatives protected her. White people had heroic images in many Chinese people's hearts because they provided humanitarian support in World War II. The positive role of French people in Chinese history is one of the underlying factors that attracted these women.

## **Bidirectional appearance appreciation**

In Chinese pop culture, pale skin, slimness, and young-looking girls are deemed attractive. I have questioned many Chinese men about their ideal beauty standards, and their answers are consistent with Chinese pop beauty standards. Girls with pale skin and slim body figures are popular in the Chinese dating market. Beauty is not only generated from cultural tradition but also affected by historical preference. Throughout Chinese history, pale skin has been a symbol of wealth and status because privileged women in the society did not need to work outside (Zhang 2013). Therefore, pale-skinned women were considered more feminine and beautiful in Chinese pop culture. This statement is held in the current Chinese dating market. When I was conducting the research, I had a casual conversation with my three Chinese close friends who had very tanned skin. Because of their relatively dark skin, they have all heard many negative comments from family and friends. One of them even experienced school bullying in primary school because of her skin color. However, some males from Western countries are attracted by girls with tanned skins (Xie and Zhang 2013:538-554). In a private conversation with my aunt, I asked her if she thinks Western men have a distinct set of beauty standards, so when they choose their wives, they are also affected by these standards. My aunt had the same question I asked her, so she talked to her Western friends who like Asian girls. Most of them appreciated Asian-looking women before they dated Chinese women. She said most of them didn't mind the girls' skin color. Potentially, they would even prefer tanned skin Asian girls due to Western beauty standards.

Related to the history of Colonization, contemporary Chinese society still maintains Fetishism toward "Euro-Asian" (Teng 2006:131-164). The history of racial mixing preference in China can be traced back to Late Qing Dynasty. During that time, Chinese socialists and

philosophers were influenced by Herbert Spencer and his social Darwinism. Spencer utilized a biological analogy for a society developed through Darwin's theory of natural selection in the evolutionary adaptation of animal and plant species to a particular environment. Spencer distorts Darwin's theory and develops his own racism theory of human social hierarchy: the individuals with traits better suited to the environment in the niche will survive, which is also known as the "Survival of the fittest. (Moberg, 143)" Extending from Social Darwinism, Spencer proposed unilinear cultural evolution. He stated that social development is innate and implied that whites are at a higher social development. Therefore, Chinese thinkers accepted his idea of social hierarchy and suggested that hybrid led to racial improvement and would eventually eliminate racist thoughts by reducing racial boundaries.

Recently, Chinese media has become a force of fascination towards "Euro-Asian." The columnist from Chinese News Week argued that Eurasian models, actors, and athletes had become hot commodities in the in-entertainment industry. Moreover, these "Euro-Asians" are labeled as beautifully and intellectually superior. One of the Euro-Asian mothers entertainment contacted her about his son becoming a model for children's clothing. All the Euro-Asian mothers noted that their children got compliments on their appearance and got special attention from people surrounding them in China. Moreover, at lunch with three French Chinese children's mothers, one confessed that she was partial to one of her children who seemed more western-looking. Many Euro-Asian YouTubers made videos about their popularity in Chinese dating markets.

I believe the wording reveals Chinese people's fetishism toward Euro-Asian people in mandarin. In China, the default of mixed kids is interracial children, particularly Euro-Asian. The usage of the word created tension in conversations with the three women. I said mixed

children are always cute in lunch, and I assumed they all married White French men. Maggie said awkwardly that her kid is not mixed, and I was not appraising her daughter for being cute in that context. She mentioned that her husband's family immigrated to France from Cambodia. However, Chinese people always ask if their child is mixed. My aunt followed her words and added, "Your kids were being asked because her skin color is darker than others." The woman who married Vietnamese French later showed me a picture of her child to reduce some tensions. She added that though her child is not mixed, she was adorable.

