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### **Published version**

SMITH MAGUIRE, Jennifer and LIM, Ming (2015). Lafite in China. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35 (2), 229-242.

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# **Lafite in China: Media Representations of ‘Wine Culture’ in New Markets**

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This article has been accepted to appear in the *Journal of Macromarketing*; this is a pre-proof copy.

## **Abstract**

Increased economic power has positioned China within the global elite, yet China’s legitimacy remains low with regard to hierarchies of taste. Drawing from Bourdieu and Elias, the paper offers an account of the global dynamics of status contests, and the role played by cultural capital and notions of civility and vulgarity. Specifically, we examine how U.S., UK and Chinese media represent Chinese consumption of fine wine, and particularly that of Château Lafite, in the 2000 to 2013 period. Our analysis reveals four major ways in which Chinese fine wine consumption is framed (as vulgar, popular, functional, discerning), and highlights tensions between Western and Chinese terms of cultural legitimacy. The paper uncovers nuanced dimensions to the “East/West” divide in terms of the grades of cultural capital, competing logics of valuation and modes of civility at play. Macromarketing implications of fine wine consumption in a fragmented and complex market are discussed.

## **Key Words**

China, cultural capital, status, vulgar consumption, wine

## **Fine Wine in China**

For many great wines, China's searing thirst for the finest vintages are the new frontier.

Recent auctions have raised astronomical sums, and the biggest wine trade fairs are increasingly dominated by Chinese buyers in a mêlée of brand-obsessed acquisition.

(Lewis and Bremner 2010, p. 53)

Times change and power rises and falls. Still this has not changed the deep-rooted, haughty attitudes of certain Europeans. (Phillips 2013)

In early June 2013, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce launched an anti-dumping trade probe against EU wine importers, claiming that subsidies created an unfair advantage for European (mostly French) producers. The probe, ostensibly first spurred by complaints from domestic Chinese wine producers, was acknowledged as a political backlash against the EU's imposition of heavy duties on the cheap solar panels that China exports (*BBC* 2013; Boselli and Bremer 2013; Waterfield 2013). Or, as a world-renowned wine writer commented: “the Chinese government made wine its diplomatic weapon of choice in the trade war” (Robinson 2013, p. 39).

The impact of this incident was widely reported in the media in both Europe and China. Both sides exchanged sharp words. *The Telegraph* (UK) quoted an EU official as saying that “the Chinese elite will be first to suffer if fine French wines are subjected to tariffs” (Waterfield 2013). Similarly, *Xinhua* (PRC) quoted a German wine merchant who exports to China: “Compared to high-end wine consumers, the middle class is more concerned about prices. If import duties are raised, we will lose them” (Hu 2013). As if in reply to these ominous predictions, the *People's Daily* (PRC), as quoted by a Shanghai correspondent for *The Telegraph*, noted on behalf of the ruling Communist Party: “Times change and power rises and

falls. Still this has not changed the deep-rooted, haughty attitudes of certain Europeans” (Phillips 2013).

The key actors and themes emerging from this tussle form part of a familiar tapestry of cultural and diplomatic conflict between China and the West that goes back centuries. At stake in these febrile interactions are notions of taste and culture that continue to underpin the politics of consumption in world markets. Wine is a high-status good associated with cultural legitimacy, *savoir faire*, sophistication, and high culture and yet, we contend, it remains an under-researched cultural field with regard to how the changing global order affects the reproduction of wine’s cultural cachet and how wine features in processes of societal legitimation.

Questions of cultural taste and legitimacy with regard to wine are tied to larger questions surrounding the role of status competitions between nations. Cultural goods have long been pawns in national jockeying for status and credibility and cultural practices are established sites for the reproduction of positions of cultural superiority and inferiority. Appreciation and consumption of fine wines have an established place as potent forms of cultural capital — material and symbolic resources that warrant social esteem, connoting distinction and privilege. Closely linked to European — and especially French — culture, fine wine production has diversified since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with “New World” producers, such as in Australia and the United States, taken as seriously as their “Old World” counterparts. This seeming democratization of wine production has been paralleled by an apparent democratization of wine consumption, thanks in part to a consumer co-produced and mediated wine culture that opens up access to what was once reserved for the elite (Arvidsson 2008). Moreover, new consumer markets have emerged in countries such as China and India, where a critical mass of upwardly

mobile, middle class, and professional managerial individuals provide demand for the accoutrements of a middle class lifestyle. The competing logics of democratization of consumption preferences, on the one hand, and consumers' desires for distinction, on the other, raise some interesting questions for macromarketing scholars of status consumption. In other words, how do we make sense of nations' sparring over global representations of prestige and what is the role of cultural goods (such as wine) in such contests? Further, how do such contestations play out in arenas of public discourse such as the mass media?

In this article, we examine these issues through the example of the coverage of the consumption of fine wine—specifically that of Château Lafite, a top producer in the Bordeaux region of France—in the Western and Chinese media.<sup>1</sup> In the prestige rankings of wine regions around the world, Bordeaux wines rank in the top league. In 1855, the vineyards in the Médoc area of Bordeaux were graded (it being the most prestigious region, in part due to its wines being long favoured by the British elite), of which five châteaux received the most prestigious ranking of “first growth.” Château Lafite was among them (Charters 2006; Johnson and Robinson 2007). It is thus indisputably a “fine wine,” and its consumption by new markets provides an example *par excellence* of the dynamics involved in the (status) consumption and appreciation of fine wine.

Although previous research has explored habits and patterns of wine consumption in China (Liu and Murphy 2007), little research has shown how new tastes and practices are represented, legitimized, and circulated (cf. Smith Maguire 2013). This blind spot in China-based research extends more generally to our understanding of the formation of new class identities, taste cultures, and forms of cultural capital in contemporary China. Also under-researched are the ways in which French wine—and European culture more broadly—are

constructed as deterritorialized forms of cultural capital (Üstüner and Holt 2010) for Chinese consumers, as are the ways in which such new forms of cultural capital are positioned within the Western media. Informed by this gap, our study focuses on media representations because of their educative and informational role in the public sphere (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Thus, we understand media representations of Chinese fine wine consumption to be instances of the promotion of new tastes to the Chinese elite *and* the education of Western readers in a particular view of Chinese elite consumption.

Following this introduction, we explore the rise in luxury wine consumption among the Chinese, identifying current perceptions of the Chinese consumer of fine wine. We then delineate key strands of literature that focus on the significance of culture and cultural capital in the struggles between groups—both intra- and inter-societal—to define and defend their status positions. In doing so, we draw from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias. We then present and analyse data from the UK, U.S., and Chinese media with regard to their coverage of the consumption of Lafite wine by Chinese consumers over the 2000s—a period during which the market value of Lafite increased exponentially due to demand from wealthy Chinese buyers. Through our analysis of media representations of the consumption of fine wine—and particularly Lafite—in the new market of China, we compare the notions of “taste” and “culture” as represented for the urban affluent elite in the UK, U.S., and China. The article moves on to discuss theoretical and practical implications and concludes with recommendations for further research.

