



CHINA LOVE

A FILM BY OLIVIA MARTIN-MCGUIRE



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AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

A STUDY GUIDE BY
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CONTENT HYPERLINKS

- 3 CURRICULUM LINKS
- 4 LEARNING ACTIVITIES
- 11 REFERENCES



SYNOPSIS

Just over forty years ago, marriage in China was arranged by the state. Romantic love was seen as a capitalist concept and was not allowed during this period. Wedding photography (if any at all) consisted of one black-and-white passport photo of the couple (dressed in Mao-style outfits) as proof of the marriage. Now, China has fallen in love with love and its exploding wedding industry is worth 80 billion dollars, and it is on an upward curve.

Pre-wedding photography is one of the most significant and curious parts of the industry. Every couple marrying in China will take part in a pre-wedding shoot. It involves several costume and backdrop changes where you can become a character in any fantasy you choose. For the most exotic locations couples pay up to A\$250,000. Pre-wedding photo shoots have become an important national ritual. They are proof of the marriage but are also a demonstration of love, romance, freedom, status, money and the new China Dream.

As an expat living in Shanghai with a long history of coming to China, Sinophile photographer Olivia Martin-McGuire was captivated by the construction of dreams through this booming photographic world. Once she started to delve deeper into this new tradition she found a unique window into China – one that revealed a country dreaming, rapidly booming and reconstructing its recent past trauma all through its own lens.

China Love takes us on a wild journey into the warmth of the family web in China into the hearts of our characters and into their personal dreams with an understanding of why and where these aspirations come from. The project explores China's new position as a globalised country from its restrictive and highly traditional past through the window of its booming wedding industry, and asks what the new China Dream is when it comes to love.



CURRICULUM LINKS

The activities included in this resource provide opportunities for students to explore, compare and contrast contemporary Chinese culture with reference to *China Love*. The Australian Curriculum has been used as a guide for the basis of these activities. Teachers are advised to adapt the activities to suit the student age and stage of their class and the curriculum foci and outcomes used in specific schools. Some websites are suggested throughout this resource. It is recommended that teachers first visit the sites and assess the suitability of the content for their specific school before setting the activities based on these.

China Love can be linked to the following subject areas within the Australian Curriculum:

- ENGLISH (YEARS 7–10)
- HISTORY (YEAR 10)
- MEDIA ARTS (YEARS 7–10)

China Love can also be used as a supplementary text for the following senior school subjects:

- HISTORY
- GLOBAL POLITICS
- PSYCHOLOGY

Relevant Content Descriptions for English

Years 7 and 8:

- Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1619)
- Compare the text structures and language features of multimodal texts, explaining how they combine to influence audiences (ACELY1724)
- Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups (ACELT1626)
- Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts (ACELT1807)

Years 9 and 10:

- Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)
- Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1639)
- Create sustained texts, including texts that combine specific digital or media content, for imaginative, informative, or persuasive purposes that reflect upon challenging and complex issues (ACELY1756)

Relevant Content Descriptions for History

Year 7:

- Key features of ancient societies (farming, trade, social classes, religion, rule of law) (ACOKFH003)
- Roles of key groups in Chinese society in this period (such as kings, emperors, scholars, craftsmen, women), including the influence of law and religion (ACDSEH041)
- Significant beliefs, values and practices of Chinese society, with a particular emphasis on ONE of the following areas: everyday life, warfare, or death and funerary customs (ACDSEH042)

Relevant Content Descriptions for Media Arts

Years 7 and 8:

- Plan, structure and design media artworks that engage audiences (ACAMAM069)
- Analyse how technical and symbolic elements are used in media artworks to create representations influenced by story, genre, values and points of view of particular audiences (ACAMAR071)

Years 9 and 10:

- Plan and design media artworks for a range of purposes that challenge the expectations of specific audiences by particular use of production processes (ACAMAM076)
- Evaluate how technical and symbolic elements are manipulated in media artworks to create and challenge representations framed by media conventions, social beliefs and values for a range of audiences (ACAMAR078)



LEARNING ACTIVITIES

FOCUS:

WEDDING CEREMONIES AND RITUALS

Early in the documentary we learn that the wedding industry in China today is worth over \$80 billion. Yet, only one generation ago, weddings were arranged and one black-and-white passport-sized photo was all that was taken.