## **Balancing cultural capital in Chinese-French marriages**

### **Sharing Food capital**

The three Chinese women all agreed that their husbands were responsible for making food and deciding the families would eat French cuisine on weekdays. Nevertheless, the Chinese grandparents came to make Chinese food for the three Chinese-French families on weekends. Therefore, the weekly lunch event provides the three Chinese women with the opportunity to eat Chinese food outside their families. For example, we had frogs' hotpots at the lunch event I joined. My aunt also talked about cultural differences in food. Her husband was puzzled when Chinese people never shared the bill. Then, she asked me when my family had dinner. I answered her: we usually start dinner at 5 pm. She said that only our family has dinner from 7 pm to 9 pm. She then provided her rationale for their late dinner:" In France, they have dinner at that time, and it lasts longer than the Chinese one."

Despite French husbands' domination in food choices and my uncle's preference for dinner time for his family, the Chinese-French family members better understand the two food cultures and take advantage of tasting different food. My French uncle accepts all kinds of meat



in Chinese cuisine, but he does not like exotic meat, such as frogs or animal offal. My aunt enjoys French cuisine and drinks wine with her husband at some dinners. My two cousins consume all kinds of Chinese and French food. Moreover, they love French cream cheese and Chinese sweet-sour pork. When an individual encounters the culture (or especially the food) of another class, they feel “disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (‘feeling sick’) of the tastes of others” (Bourdieu 1984: 56). Because tastes are learned early and heavily internalized, they are difficult to change and permanently stigmatize people of certain classes and block their social mobility. Since all the family members can accept most of the food from the two countries, their social mobility is not constrained by their tastes.

## **Gaining Linguistic capital**

### **My uncle’s and aunt’s language learning paths**

After marrying my aunt, my uncle can understand Chinese better, and my aunt can speak fluent French. My parents invited 30 close relatives to our house-warming party four years ago when my uncle and aunt were dating. All my relatives were chatting with each other, and we had lunch together. However, I thought my uncle was uncomfortable with the environment because he only spoke French with my aunt. Since my aunt told him that I spoke a little French, he asked me many questions about our house. For example, he asked me about the fountain in my garden. I was unsure how to say “fountain” in French and said “that is a swimming pool” instead. I was so embarrassed because my French was not fluent. However, knowing my French-speaking skills were limited, he still spoke French with me, and I decided to respond in English. Finally, he stopped talking to me. During the lunch with aunt’s friends, her two friends said their French husbands first learned Chinese in Chinese universities before meeting each other. My aunt also

mentioned that my uncle had a Chinese language learning experience. Therefore, I was surprised when my aunt said he had learned Chinese and that they first used English, rather than French, to communicate. My uncle was able to speak Chinese and English, but he was more interested in using French to communicate with other family members.

The French men of the three Chinese families were obsessed with using French in talking to their family members, which their Francophilia caused. All three women said their husbands prefer to speak French in conversations. In June 2021, we invited my aunt's family to my house on another hot and sunny day. One of my cousins is about the same age as my sister. Therefore, my aunt suggested doing a family visit, so my sister and cousins could spend some time together. My sister was overly excited about this family event and woke up at 3 a.m. She woke me up at 5 a.m. I felt very dizzy during the whole event and went back to sleep in the middle of the event. My uncle could perfectly understand our conversation in Chinese and even responded with a few words in Chinese. He was asking my father if his company was negatively affected by COVID. My father explained the new economic cycle after COVID and the Chinese stock market. His language improvement in Chinese led him to join conversations more confidently during this family event. Also, we have had several conversations about his children and my campus life in the U.S in English. After marrying being married to my aunt for a few years, he was more willing to speak Chinese and English at family events.

Even though my uncle and aunt could use Chinese and English to communicate, my aunt learned French after she met my uncle. My aunt decided to take French classes in her free time, outside of work. According to her words, she learned French because she would like to better assimilate into my uncle's family and friends' cycles. Although most of my uncle's friends and family can speak either Chinese or English, she could feel the interpersonal estrangement. When

surrounded by my uncle's French friends, sometimes she did not get some cultural and linguistic jokes.