### **Context**

Wine was historically a drink of the social and religious elite in China, with grape wine making and consumption dating back at least to the Han period (Li 2011). Yet, only recently has wine

become popular (Li 2006) and wine consumption makes up only one percent of the Chinese domestic alcoholic drinks market, which is otherwise dominated by traditional drinks such as beer, rice spirits, and other hard liquors. Domestic wine production remained small-scale until the 1980s, when government initiatives, partnerships with foreign (notably French and California) wineries led to the emergence of some large, domestic brands, and an increasing (if uneven) focus on the production and regulation of quality (Li 2011; Moslares and Ubeda 2010). Current domestic production places China among the top six wine producing countries in the world by volume (Moslares and Ubeda 2010).

While China is projected to become the world's top wine consuming nation by 2016 (Paramaguru 2013), present consumption in China is primarily of domestically produced. The consumption of foreign brands represents a small upper niche of the wine market. Nevertheless, a rapidly growing affluent middle class of urban elites and high net worth individuals are driving demand for fine wines. Consumption of wine is strongly related to social class, with the wealthiest provinces (Shanghai and Guangzhou) having the highest rates of wine consumption (Moslares and Ubeda 2010, p.78). Wine builds upon an established economic base for the consumption of foreign brands (Tian and Dong 2011), on cultural rituals such as the raising of toasts at special events and gift-giving of alcohol (*baijiu*), and on beliefs in the health benefits of drinking wine (Yu et al. 2009). Underpinning all these facilitating factors for wine consumption is an established culture of connoisseurship around the drinking of tea. Thus, social, cultural and economic factors intertwine in the emergence of the fine wine market in China.

By 2005, Chinese wine consumption had reached 420,000 tons or 564 million bottles, making China one of the world's top ten countries for wine consumption (*Foodmate.net* 2007). As of 2009, Chinese wine consumption reached 45 billion yuan in value, making China the

world's fifth largest consumer of fine wine (*Xinhua News Agency* 2010). Foreign wines from the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and South America are rapidly increasing in popularity. In a crowded market, French wines stand out as the gold standard for many Chinese investors and consumers. More than two-thirds of the 430 million litres of wine imported by China in 2012 came from the EU, with French wine accounting for more than half of the EU exports (*BBC* 2013).

In 1995, fewer than 60,000 cases of imported wine were sold in China (Zhao 2003). Since then, China has emerged as a major player in the global fine wine market, credited—or blamed—for soaring prices for particular wines (Lau 2008; Wiggins 2007). Among the wines most desired by Chinese are those of Château Lafite. Over the 2000s, as prices of Lafite and other fine wines continued to rise, Hong Kong pursued a strategy to become a hub in the global fine wine market (Lister 2010), leading to the removal of all duties on wine imports in 2008, which was quickly followed by the arrival of auction houses and exponential increase in the number of wine importers and merchants (Leroux 2010; Lister 2010). This seemed to culminate in November 2010 with a Chinese buyer at a Hong Kong auction paying £147,000 for a single bottle of 1869 Lafite (Wallop 2010). Reports of widespread fake Lafite seemed to cool the market shortly thereafter (*The Economist* 2011), and over 2011, Chinese buyers' interest seemed to shift increasingly towards Burgundy wine (Barrett 2011; Stimpfig 2011).

### **Global Elites and Status Consumption**

Increased economic power has repositioned China within the global elite. Yet, like the *nouveaux riches* of Veblen's (1934) late 19<sup>th</sup> century America betrayed by their lowly origins, which were embedded in their too-conspicuous aping of the consumption patterns of the established leisure class, patterns of culture and styles of life operate to reproduce difference. The parallel pursuit

of economic and military power, on the one hand, and cultural power, on the other, has intensified over the contemporary period as consumption and cultural diplomacy become central to geopolitical strategies. This examination of the place of wine in representations and positioning of China—by and for Western and Chinese media and its audiences—is a timely one.

At the macro scale of the nation, China's social structures are shifting, with an economic middle class well established, but a middle class culture still emerging. And, at the macro scale of global relations, despite China's economic power, its legitimacy on a global scale remains low with regard to global hierarchies of taste and distribution of prestige. Meanwhile, at a micro scale, status consumption is clearly alive and thriving in the urban centers of China, corresponding to a globally unprecedented wave of new consumer middle classes in countries such as Mexico, India, Malaysia, Chile, Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa, just to name a few from a long list (see Myers and Kent 2004).

Thus, a theoretically-informed approach is required in order to develop our understanding of (1) the complex inter-societal dynamics at play in the appropriation of established forms of legitimate culture by an ascendant global player such as China, and (2) the response on the part of the dominant—if perhaps declining—players from which such culture stems. The literature on cultural globalization has added much in this regard, with an increasingly nuanced appreciation for the interplay between homogenizing and heterogenizing processes of inter-societal exchange, such that the “myth” of a global trickle down of Western goods and tastes to new markets has been problematized, if not yet abandoned (Ram 2004; Robertson 1995; Üstüner and Holt 2010). Such perspectives chime with a processual, sociological orientation, associated with the writings of Elias (1994), whose account of inter-civilizational dynamics provides us with a perspective that anticipates much of the cultural globalization literature.

Elias (1994) offers a proto-account of globalization through the lens of colonialism. Writing of the long-term historical interaction between cultures with regard to colonialism, Elias noted the commingling of Western and non-Western cultural forms, which gave rise to new forms of legitimate (or, for him, “civilized”) conduct: “It is not a little characteristic of the structure of Western society that the watchword of its colonizing movement is ‘civilization’” (1994, p. 509). That is, civility was a moral position claimed by groups (not ascribed by Elias) in asserting their dominance over others. In addition, it is marked by regularities across instances, such that one can deduce a modus referred to as “civility” or “civilization.” This modus is associated with self-restraint, foresight, elaborated manners, and so forth (1994, p. 153). These codes of civility are enshrined in the repertoires of good taste of the dominant group which, in the case of wine, refers to (broadly) a European bourgeois canon (Bourdieu 1984; Ferguson 1998).

With his template of civility as the benchmark, Elias notes that the “contrasts in conduct between the upper and lower groups are reduced with the spread of civilization; the varieties or nuances of civilized conduct are increased” (1994, p. 464). It is a “universal human theme” for groups that are stronger to both define themselves as morally and culturally superior, and to use such definitions of their superiority and the inferiority of other groups to maintain and defend their dominance (Elias 1994). As the power balances between groups are not static, this therefore entails an on-going process of groups in positions of dominance—particularly if that dominance is threatened—defining and defending their style of life as superior or more civilized, and ascendant groups attempting to emulate those dominant styles of life, and/or reject them and define new styles as more legitimate, as part of an attempt to improve their power ratio vis-à-vis their social relations with other groups. We can see this universal human theme playing out at

the level of communities (Elias and Scotson 1994), societies (Veblen 1934), and nations (Maguire 1993).