Working in small groups, students are to research wedding and marriage rituals across the following cultures and eras:

- Ancient China
- Modern China
- Modern Australia

Students are to conduct research (as well as use information gained from viewing *China Love*) to discover information about the following areas across the three cultures/eras under investigation:

- Proposal and courting
- Bridal rituals

- Groom rituals
- Wedding procession
- Wedding ceremony
- Interesting facts
- Relevant images

Students are to conclude their research with a reflection on the differences and similarities across the three cultures/eras, as well as changes and continuities with reference to Ancient and Modern Chinese weddings. Share and discuss the concluding activity findings as a class.



Extension activities

- Students are to select another country from around the world and research modern wedding and marriage rituals. Comment on any differences/similarities with modern Chinese wedding and marriage rituals. Share and discuss as a class.
- Students are to select a significant person in their life (parent, relative, family friend) who has been married and seek their permission to prepare an oral history documenting their wedding. Students are to film their finished product, aiming for a five-to ten-minute documentary that covers the following areas:
 - The couple's courtship and proposal
 - Pre-wedding customs and rituals
 - When and where the wedding was held
 - The wedding ceremony and celebration
 - Extended family involvement and any familial pressures they felt as a couple in terms of wedding traditions
 - Reflections on their enjoyment of their wedding day (highlights, aspects they would alter, etc.)Images of the couple and the wedding should be included, as well as interviews with key people involved. Students should storyboard their ideas prior to filming, and the finished product should be edited.



In *China Love*, we learn of the huge cost associated with some pre-wedding photographs, as well as the increasing overall costs within the wedding industry. In Australia, the average wedding can cost in the range of A\$36,000–A\$50,000, with many couples spending considerably more than this on their 'big day'.

- Working in pairs or small groups, students are to research the breakdown of average wedding costs in Australia. Where do the largest costs lie, and were you surprised by this? Are there ways that couples can keep costs down? Share and compare findings as a class and discuss.

Suggested sites to begin research:

- <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-22/how-to-slash-the-astronomical-cost-of-weddings/9177536/>
- <https://honey.nine.com.au/2018/02/14/15/21/average-wedding-cost-australia-2018/>
- As a concluding activity following your viewing of *China Love*, prepare a three- to five-minute summary of the practice of pre-wedding photography in modern China. Imagine you are describing this practice to someone who has no prior knowledge. Ensure you outline the logistics involved (the cost, the locations, etc.), as well as examining the reasons why this has become an increasingly popular practice. Select someone you know who has not viewed *China Love*, and orally present your summary to them.



FOCUS:

CHARACTERS IN CHINA LOVE

China Love follows several key characters and their experiences with/views on pre-wedding photography in China. Using notes from your viewing of the documentary, answer the following questions and reflect on the journey of these key individuals throughout *China Love*:



Viona and Will

In one of the Jihao Group's illustrious pre-wedding photography studios, we meet Viona, who is set to marry Will (who is from Australia), as they prepare to take their pre-wedding photographs.

- Why does Viona feel Chinese couples are taking such extravagant pre-wedding photos?
- How does Viona feel these pre-wedding photos help her to honour her mother's and grandmother's beauty?
- How does Viona sum up the 'modern Chinese' dream? How do the pre-wedding photos help embody this vision of an idealised life? Do you see this mirrored in any aspect of modern Australian wedding culture?
- We meet Han Ma, Viona's mum. We learn about the intense pressure on women in China to be married by the age of twenty-eight, lest they become a 'leftover woman'. Why do you think such pressure exists? Do you believe this exists for women in modern Australia? Share and discuss as a class.
- What is the 'Marriage Market' and how has it led to intergenerational tension?
- How did Viona's and Han Ma's relationship experience strain prior to her engagement and marriage to Will?
- We follow Viona and Will to their new life in Darwin, where they have moved for Will's work following their wedding. How is Viona finding life in Darwin, and what are the current pressures she is facing?
- How does the pressure to become pregnant impact Viona in terms of her sense of self, her career and her ongoing relationship with her mother?
- Consider the following quote by Han Ma:
Family has a spider-web structure with all relatives forming the web. The extended web forms the family too. If a couple decides not to have children, it would disconnect the family web.
Explain what you think Han Ma means by this, and do you share this view? How does this comment help us to understand Han Ma's pressuring of Viona and Will to have children?