Moreover, she thought learning French could improve her relationship with her husband. The French linguistic capital she obtained would advance her habitus in her husband's social network. Bourdieu argues that a social network is an individual's social capital in a particular social field (Hanks 2005:67-83). In this case, languages foster tighter social bonds. At the same time, symbolic capital social recognition can be consolidated through speaking the same language (Moberg 2019:278-281).

### **French is the dominant language in households.**

The French Chinese families differed from other international families through their distinctive languages: they only speak Chinese or French at home. From my observation, four international families used English in my social cycle as their primary language in their families, but their parents' native languages are not English. Their parents are Dutch and Chinese, Danish and Singaporean, Austrian and Chinese, Japanese and Italian. Since we all learned English early in China's school curriculum, English served as a middle ground between Chinese and other languages. Chinese-French families only used their native languages to communicate despite the advantages of using English in international families. All three Chinese women stated that they would like their children to be bilingual, Chinese and French.

Similarly, to these French Chinese children, languages are learned quickly at an early age. Their children learned and spoke both Chinese and French at home, which exhibited their Chinese-French identities through their languages as their linguistic capital. Whereas the other international families, their English was not their linguistic capital which comes from their

international families. According to Bourdieu, skills and subjective preferences are learned and internalized in childhood, and they are hard to modify and provide an identity of certain social classes.

Their native language, Chinese and French, serve as a strong social bond for the children from three Chinese-French families. French and Chinese children have exclusive social networks, like a particular social class. My aunts' children and her friends' children were close friends because they went to the same French kindergarten and ballet class. The French school in Shanghai only teaches English in the first grade. Their linguistic skills were learned in childhood and preserved their Chinese-French identity.

### **Code switching in daily family conversations**

My aunt's family often used "code-switching" in the multilingual environment because family members have different native languages. "Code-switching" through different languages improves communication among people with different linguistic backgrounds. My aunt's mother was proud that her daughter could speak fluent French. She told us that even though she could not understand the language, she could imagine the content of their conversations. She mimicked the pronunciation of French as "Dodoo," and the only word she could speak in French was "Bonjour." My aunt's mother used "code-switching" in the most obvious way.

After lunch together, my uncle took my cousins to the swimming pool. My aunt's mother later found out that they had forgotten water bottles. She came out and yelled: "Hello! Shui!" Hello, is English, and "Shui" ("水") is the pronunciation of water in Chinese. The rationale for this code-switching in English is closer to French, and my uncle is the only person whose native language is not Chinese. While it was in two languages, he still understood her perfectly. In

conversation with my aunt's mother, she said, "I have an international perspective because I can speak some English and French." Although she revealed limited interest in talking to her son-in-law, she showed great interest in talking with her grandchildren because of the mother tongue effect. She used Shanghainese (a dialect in China) and Mandarin (the official language in China) to communicate with her grandchildren. Amazingly, the children responded to different languages correspondingly.

The Chinese-French children develop strong abilities to code between different languages, switch languages based on whom they are talking to, and design improvements depending on their language environments. My aunt also suggested her friend's child's exceptional language learning skills in different language environments. Her friend's child hardly spoke any Chinese in France, and her French improved significantly. When they returned to China, her Chinese soon became better than her French. Therefore, she argued that the children are very "snobbish" because their language environment influences their language improvement. She assumed that the children highly value the practical use of language. My cousin spoke French to her father and Chinese with us.

## **Accepting French pedagogical capital**

### **My Chinese family vs. the Chinese-French families' pedagogical ideologies**

In the three French Chinese families, the fathers all had dominant positions in pedagogy. However, in most Chinese families, mothers are responsible for educating the children. In a private conversation with my aunt in the Western restaurant, she said, "Your uncle is designed his rules for our children's education. He rejected my pedagogical ideology because I said I wanted to give more freedom to our children. He is sticking with his pedagogical ideologies

because he is from Northern France. Unlike Paris, his region is closer to England and has a more patriarchal society. ” Furthermore, she told me that her husband thought he had the absolute power to dominate their children’s education from 0 to 7; my aunt demonstrated that American Educational books for preschool children sold in China influenced her ideologies. She summarized that these books advise parents to treat children as individuals and give them freedom of choice.