Social relations and their associated power balances are not static. So too, then, must the dominant forms of prestige and civilized conduct be acknowledged as the outcome of unceasing processes of social construction and reproduction. How is it done? Here, we turn to Bourdieu for a particularly useful conceptualization of the role of culture and forms of cultural capital in the reproduction of the unequal distribution of prestige.

Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as embodied or objectified forms of cultural knowledge and competence. These are socially esteemed in themselves and facilitate participation in other socially-esteemed activities (e.g. having experience attending art exhibitions with one's parents, receiving art history training in school, and thus being better equipped to discuss and assess a piece of art). Because of their social prestige, forms of cultural capital are worthy of acquisition and monopolization. Thus, the reproduction of social stratification is accomplished, in part, through mechanisms for the transference of forms of capital, which make it more likely that those of the dominant class come to acquire particularly valuable forms of capital, while those of the subordinate classes do not. In the case of objective cultural capital, for example, the quality and content of elite schools' curricula makes it more likely that the children of the dominant class will be endowed with more cultural capital than their "equally educated" counterparts from poorer schools. This dynamic is also observed in the transference of social capital and embodied cultural capital. As a result of these dynamics, group dominance is reproduced, and the means of reproduction work as both a means of exclusion (lack of certain forms of cultural capital hinder upward mobility) and the grounds of condescension. In the latter case, attempts by subordinate groups to acquire elite forms of

cultural capital—or the subordinate groups’ own versions of such material or symbolic goods—are subject to stigmatization and marginalization by the dominant group. However, such denigration is typically directed at the tastes or practices of the ascendant group, not at the group itself, thereby naturalizing their subordination as an effect of their choices, rather than prejudices or insecurities of the dominant group (Elias and Scotson 1994).

Bringing Elias and Bourdieu together, our attention is thus directed at a number of dimensions to the operation of cultural capital in the reproduction of status hierarchies. These include processes of legitimation: ways in which some tastes/cultural goods are framed as legitimate, esteemed and thus worthy of possession, which extends to the possessors of such tastes/goods as also being deemed legitimate and, by virtue of juxtaposition, to those who do not possess said resources as being deemed illegitimate. Strategies of acquisition directed at legitimate goods/tastes are also, then, to be expected: ways in which subordinate groups go about acquiring/adopting (and possibly adapting) the legitimate forms of taste and cultural capital. At the same time, processes of de-legitimation are also at work, as a shield for the dominant group, against subordinate groups’ strategies of acquisition. These are ways in which some tastes/goods/possessors of such tastes/goods are framed as illegitimate or perhaps not-yet-legitimate (i.e. possibly redeemable). De-legitimation might be accomplished by framing goods/tastes as lacking in sufficient discernment and self-control—in other words, as uncivilized (Elias 1994) or vulgar (Bourdieu 1984).

At the level of societies, we would expect in the case of global group dynamics between nations to find that the social reproduction of dominance and exclusionary practices will operate, at least in part, through forms of cultural capital, and that the forms of cultural capital and legitimation and de-legitimation strategies will work through an emphasis on discernment and

“civilized” codes of conduct, rather than an out-of-hand rejection of a particular group. This has been demonstrated through research on sport as a cultural form, for instance, and how it is deployed in the creation of zones of prestige, emulation and resistance (Maguire 2012).

In summary, our research is informed by a theoretical perspective that understands consumption as a field, and cultural practices as devices, for nation-state competition over the stratification of power resources on a global stage. In the case of fine wine, a globally accepted order of legitimacy operates to maintain norms of consumption and etiquette. As that order is increasingly challenged with regard to *who* is consuming fine wines—through the strategies of acquisition on the part of ascendant groups—we thus expect to see representations of such practices reflecting both claims to, and rejections of, legitimacy on the part of the ascendant and dominant groups, respectively.

As an entry point to studying inter-group power dynamics, we examine the mediatization of taste, asking how consumption practices are represented in the media with regard to the construction of some as superior, and others as inferior, and their association with particular social (indeed, national) groups. Media genres, such as lifestyle media and news media reporting on consumption and lifestyle matters, are crucially important to the reproduction of cultural fields, such as that of fine wine. Acting as second-order field texts (Ferguson 1998), such media forms consolidate and circulate norms and repertoires of legitimacy both through representations of “correct” practices (allowing members of the dominant group the satisfaction of self-recognition in those practices, thereby building group cohesion), but also through stigmatizing representations of subordinate groups’ practices (particularly the “bad” practices of the “worst section” of that group) (Elias 1994, p. xix). This defines and strengthens the association of the dominant group with a superior style of life, thus naturalizing and reaffirming their dominance.

This dynamic comes especially to the fore when an established dominance is perceived to be under threat, as we see today with the case of China's rise in economic power.

Therefore, China's emergence as a relatively new market for French and, especially, for Lafite wine, an important although by no means the definitive marker of prestige and cultural value, holds rich implications for a better understanding of how cultural and symbolic capital intersect with questions of elite taste. The ways in which the media present and represent rituals of consumption of fine goods such as rare wines in fast-growing markets like China becomes particularly interesting in such considerations.

### **Methodology**

To address our research aims, two sets of complementary data are employed—UK/U.S. media coverage and Chinese news reporting—on the consumption of fine wine in China, and especially (though not exclusively) that of Château Lafite. This method lends our study a unique perspective on how Chinese consumption preferences and practices are represented to the West and to the Chinese themselves. To leverage both sets of data, our analysis moves back and forth between a thematic analysis of the larger UK/U.S. sample, and a qualitative reading of the smaller Chinese sample, in order to identify the dominant themes within the media representations of Lafite in the Chinese market and of elite Chinese fine wine consumers and investors.

We undertook a thematic textual analysis (Crabtree and Miller 1999; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; King 2004) of UK/U.S. and Chinese news media reporting on the consumption of fine wine in China. Data sources for the UK/U.S. were the *Telegraph*, *Times*, *Guardian*, *Financial Times (FT)*, *Economist*, and *New York Times*. Chinese online news sources and news databases included popular mainland dailies as well as reports from the *Xinhua News Agency*, the

*Nanjing Yangtze Evening News*, *Haiwainet*, *nfdaily.cn* (*Nanfang Ribao*), the *Guangming Daily Organizer*, *China Youth Daily*, and the *Global Network* (*Huan Qiu Wang*). Data were also supplemented with convenience sampling of Chinese wine and food lifestyle print magazines, such as *Food and Wine* and *La Revue du vin de France*.

