Cultural Capital:
The concept of “whiteness” in Beauty Advertisements in China

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Introduction & Background

Shanghai Metro Exposure

一白遮三丑
“one white covers three uglies”
Why is “whiteness” an ideal beauty characteristic in both Chinese and Western culture?
How and why is this standard used in beauty advertising?
Literature Review

- Defining culture
  - Combination of “ideas and values of a community incorporating conditions, events, and consequences arranged by other people that regulate individual behavior” (Lamal)

- Creating Beauty
  - Ancient Egyptians and kohl (Riordan)
  - Turmeric baths, lead-laden powder, powdered pearls (Li et. al.)

- Widespread Whiteness
  - Dominant white beauty ideal tied to colonialism (Riordan)
  - Popular media portrayal “reinforces prevailing stereotypes of lighter skin and European-descended features” (Fitts)
## Design and Methodology

### Content Used

- Collection of scholarly articles, content data studies, current news media reports, and advertisements

### Content Selection Reason

- Scope and components of “whiteness” in Chinese and Western culture
- Current and tangible examples
- Cross-analysis of current findings and previously collected data

"Examining advertisements is perhaps the best way to ascertain appearance ideals in a society”

(Baumann)
Sample Images

Image 1: Lancôme model. Westernized facial features for a product linked to Chinese tradition.


Image 3: L’Oreal model. Perhaps Chinese, heavily white-washed visual.
Argument and Discussion

- **Beauty standards in China and the West are not synonymous**
  - Ideal beauty is a social construct that is influenced by direct cultural surroundings

- **Use of language is essential in creating the concept of “whiteness” in beauty product campaigns**
  - White skin is associated with “naturalness,” high social status, and ideal beauty

- **Whiteness as a component of ideal beauty in both China and the West is perpetuated by merged media and advertising influences**
  - The U.S. has a monopoly on media and advertising that directly impacts other cultures
The idealized desire for “whiteness” in both China and the West stems from unique historical instances. The merging of Chinese culture and U.S. media created the concept of “whiteness” as a beauty ideal heavily utilized by the beauty industry.
Closing Thoughts

- Importance of understanding the repercussions of pervasive and homogenizing global beauty norms
- Fresh perspective on beauty advertising