Surprisingly, all three women shared or accepted the similar pedagogical ideologies of their French husbands. Livie shared an anecdote about her family. On the weekend, her parents came to visit her family. Her husband was rebuking the children, but Livie’s parents were very unpleasant about her husband’s pedagogical ideology because her husband was too strict with their grandchildren. Then, Livie’s parents started to argue with her husband. Livie added that she very much agrees with her husband's pedagogical ideologies. In conversations with the three Chinese women, they were glad that men took equal responsibility in taking care of children. While my uncle rejected my aunt’s educational doctrines, he spent most of his free time taking care of their children. For example, he taught his children swimming and attended his children's ballet dance performances. In most Chinese families, women are responsible for all household chores, including educating children. Therefore, my aunt she had more free time and she thought it's a more feminist approach. Later, the three Chinese women concluded that their children are very independent compared to most Chinese children, like my sister. Additionally, my aunt said her daughter sometimes could even take care of her little brother.

I analyzed and observed a comparative study with two families’ pedagogical ideologies at lunch. My sister is American but grew up in a Chinese family, and my two cousins are Chinese-French children since two cousins are as old as my sister. My uncle had more authority than my

aunt in his children's eyes, while my father did not. For example, during the house visit, my cousins asked their father's permission to drink a new type of beverage. At the family lunch, my cousin bit and destroyed the curtains in our VIP room. He was forced to stand in front of the wall and think about his mistake. He was unhappy about the treatment and threw a piece of trash at his grandmother. He was being blamed again. While my family praised his cleverness, his French father's expression became grave. In contrast, my father did not even say a word as my sister hit my father in front of the two families at lunch. He excused her because she was just a kid. My sister did not know the line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior in public. In conclusion, the boundary line between children and parents is not clearly defined in my family, which means that rules and punishments are not established.

### **French cultural hegemony and Shanghai French School**

French cultural hegemony and colonial history remain in its formal colonies. France has direct administrative branches in its territories, and one of its missions is to civilize the barbarian colonial subjects through French culture and the French language. Therefore, the French also oversaw education policies and established missionary schools to promulgate their cultural ideologies and language to assimilate these colonial subjects. Regarding French Colonial history and cultural hegemony, Shanghai French School (Lycée Français Shanghai) is cheaper than other interracial schools. Concordia International School's (my sister's American school) yearly tuition is about 200,000 RMB (about 33,350 USD), but Shanghai French School's (Lycée Français Shanghai) annual tuition is only about 75,000 RMB (10,000 USD). My aunt explained that before the tenure of Marcon, French Interracial schools were subsidized by the French government. My aunt believed that the Shanghai French School was inclusive because they

accepted any students with foreign passports. Therefore, it is a famous school, and many of the parents in Shanghai French School (Lycée Français Shanghai) reported that they would like their children to experience French culture.

According to my aunt, many Chinese parents have fetishism toward French culture and education. She mentioned that many parents in her daughter's Shanghai French School (Lycée Français Shanghai) were not French. Still, they hoped their foreign-born children could experience French culture. In modern China, the western-educated children reflect their parents' wealth and represent these children who have an excellent educational background. Therefore, Chinese elite families sent their children to study in western countries or international schools in China.