Two caveats should be noted. Firstly, our media sample is illustrative of wider sets of discourses, and not intended as an exhaustive account of the framings of Chinese wine consumption by various stakeholders. For example, one might anticipate differences in French media given that wine exports to China are one of the few areas in which French trade is doing well! Secondly, our focus is on mediatized consumption (as opposed to actual practices and lived consumer experiences), in order to ask what such representations of Chinese fine wine consumption for Western and Chinese audiences can tell us about inter-societal status contests.

As the first stage in our research, an exploratory sample of UK/U.S. articles (from 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010) featuring “wine” and “China” as keywords was assembled using the Nexis database, and inductively coded. This identified two repeated themes: the derogatory characterization of the Chinese wine drinker (e.g. references to mixing wine with soft drinks, or to the importance of the status of the brand rather than knowledge of the wine itself), and the repeated mention of Château Lafite as the quintessential high status wine brand for wealthy Chinese. On this basis, we isolated Lafite as an exemplar case of the media reporting on fine wine consumption in China, and then used Nexis to assemble a final UK/U.S. sample of articles featuring the keywords “Lafite” and “China” for the years 2000-2013 (n=73). Thus, the articles all mention Lafite at least once, but also include discussions of Chinese consumption of fine wine more generally. For the China sample, a total of 10 online news reports between the years

2011 and 2013 were collected and translated from the original Mandarin Chinese reports by one of the authors.

The final media samples were then analyzed, guided by our theoretical framework. Informed by Elias' (1994) account of civility, and Bourdieu's (1984, pp. 376, 536, *passim*) discussions of class taste and aesthetic preferences, we devised four themes for a deductive coding of the media samples, in order to trace the representations of Chinese wine consumption as illegitimate (untutored, fashion-led, functional) or legitimate (discerning, disinterested, connoisseur):

- vulgar consumption: aspects that are uncontrolled, untutored, or lacking refinement (e.g. mixing wine with soft drinks to make it taste better; wine as primarily an alcoholic drink/getting drunk);
- popular consumption: aspects that are led by an overriding interest in wine as a popular, fashion or status symbol rather than by knowledge of the wine *per se* (e.g. descriptions of wine being “a la mode”);
- functional consumption: aspects of using wine as a tool for accomplishing an instrumental purpose, rather than appreciation of the wine *per se* (e.g. references to *mianzi* and gift giving as part of business networks);
- discerning consumption: aspects linked to traditional (i.e. European) wine drinkers/drinking (e.g. references to Chinese “wine lovers”) and notions of civilized conduct.

In addition, frequencies were noted of references to the *nouveaux riches*, impacts on the global wine market (e.g. driving up prices), and favorable discussions of Chinese-made wine.

## **Findings**

The deductive analysis of the UK/U.S. sample found that 71% of the reports included an indication that the global fine wine market was being driven by China, both in terms of constituting the market (e.g. Chinese fine wine buyers overtaking their “traditional” counterparts in terms of purchases), and inflating it (e.g. Chinese buyers paying well over estimated values in auctions, thereby driving up prices more generally). The significance of China to the global fine wine market is epitomized in a 2010 *FT* article that noted that the American wine critic Robert Parker “is no longer the most important factor determining the price of Bordeaux wine. That honour goes to rich Chinese consumers, who are especially mad about Chateau Lafite” (Terazono 2010, p. 13). Of these articles, 15 were explicitly negative in their framing of the impact of China on the fine wine market, including the “truly terrifying” (Robinson 2013, p. 39) prospect of Chinese interest now moving on to Burgundian wine.

There was, therefore, broad consensus across this media sample that Chinese fine wine buyers were taking up a central place in the fine wine market. This destabilized the previously established organization of the field, as indicated by the reports referring to Europeans and Americans not by their nationality, but as the “traditional” buyers of fine wine. Not only was the established market perceived to be changing in terms of anticipated buyers, but also in terms of the primary forces driving the market. It was no longer the tastes of the traditional buyers, and opinions of legitimate wine critics (such as Parker) that confirmed value in the marketplace, but the purchases of Chinese wine buyers.

The most common finding—in 79% of the sample—was discussion of Chinese fine wine buyers’ tastes and consumption practices. Informed by our theoretical perspective, we expected that the destabilization of the established cultural order of fine wine would be met with attempts on the part of the (formerly) dominant group to disarm the ascendant group by denigrating their

cultural practices as “bad taste,” and asserting their own as a more “civilized” mode of consumption and “good taste.” Deductive coding of representations of the tastes of Chinese fine wine buyers identified defensive representations in both media samples, including both overt and covert attempts to reinforce European/Western cultural dominance, even while conceding economic dominance to China. Four framings of Chinese fine wine consumption were disentangled through the deductive coding—vulgar consumption, popular consumption, functional consumption, and discerning consumption—broadly confirming our hypothesis.

*Vulgar Consumption: “It’s the Wild West out East.”*

The most common frame for Chinese fine wine consumption was that of vulgar consumption, which was found in 55% of the articles (40 of the total 73). Three themes were apparent here. The first—in 27 articles—consisted of references to the lack of restraint or discipline in the manner of purchasing the wine, including descriptions of Chinese buyers at fine wine auctions as frenzied, bonkers, crazy, mad and obsessed. A *Daily Telegraph* article (Moore 2010, p. 7) asked of the Chinese buyer who had recently paid £43,000 for a (still un-bottled) case of 2009 Lafite: “at the time of writing you could pick up a case for £14,000; one has to ask, was the buyer drunk, badly advised or just caught up in the excitement of it all?” Similarly, a *FT* article (Robinson 2008, p. 1) quoted a Hong Kong-based wine educator’s description of the wine market in China: “It’s the Wild West out east.” This characterization was also echoed in the Chinese media (*Haiwainet* 2013):

I now understand that the Chinese people are not sensitive to Burgundy wine culture... it represents only status...only a very few people understand or even care about how it tastes. Now we have become wary of their predatory tactics. We call them Chinese crazies (*zhongguo fengzi*).

A second theme, found in eight articles, was unrefined or untutored manners of consuming or drinking wine. A *NYT* article (Smith 2000, p. A1) opens with this scene: “Yao Yun pulls the cork on a bottle of red wine in a fashionable restaurant here and does something that might horrify a Frenchman: he pours himself half a glass and tops it up with Sprite.” Having juxtaposed the Chinese drinker with the French (horrified, and hence legitimate) drinker, the article then goes on to refer to the importing of vast quantities of “cheap European wine,” quoting a Spanish importer, who:

says his fax machine began whirring with order after order from China in 1996. “People wanted four, five containers in the first order, no sample required,” he says now from his mostly empty warehouse just west of Shanghai. ... Mr. Rovira moved to Shanghai, established a bottling plant and began pumping wine from truck to tank as if it were home-heating oil (Smith 2000, p. A1).