Pei-Pei and Xuezhong

In Shanghai's French Concession area, we meet elderly couple Pei-Pei and Xuezhong, who were married in 1968. We learn that marriages were arranged at this time, and that couples received a single wedding photograph.

Consider Xuezhong's quote about pre-wedding photography: "[it] could never have happened in 1968 because of the Cultural Revolution ... Colourful clothing was not allowed. We had no choice."

The Cultural Revolution that Xuezhong speaks about was a political, social and cultural movement that took place under ruler Mao Zedong in China from 1966 to 1976. The revolution encouraged Chinese youth to report all persons who were thought to be enemies of the ideals of the Chinese Communist Revolution.

Activity

Students are to be divided into five groups, with each group becoming 'experts' about one of the following topics relating to the Cultural Revolution:



- Origins of the Cultural Revolution
- The Cult of Mao
- Destroy the 'Four Olds'
- The attack on the Arts
- The Rustication of Urban Youths

In their groups, students are to research their designated area for one to two lessons and produce a PowerPoint or Slide Show that presents their area of expertise (along with relevant images).

Students are to then move into their 'jigsaw group', with one representative from each area of expertise in each group. Students will then spend five minutes teaching their topic to the other students in their group.

Suggested site to begin research:
<<http://aas2.asian-studies.org/EAA/EAA-Archives/10/3/624.pdf>>

Following this activity, teachers are to facilitate a whole-class discussion that reflects on the impact of the Cultural Revolution and the ways in which this experience may have contributed to the desire for the perfect projection of a 'dream life' that the pre-wedding photography now offers.

- What restrictions do Pei-Pei and Xuezhong recall from the Cultural Revolution, and how did this impact their ability to trust others?
- Later in the documentary we see a volunteer-run charity who offer free photoshoots for the elderly who were denied wedding photos in their youth. How do you think this helps heal some of the wounds that couples like Pei-Pei and Xuezhong sustained from the Cultural Revolution?



Li and Jun Bo

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We meet engaged couple Li and Jun Bo, who live in the rural village of Anhui in Southeast China. Set to be married in 3 months, Li and Jun Bo are having their pre-wedding photographs taken in an industrial park called Baoshan. This is an hour's drive outside of Shanghai and contains multi-leveled studios which offer couples a much cheaper pre-wedding package.

Li and Jun Bo speak about 'following their matchmaker', stating that 'in our hometown most of the couples were introduced by the matchmakers'.



Activity

- Working in pairs, students are to conduct research into 'matchmakers' in modern China. Are they a new phenomenon? How is their increasing popularity linked to the Chinese One-Child Policy?
Suggested sites to begin research:
 - <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000547/chinas-love-hate-relationship-with-traditional-matchmaking/>
 - <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-match-makers-china-s-200-million-singles-are-a-big-business-a-1221127.html>
 - <http://theconversation.com/chinas-marriage-rate-is-plummeting-and-its-because-of-gender-inequality-66027/>
- What sense do you get about Jun Bo and Li's courtship and sense of attraction to each other?
- We visit Li and Jun Bo in Anhui, the rural village where they live in Southeast China. What is the pressure on Jun Bo's father in relation to 'marrying off' his three sons?
- What are the different emotional, social and economic pressures on young men and young women in China in relation to getting married?
- Where do Li's familial loyalties lie after her marriage? How does this impact her father?
- What will be the next pressure that Li and Jun Bo face from their family following their marriage?
- Given the bride is leaving her birth family home on her wedding day, it is tradition in China for the groom to undergo several 'trials' to prove his worth in taking her hand in marriage. What trials do we see Jun Bo engage in? Conduct research into other such trials (both in China and other countries around the world). What similarities and differences do



David and Jenny

We meet recently engaged couple David and Jenny as they embark on their pre-wedding photography shoot. It is evident that Jenny is much more interested in this process than David, who is quite unaware of what the practice involves.