### **Chinese Grandma made her concessions in educating her grandchildren.**

The grandparents in China think that they share specific responsibilities in childbearing, while they hold the expectation: if they become old and sick, they will be served by their children. (“养儿防老”) For example, I was raised by my grandparents and parents since we have always lived in the same house. In contrast, when my grandma broke her legs, my mother and I made her food and helped her move to the bed. After women give birth to their children in China, they eat tonic food and rest in bed for a month. (“坐月子”) Usually, they were taken care of by their mothers. However, my aunt's husband was surprised that she was not leaving after the month and requested his mother-in-law to leave. My aunt's mother wanted to live with them and help them look after their children because my aunt and her husband were both full-time employees. While acknowledging the concession made by the Chinese in-law grandmother,



there are disadvantages of cross-generation education. Since many Chinese grandparents raise their grandchildren, they believe they have the right to educate their grandchildren in their knowledge. None of the Chinese-French families live with their grandparents in China, including the three Chinese women who married French men. At the same time, these families refused or avoided cross-generational education. I recognize its weaknesses and resonate with the three women's opinions about cross-generational education. My grandparents raised me. My parents held different pedagogical ideologies compared to my grandparents. My mother thought my grandparents spoiled me by setting inconsistent rules. For example, my grandparents sometimes allowed me to waste food, and while sometimes they did not care about wasting food.

Moreover, my grandmother thought I was incapable of doing things and did not want me to do any housework. I slept with my grandmother until I was 13-year-old. After studying abroad, I learned to cook and wash dishes. My mother thought I would be more independent if she raised me.

Consequently, my aunt's mother was quite unhappy because my aunt was her only daughter, and all Chinese grandmothers live with their daughters' families. She has only lived with her daughter's family again during COVID. Her tenant returned from Japan and quarantined an apartment in her suite, and Chinese police sealed her house. Therefore, she had nowhere to go and moved into her daughter's house. She said she was now making peace with her son-in-law's decisions, and spending more time on hobbies, such as singing and visiting parks with her friends. Her WeChat was filled with videos of her choreographer performances in Shanghai and cities in Europe. She has much free time to spend with her friends, enjoying her life after retirement.



Figure 4: This picture of my cousin and I was taken at the house party.

### **Supplemental Discussion of the unsuccessful Chinese-American marriages**

The unsuccessful Chinese American marriages were caused by the couples' failure to balance the forms of capital. The author of a WeChat (a Chinese social media) article investigated the four divorced American--Chinese teams by conducting individual interviews. He concluded that the divorcements of American--Chinese couples were caused by food and communication. While communication is different from linguistic and educational capital, I argue that it is also a part of cultural capital. Although the four American men were interested in Chinese culture, they were not familiar with Chinese social and cultural norms. One of the American men is a Chinese Studies professor in American studies. In other words, they did not evaluate their social and cultural capital in their relationships.

The Chinese-French families have encountered conflict in food capital, but the three Chinese women provided their solution to balance food capital. However, in divorced Chinese-

American families, the Chinese wives did not get used to Western dishes, and their ex-husbands hated the smells that came from Chinese cooking food. Both did not enjoy and share their food capital. Connecting to my research, the three Chinese wives mentioned that they mostly enjoy consuming Chinese oily and spicy food. However, they choose to make their comprise. They decided to hold this weekly break lunch from consuming Western food in their household. They embrace the French food capital in their Chinese-French family and preserve their food capital with their friends.

Unsuccessful marriages were also caused by different means of communication, and my aunt suggested her approach to reduce miscommunication in her family. According to these American men, marriages require direct communication. For example, one of American men complained that his wife asked all his friends and families about his feelings but never sought to have conversations with him to solve the problems. Another example is one of the American men who pointed out his ex-wife was very manipulative and opened the envelopes. He thought his privacy was violated, but his ex-wife did not understand the seriousness of her behavior. The logic was referred to by my aunt when related to ineffective communication. She argued that sense influences one's ways of acting, including communication. While my aunt also faced the same challenges, she tried communicating directly and stopped the argument immediately. I think her optimistic viewpoint in disputes strengthens her relationship with her husband. Furthermore, she said arguing and exchanging ideas with her husband can improve her French language skill, such as fluency.