Judgments of taste are, of course, relative to the field in which they are enacted. The “vulgar” act of mixing wine with Sprite or the ordering of wine as just another commodity may be locally understood as hallmarks of connoisseurship and rationality. Nevertheless, one must not confuse the assignation of vulgarity, as demonstrated in our findings, with the lived perceptions of the consumers being represented. What is framed as “bad taste” is undoubtedly understood by at least some of the consumers as “good taste” and acts of discernment. But it is exactly this misrecognition that further damns them in the eyes of the Western elite, at least as media reports position them. Furthermore, the emergence in China of a new vocabulary surrounding consumption and taste would suggest that Chinese perceptions of Chinese luxury consumption—if not of wine specifically—are not dissimilar. In September and October 2013, over 100 million references on Chinese social media were made to the term “*tuhao*,” a

description of the nouveau riche that refers both to their wealth and their lack of sophistication (*BBC Trending* 2013).

The UK/U.S. and Chinese media nevertheless also help to feed the frenzied buying of wine as a lucrative investment, fuelling speculative activity with reports like this, from a Chinese news source (*CNNMarketing.net* 2010):

Over the last ten years, the price of Lafite has soared over 30%. Fuelling the excitement are reports that trumpet the investment returns to be had from red wine. Given the plethora of investment choices in China for rich people today, which ones are the most lucrative? Gold or precious works of art? Neither! It's red wine! According to the *Times* of London, the returns from investing in Bordeaux wines far, far exceed those from gold, oil or stocks and shares, antiques, fine art, diamonds...nothing beats fine wine.

And of the wines in question, France's premier Lafite wine is the best. The name "Lafite Rothschild" – that's all you need to know...The name alone guarantees upward returns.

Finally, 13 articles in the UK/U.S. sample referred to a manner of choosing wines for purchase or consumption that demonstrated a lack of cultural knowledge, such as the perceived luckiness of the number eight, or the fact that "Lafite" is easier to say than the names of other top Bordeaux producers. It is worth noting that Château Lafite has capitalized on the cultural resonance of their iconography for the Chinese market. A *Daily Telegraph* (Metcalf 2010, p. 22) article included the observation that "Lafite's 2008 vintage rose from £9,000 to £13,000 a case in just two days after it was announced the bottles would be etched with the Chinese figure eight - a lucky number in China." Such manners of choosing demonstrate a failure to know of, and abide by established criteria for the evaluation of the qualities of the wine (either directly or via reliance on legitimate critics' reviews).

All three of these themes—related to purchasing, drinking and selecting—frame Chinese fine wine consumption as vulgar. Such practices do not simply contravene the bourgeois norms of fine wine consumption, but overtly display their absence through a lack of self-restraint, foresight, refinement of manners, and due deference to elaborated taboos around inappropriate behavior (Elias 1994, p. 153).

*Popular Consumption: A “Mêlée of Brand-obsessed Acquisition”*

The second most common framing in the UK/U.S. sample was that of popular consumption: 52% per cent of the articles included at least one reference to fine wine consumption being primarily driven by associations of status or fashion rather than an appreciation of the wine *per se*, a form of “Lafite-mania” (Rachman 2010, p. 15; Robinson 2011a, p. 37). This overlaps with vulgar forms of wine selection, here, reliant not on the naive criteria of luck or ease of pronunciation, but on the assured prestige of buying the “right” or most popular brand. For example, from the same *Daily Telegraph* article (Metcalf 2010, p. 22) noted above:

Judging by the number of Chinese tasters in Bordeaux this week, the boundaries of the wine world may be expanding further east than ever. Knowledge doesn't always match desire, however: one château in the Pessac-Léognan region was asked by a would-be Chinese buyer if they could make him Lafite-Rothschild, currently the “hottest” estate for the Chinese. Baron Eric de Rothschild would not have been amused had the answer been yes.

The scope for “vulgar” consumption continues to expand via the popularization of particular brands in the eyes of nouveau riche consumers. Other articles echo the stereotype of the Chinese brand-mad luxury consumer. *The Times* (Lewis and Bremner 2010, p. 53) noted, “the biggest wine trade fairs are increasingly dominated by Chinese buyers in a mêlée of brand-

obsessed acquisition.” Others draw equivalences between the popularity of Lafite and other luxury brands: “Everyone in China is thinking Lafite ... It is seen in the same light as Louis Vuitton, Prada and Gucci” (Booth 2010, p. 11).

Chinese media reports back up this phenomenon: “The Chinese investors are fanatical about the Lafite brand but they don’t understand its exclusiveness. Wine in the [Chinese people’s] eyes is just a powerful symbol. Not many people really care about the taste of it” (*China Youth Daily*, 2013). In a similar vein, *Global Network News* (2013) reports on the complaint by a French export manager of a wine trade body that: “This buying binge [by Chinese investors] makes me upset. I believe they are buying French vineyards for purely commercial reasons, not in order to pursue plans to find the most suitable soils or conditions.”

Popular forms of consumption are often linked in the representations to vulgar forms of consumption; 27 articles (37% of the UK/U.S. sample) included reference to both. This conjunction of “bad taste” is embodied in the stereotyped figure of the nouveau riche Chinese consumer. An *FT* article (Stimpfig 2010, p. 6) reported that “Lafite has become the darling of the market, especially in mainland China where the brand is the drink of choice of high-rolling tycoon collectors - to serve anything else is almost insulting.” The *Guardian* (Booth 2010, p. 11) is even more explicit:

With its creamy chateaux and immaculately tended vines, the Bordeaux wine region has for centuries catered to the discerning tastes of European elites. But this week, as leading critics declared the region's 2009 vintage the best they have ever tasted, a distinctly new clientele crashed the claret party.

Interestingly, both vulgar and popular consumption frame the Chinese fine wine buyer as less civilized than their “traditional” counterparts, whose actual consumption practices (civilized or uncivilized) are left unmentioned, although the implied message is quite clear.

Another twist on the “uncultured” tastes of the Chinese nouveaux riches is the seeking out of French wine for its cultural cachet, regardless of the intrinsic qualities of the product. The country-of-origin effect alone is often enough for the investor. Jean-Pierre Rousseau, whose wine trading company is largely owned by Shanghai Sugar Cigarette and Wine, wealthy Chinese are investing in French vineyards “for the reputation of the wines and their quality. In a way, owning French vineyards gives them credibility” (Richardson 2013). Similarly, according to wine expert Olivier Poels of the *Revue du vin Français* magazine, Chinese wine producers hire French winemakers, using the “rubberstamp” of French reputation and expertise to inflate the prices of their “mediocre” wines (Oberti 2013). This “French effect” is rooted in a Eurocentric view of cultural legitimacy that extends from wine and food to literature, fashion and places (*The Economist* 2010).