- How do David and Jenny's views on pre-wedding photography differ? What reasons can you offer for the disparity in their attitude to this practice?
- Why do some couples (like David and Jenny) opt for 'underwater' pre-wedding photography shoots?
- Compare and contrast David and Jenny with the other young couples we meet in *'China Love'* (Viona and Will and Lin and Jun Bo). What are the similarities and differences in terms of their attitudes towards, and experience with their pre-wedding photographs? Share and discuss as a class.

Allen Shi

We learn that since the 1970s in China, more than 500 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty, with the country experiencing the fastest economic growth of any nation in history. China now has more self-made billionaires than any other country in the world. The Jihao Group is the most successful pre-wedding business in China. It's run by Shi Jiahao, otherwise known as Allen Shi (aka 'the wedding king').

- How do you think Allen's own childhood and his economic status as he was growing up have influenced his drive and determination as a business man?
- How would you describe the work ethic and the expectations he has of his employees at the Jihao Group?
- What are the core values and aspirations that drive Allen within his business? Do you see any similarities between Allen and other characters we meet in *China Love*?
- Do you feel Allen is 'cashing in' on couples' dreams or helping them to achieve them? Share and discuss answers as a class.

Students are encouraged to read the following article further insights into Allen Shi:
<https://www.news.com.au/finance/money/wealth/the-billionaire-who-helps-reallife-crazy-rich-asians-splash-out-500000-on-lavish-prewedding-photos/news-story/4134428771f216834266e6733bc54c1a?from=rss-basic/>

Using the answers to the above questions on Allen Shi, as well as insights gained from the profile article on him (and any additional research), students are to create a biographical profile/snapshot of Allen Shi. Include the following: his childhood and education, early career, his beginnings in the pre-wedding photography industry, the growth of the Jihao Group and his plans for the company's (and his own) future. Include relevant images and quotes.

FOCUS:

THE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a class, read the following statement by *China Love* director, Olivia Martin-McGuire:



Living in China for the past 4 years has offered me a different perspective from the media image that is often portrayed in the West. With this in mind, I wanted to make a documentary that revealed another view of this complex and powerful country. I wanted to capture the sense of play, lack of inhibition, loyalty to family and community and the liberating flow with which the country moves – a more personal insight into this new world power.

As I traveled along this path, I continuously came up against the incredible restrictions Chinese people have lived through. It is a fascinating time in Chinese history. They have only recently excelled – at breakneck speed – out of a period of great trauma and the death of tens of millions during Mao Zedong's leadership.

It is very hard for us to fully understand or judge current China without understanding how this period influenced some of the values and aspirations we see now. I feel that most Australians do not have a holistic view of China. It's a view lacking in empathy and understanding. I wanted to show an honest and open view of its people through the industry of love and marriage – so the audience can form their own opinions.

This is not a film to make fun of Chinese absurdity. In fact, if there is any absurdity in the film, it is because we see ourselves in its reflection. Adopted from the Western dream of romance (an unknown concept in China until recently), the film explores this new influence and how it has been fashioned within the new China Dream.

What began as a series of photographs on the streets of Shanghai, quickly developed into a fascination with China's matters of the heart – for a people pulled by both the past and visions of a new future. This generational tension creates a unique platform for the construction of new dreams and memories through the play and fantasy of pre-wedding photography. For me personally (as a photographer), to witness the use of a single photograph as a bridge between memories and dreams in such a pragmatic – yet magical – fashion was extremely fulfilling to observe. I wanted the film to feel youthful, fun, and represent the sense of possibility that is infectious in China.

- What was the director's intention and motivation for making this film?
- How has her time living in China influenced her decision to make the film?
- How does the director see the influence of Western culture as playing a pivotal part in the emerging Chinese practice of pre-wedding photography?
- How has the director's experience as a photographer influenced her decision to make the film?
- How does she explain the power of photography in relation to capturing memories and dreams?
- What are your favourite two scenes in *China Love* and why? Consider in relation to how the director has used light, framing, composition, camera movement and sound to help create meaning and engage the emotions of the audience.
- Consider how the editing of shots has been used to select specific moments in the narrative, to convey information and to compress time. Discuss how the editing engages the viewer through a manipulation of narrative perspective.

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