## Discussion of research

Admittedly, I acknowledge some limitations of the research. My research might be constrained by social relationships with my aunt and her friends. Since my aunt viewed me as a child, sometimes she would think twice about sharing some information. In China, younger individuals asking their older generational family members about specific topics are inappropriate. My aunt paused many times and spoke more slowly than usual when some questions I asked touched on her relationship. She worried about me discussing her information with my mother or other relatives. My family always invited my aunt's family to our houses, and they might think we were showing off our assets; Therefore, they might want to hide some flaws of their marriage. In China, you never want to look bad (“没面子”) in front of your close relatives. My understanding of Chinese culture was not comprehensive. I did not live in a cultural environment after 2013. I might also exhibit some observation biases. Regarding the sampling method, the samples from my community and my aunt's social were not large enough to represent the linguistic domination and strong authority in educational ideologies of international marriages or even Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai.

For the future of ethnographic work on these women, I hope to join more social events and increase my sample population. Therefore, I can develop a better outlook on Chinese-French marriages by gathering more daily information from the three families. Moreover, my aunt allows me to conduct ethnographic research with other Chinese-French families in Shanghai. Furthermore, instead of using the three Chinese women as the primary narrative, I am also thinking about adding their French husbands' voices into the research since their opinions on their marriages in Shanghai are also valuable to my research. I would like to hear about their

views on balancing their social and cultural capitals in their marriages. In this way, I will improve the overall insight into the three Chinese-French marriages.

## **Conclusion**

Nowadays, the rise of post-modernity theory is produced by globalization. In general, by addressing distinctions and taking account of historical and cultural context, postmodernism reduces the “otherness” in Levi-Strauss’s theory: creating *binary opposition*(Moberg, 335). Also, the approaches would lead to cultural diffusion, and individuals can learn about other cultures. Nowadays, social media and advanced technologies increase geographical boundaries fluidly, leading to cultural exchange. Cultural exchange generates people’s curiosity to learn about different cultures, advancing their understanding of diverse cultures.

Understanding individually possessed social and cultural capital is a foundation for international couples to develop long-term relationships. Examining the cultural and social capital, international couples benefit from gaining a holistic picture of their relationship. Additionally, cultural appreciation would be produced if they respected the two cultures. In terms of Chinese-French marriages, balancing social and cultural capital is built on the base of cultural appreciation. Three Chinese women showed French cultural appreciation, and they all stated that their husbands showed Chinese cultural appreciation. After finishing the participant-observation research, my aunt even offered that if I wanted to marry a foreign in the future, she would help me convince my family. She would explain and try to deconstruct the effects of stereotypes underlying Chinese culture. Indeed, she believed that her successful marriage is an excellent example of balancing cultural and social capital.

I am also willing to explore other international marriages in Shanghai for future work on this topic since we can quickly encounter people from other countries in globalization. We see increasingly international marriages in different countries and China. Through my thesis, I would like my readers to understand the complexity and uniqueness of Chinese-French marriages in Shanghai. According to the analysis based on the three Chinese-French marriages, I strongly suggest that balancing forms of capital in marriages requires appreciation and understanding of Chinese and French cultures, and “yellow fever” could not sustain in the marriages.

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## Appendix

These are the interview questions I asked my aunt during my first conversation and a subsequent conversation with three Chinese women married to French men. Her answers to my questions shifted my research interest from "yellow fever" to Chinese-French marriages, giving me a better understanding of the three Chinese-French marriages. A more detailed summary is in the section "Shifting from 'yellow fever' to a successful Chinese-French marriage."

- 1) Do you know about "yellow fever?" What are your opinions on this topic?
- 2) How did they meet their husband?
- 3) Did their husbands learn Chinese? What languages do they speak at home?
- 4) Did you encounter cultural differences? How did you react to the challenges?
- 5) Are grandparents the primary caretakers of the children? Are their families living with their Chinese grandparents?
- 6) Which schools are their children attending?