*Functional Consumption: “Lafite has become a Unit of Business”*

The third framing, found in 16 articles (22% of the sample), was that of functional consumption: the use of wine for some *other* function than that of connoisseurship, typically as a gift or for displaying “face.” An *FT* article (Rachman 2010, p. 15) stated, “Lafite-mania clearly has little to do with the taste of the wine.” In other words, the Chinese fine wine consumer was depicted as not appreciating wine on its own, established aesthetic, normative terms, but instead as a tool to fulfill some other instrumental end. That function might be related to drinking—the use of toasting, for example, in which to show respect in social gatherings—or to cooking. According to a *China Youth Daily* report (2013) on a Chinese website, a wine shop cashier (“Ms Yang”) is

reported to observe that, for many Chinese customers, wine was still regarded as a kind of condiment for use in the kitchen: “Chinese wine mainly used to cook.” She added, “[they] buy Chinese wine to drink, and most of those men alcoholics.” For them, “French wine [was] more romantic” and required a “candlelit dinner when drinking” for its enjoyment: “Certainly not a kitchen!”

More commonly, however, the discussion was of fine wine being appropriated within established Chinese rituals of gift giving, networking and the management of social obligations. A *Times* article (Lewis and Bremner 2010, p. 53) demonstrated a less overtly stigmatized view of Chinese fine wine consumption through overt acknowledgement of the importance of *guanxi* in Chinese social relations. The article quotes a representative of one of the most prominent and prestigious importers in Hong Kong who observes that: “Lafite has become a unit of business, and it is not being stored, but drunk. ... The buyers aren't thinking about the price of the wine, but about the value of the relationship or obligation you establish by serving it.”

However, while this potentially suggests a greater tolerance of Chinese fine wine consumption *on Chinese terms*—and thus affirming the UK/U.S. social/liberal beliefs around tolerance, cultural openness, awareness of other cultural traditions—the functional framing of wine was accompanied by negative association. All but two of the 16 articles also included reference to vulgar or popular (uncivilized) consumption practices. In addition, the frequency of the functional framing diminished over time: 27% of the articles in 2000-10 had that framing, whereas only 16% of the 2011-13 articles had it. Nevertheless, the fourth framing of Chinese fine wine consumption does fall more clearly within the realm of the legitimate and civilized.

*Discerning Consumption: “Chinese Palates Are Slowly But Surely Adapting”*

The final framing of Chinese fine wine consumption was discerning consumption: 20 articles (27% of the sample) made explicit reference either to Chinese wine consumers undertaking established, legitimate forms of consumption, or referred to Chinese wine consumers in established, legitimate terms (e.g. as oenophiles or wine lovers). That is, discerning consumption is understood as legitimate because it takes place *on Western terms*. For example, an *FT* article (Lister 2010, p. 4) acknowledges that an “ever-increasing number of wealthy Asians are embracing a fine wine culture.” Similarly, approving note is taken of growing numbers of wine education and investment classes. Furthermore, there is the suggestion in our sample that Chinese fine wine culture is increasingly regarded as legitimate and sustainable, with an increase between 2000-10 and 2011-13 in the frequency of the discerning frame. In the 2000-10 sample, 22% of articles used that frame, compared with 34% in 2011-13.

Such examples of inclusion within the “established” group, however, are tempered by other references that diminish the legitimacy of the Chinese consumers. A *Times* article places Chinese connoisseurship at a nascent state. It quotes a representative of a European wine investment house with growing numbers of Chinese clients as saying: “Chinese palates are slowly but surely adapting, learning the complexities attached to wine and, accordingly, wine has become a greater understood commodity” (King 2009, p. 43). A neutralization of the legitimacy of Chinese discerning, legitimate consumption also occurs through who serves as a voice of authority. Typically, Western importers, auctioneers, educators and investment advisors give accounts of the Chinese market and/or who are positioned as the conduits of an emerging, legitimate wine culture in China.<sup>2</sup>

If representations of “civilized” Chinese wine buyers and consumers are becoming increasingly common, they are nonetheless accompanied by overwhelmingly negative reports of

their impact on the global fine wine market (i.e. the Chinese have vulgarized the wine market for others). From 2010 to 2011, the wine market witnessed record-breaking auctions of Lafite with Chinese buyers paying multiple times the wine's value in October and November 2010. By January 2011, commentators were referring to a wine bubble. Lafite lost value over the year, and the Bordeaux *en primeur* sales in June 2011 were modest (despite 2010 being heralded as an excellent year), as Chinese buyers shifted to buying Burgundy. As one well-regarded wine writer (Robinson 2011b, p. 37) noted: "There are dangerous signs that China's (still small) nucleus of seriously well-heeled wine buyers may now be turning their attention to Burgundy. Dangerous because the quantities of top burgundy produced are so tiny that Chinese interest could upset the market." With such moves in the patterns of wine consumption, the international wine market has experienced fluctuations in price that do not reflect the behavior of their traditional markets. Does this herald a form of market subversion, albeit unintended?

Reflecting the media's role as a diffuse mode of education, Chinese reporting reflected the minority status of "legitimate" connoisseurs. The Chinese media reports between 2012 and 2013 highlight the trend towards "market confusion and chaos" (*luan xiang*) (*Yangtze Evening News* 2013). In the same report, we are told that (loosely translated): "the summer season – considered the peak wine-drinking season – would find many consumers unable to decide between hundreds of brands of French wine." They were unable to discern the "halo" or "aura" (*yun*) of the authentic product, especially in the case of Lafite. Like many products within the luxury sector in China, the Lafite brand suffers from over-exposure, over-selling and counterfeiting. In the same report, reporters visiting several *xinjiekou* liquor stores discovered that the Lafite market was highly heterogeneous, with different sub-brands of Lafite jostling for prominence. Bizarre scenarios such as "Buy one Lafite, get one free" (if one phoned in to a

hotline) as well as wild fluctuations in price from a few hundred to a several million renminbi prevailed at supermarkets. There were also homophonic imitations using “Lafitte” (with a double T denoting, confusingly, the original, “legendary” Lafite), while “Rafael” was also a common name. Such reports of the growth of fake wine underline the predominant view that the Chinese market remains naive.

As a result, several wine magazines take pains to distinguish among three categories of Lafite for their readers: the “genuine” product, according to a report in the *Yangtze Evening News* (2013), for instance, is “Lafite Chateau Lafite Rothschild,” starting at “89 thousand;” the second category are the “little Lafites” (*xiaolafei*) and finally, a series called “Rafi Legends Series-Legende,” “Rafi Legends Series-Saga,” “Rafi Collection-Réserve Spéciale,” and “Rafi Noble Series-Selection Prestige.”

This same *Yangtze Evening News* report clearly sees an educative role for itself by inserting warnings on the “chaotic choices” facing consumers. The article features “expert analysis” (*zhuanjia jiexi*) on how to identify wines that are left on shelves past their expiry dates, Australian wines advertised and deliberately mislabeled as French, and so on. The “tricks of the trade” must be learned, in order to avoid getting cheated. It recommends not to confuse wine with red wine, not to assume that screw caps on wine bottles denote inferior quality compared to cork seals, and, most importantly, to look for the “AOC” (Appellation Origine Contrôlée) label on French wine bottles: “In other words, the middle one “O” will be different according to the wine (that denotes the origin of the name: the smaller the range of names, the higher the level of wine, generally speaking” (*Yangtze Evening News* 2013).

The Chinese print media also regularly report on British wine magazines that track the price and demand for Bordeaux wines, in line with the former’s obsession with tracking

changing consumer tastes. A *Global Network News* (2013) report, for instance, announces that “the Chinese consumer’s wine buying and consumption habits are transforming” and, as a result, “Chinese consumers’ fanatical enthusiasm for premium wines is fading because they are just too expensive even for wealthy consumers. In recent reports, the price of Lafite stood at €330 per bottle, a decrease of 21.4% from 2011.” The same report observes that “China’s consumers no longer splurge €1000 on bottles of Bordeaux wine and are instead wanting to spend 600-1500 yuan to buy wines from other regions, such as Italy or Burgundy wines.”

### **Discussion**

Our findings reveal new insights not only into how fine wines are perceived and consumed in China but also how the media represents status and taste through their interventions in the market for Lafite. By employing both Western as well as Chinese media, our study represents the first attempt (as far as we know) to capture how the democratization of wine (vis-à-vis the opening up of elite consumption to “non-traditional” buyers) co-exists with the maintenance of status hierarchies via the neutralization or minimization of the legitimacy of new (Chinese) wine consumers.

A growing literature on the globalization of cultural capital (Appadurai 1996; Belk 1988; Holt, Quelch and Taylor 2004; Üstüner and Holt 2010) has rightly focused on the mechanics of consumption among a new class of affluent consumers in less industrialized countries (LICs). Although Western brands and lifestyles continue to shape the aspirations of consumers in many of these LICs, Üstüner and Holt (2010, p. 39) note that perceptions of the “Western lifestyle” can take on the nature of a “myth” in non-Western local and national discourses. Where globalization discourses can sometimes lack local detail and fine-grained empirical data, our findings provide concrete insights into representations of taste, aesthetic norms and consumption

practices in a rising China. In this sense, we show that globalized cultural capital has more than one face. By focusing tightly on a global French brand in an area of conspicuous luxury consumption (fine wine), we have been able to illuminate key aspects of how taste is perceived by the West and the Chinese themselves. Two key aspects related to the cultural globalization of taste emerge from our findings.

First, the findings from both samples show that consumption patterns are not straightforward in the Lafite wine market in China. Although the media in both samples note “vulgar” characteristics of the Chinese consumption of Lafite, a parallel (and growing) trend to acknowledge discerning consumption is also evident. Bearing in mind Elias’s insight that tastes become homogenized as markets in different countries benefit from inter-societal exchange, we see that the Chinese media play a key role in parlaying such homogenizing tendencies. The pedagogical content of the media (as presented above) bears testimony to this tendency. In this sense, French wine culture is effectively deterritorialized by the Chinese media, both in terms of their clear analysis of the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese market for Lafite as well as in their provision of “tricks of the trade” tips for discerning fakes from the real thing, as it were.

Second, since Lafite has spawned so many Lafite-type brands in Chinese retail outlets, the distinctiveness of the “real” product has been significantly diluted. The markets for Lafite in China have flattened the contrasts between types and vintages of Lafite in the minds of consumers. As a result, market demand is affected. Although the symbolic attributes and brand image of Lafite remain formidable weapons in the arsenal of “Western” brands in China, the Chinese consumer is showing signs of moving on to other wines, such as those from Burgundy, as markers of prestige. As confidence and discernment grow, so too does the attraction of competing brands and forms of cultural capital. As the Chinese consumer learns new strategies

of acquisition, the possibility exists of greater control over legitimate forms of high-status consumption that may or may not include brands once holding sway in the high-end, luxury wine market.

In this sense, our research adds to Bourdieu's work on the accumulation, stratification and diffusion of cultural capital. The highly fragmented, apparently chaotic (*luanxiang*) nature of the market for Lafite in China complicates Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as socially prestigious. Our findings reveal *grades of capital*, strata of prestige, and logics of discernment that overlay one another and operate in complex ways to appeal to myriad investors and classes of consumers. Furthermore, competing logics of valuation of those forms of cultural capital are at play. Based on *guanxi* (involving relatively closed networks of privilege *and* obligations), these logics compete with other notions of informed, aesthetic appreciation that can be deliberately acquired and are, in that sense, democratic. It is not that a *guanxi*-derived valuation is not civilized—it requires self-restraint, foresight, elaborate rituals and behavioral codes, thus exemplifying the hallmarks of civility—but that its application to an aesthetic product (wine) not normally valued in this way has consequences for the marketplace (a Lafite bubble), and for restricting the social honor that can accrue to the participants (local social capital at the expense of global recognition as an elite connoisseur).

Our study shows that the aesthetic norms and codes surrounding the selection and consumption of fine wine in China do not just fit the stereotypical image of the cash-rich but poorly-informed consumer. While aspects of “vulgar consumption” are certainly borne out by media reports, other institutional forces are at play. The consumer behavior of a rising and increasingly confident cultural elite, market dynamics, cultural peculiarities rooted in a hybrid form of “French-is-best” colonialism and nationalism, as well as linguistic adaptations and

inventions of brand image, name and logo all play a role, and should sensitize us in how we approach the consumption of fine wine in China. As we have shown, a rapidly-growing interest in education and information (a role either deliberately or inadvertently played by the media in both Western and Chinese contexts) as well as trends towards discerning cultural capital from different parts of the Western hemisphere are likely to add to the changing landscape of fine wine consumption in China.

The question of the discerning wine consumer in the Chinese market as presented by the media samples used here serves to highlight neglected aspects within Bourdieu's framing of cultural capital and status consumption. We have added important empirical detail to his inter-class or factional view of cultural resources by showing how economic, social, and cultural capital intertwines to drive fine wine consumption among China's urban consumers. Further, our analysis has been enriched by insights from Elias, an under-utilized figure in macromarketing discourse in our view, that have helped us better appreciate the long-term inter-civilizational dynamics at play in emerging luxury markets. In contrast to much of the literature on consumption in emerging economies, we argue for a more nuanced consideration of the ways in which China participates in the reproduction of Western cultural dominance. The codes of legitimate culture are no longer (if they ever were) monopolized by the "West." We see, for instance, processes of "indigenization" occurring in the Chinese market in the way sommeliers and wine writers now take Chinese (domestically-produced and cultivated) wine seriously, in the way the Chinese are taking up wine appreciation and wine investment courses, in how Western wine writers are increasingly led by the interests and machinations of the elite Chinese wine consumer and, perhaps most compelling, in how the massive changes in the contemporary global wine market—such as the meteoric rise in prices that have had a knock-on effect on the so-called

“traditional” wine buyers—have been driven by cultural factors *within* China (*guanxi*, status consumption, shame at being vulgar) rather than within the West (which traditionally drove markets also through status as well as taste).

Last but not least, we have aimed to develop our understanding of processes of legitimation and de-legitimation of consumption in China, in terms of how brands become localized and indigenized. In particular, our study of the ways in which the media present information and pedagogical content on Lafite and fine wine in the Chinese context represents an original contribution to the fields of media and communications, cultural consumption, branding, and the study of how the power of colonialism in world markets still operates in subtle, albeit declining, fashion. The empirical insights of this paper, combined with an analysis framed by an inter-civilizational (Elias) and cultural legitimation (Bourdieu) perspective, have, we hope, opened up new understandings of the contextual inflections of global brands in the complex Chinese market. What we shall call the “mediatization of taste” becomes, therefore, important to understand as the Chinese market for fine wine and other luxury goods and services develops.

## **Conclusion**

We noted earlier that although the study of status consumption is well established (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992; Veblen 1934), a key caveat in this body of work needed empirical attention. This relates to the paucity of empirical research into the changing nature of high status consumption in the rapidly growing economies of Asia and the Middle East. In the case of China, this task of documenting cultural capital norms is particularly important and timely as an increasingly confident and affluent middle and upper middle class creates a wave of cultural globalization that has seen demand for luxury goods and services soar over the last three decades. Previous studies on upper middle class consumers in LICs (Less Industrialized

Countries) have, rightly, focused on how Western myths of the luxury lifestyle are inflected and adapted to local tastes and preferences, a process Üstüner and Holt (2010, p. 39), for instance, call “indigenization.” Yet, the study of the Chinese context still requires sustained scrutiny in order to address broad questions of societal change.

Our findings echo research on contemporary patterns of elite taste that suggests the maintenance of exclusive, elite consumption of globally-recognized brands, and Western dominance of aesthetic or civilized norms and codes no longer (if ever) work straightforwardly on the basis of cultural capital. In an era of liberal values, cosmopolitanism, and cultural omnivorousness (Peterson 2005), it is both esteemed to embrace a diversity of tastes and socially and politically suspect to denigrate groups based on their gender, racial/ethnic, sexual, cultural, generational, physical, or religious characteristics. As a result, the criteria for cultural legitimacy and the forms of distinction have become more nuanced, as in turn one would suspect the strategies for the de-legitimation or stigmatization of others would become more subtle (so as to be both democratic and elitist).

Although our study focuses on just one brand of fine wine, it provides an analytical lens on how the Chinese market for French wines (and, possibly, Australian, South African and other wines) may develop in the future. Specific brands operating in localized context (first tier versus third-tier cities; niche markets within those macro markets) reflect stages in the cultural globalization of particular cultural objects and practices, and the indigenization of particular groups’ repertoires of good taste. Thus, future research on Chinese cultural capital might well shed more light on how the local and the global intersect in wine markets. For instance, it has been noted that the emerging tensions between nationalistic goals (the Chinese Communist Party’s 1970s strategy for cultural growth emphasized, for instance, a new commitment to

investment in China's cultural capital) and the overwhelming attraction of Western brands are not necessarily antagonistic (Tian and Dong 2011). Consumers are, after all, global citizens and are conscious of their status—local, national, and global—via their consumption practices.

This article strongly suggests that the geo-politics of consumption—the strategic and political context underpinning nations' consumption patterns—deserves further study within the field of macromarketing. The role of the media in reproducing political sentiment and hence reproducing consumption preferences based on national/international stereotypes of brands as well as taste or “high” culture offers intriguing possibilities for marketing researchers. Currently absent in the literature on wine consumption and cultural capital is the question of how media representations shape cross-cultural perceptions of prestige brands. Since notions of taste and what constitutes “high” status and “high” culture shape media coverage of bilateral relations in the context of wine consumption, the question of how taste is mediatized against a backdrop of often rising intercultural and diplomatic tensions between nations is a salient topic for future research.

Relatedly, questions of cultural taste and legitimacy are tied to much larger and broader questions surrounding the role of aspirational consumption and cultural stereotypes in shaping markets and building national identities. What we call the “mediatization of taste,” in other words, plays a key role in representations of cultural prestige to consumers of fine and luxury goods and services. How do we make sense of the battles over the global representations of prestige, and the role of cultural goods (such as wine) in such contests?

Future research could also follow on to identify specific consumer-led as well as macromarketing implications of our paper. A rich area for further study, for instance, would be to unearth evidence for the rise of a more discerning high end Chinese consumer as she/he moves

away from “bling-bling” branded names to niche, *luxe* or “own-name” brands that are much less well-known outside mainstream cultural and social circles. Such a move is heralded in the changing Chinese lexicon of consumption, with the term “*tuhao*” framing the nouveau riche Chinese consumer as vulgar. That is, what is next for discerning Chinese investors or consumers as they move from Lafite to little-known elite wines from all over the world? How do the Chinese choose to display and promote signs of “civilized” connoisseurship? One could, as suggested by Lamont and Lareau (1988, p. 162), “identify clusters of people who share similar *répertoires* of institutionalized signals by interviewing managers, professionals and entrepreneurs” in the fine wine industry in selected cities in China. From a macromarketing perspective, how will their respective behaviors, choices and preferences vis-à-vis fine wine (domestic and foreign) influence global trends and prices? Other broad questions emerge. How will the Chinese diaspora, the vast Indian market, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and other leading producers of wine continue to co-create and cooperate with mainland Chinese producers to carve out new niches in world markets in fine wine and other luxury goods? To the extent that the world is so deeply interconnected by mass and social media, much more work remains to be done on how the world’s media influence the stratification of taste and prestige in China as competition in the fine wine market intensifies between the “Old” World and the “New.”

China is already laying serious foundations for securing its future status as a net producer of luxury goods. There is reason to expect that, as the country moves beyond its image as the manufacturing workshop of the world and one driven by brand-obsessed consumers with money and no taste, “China” itself will, in the not-too-distant future, come to be a desired appellation of luxury wine. Just recently, the *He Lan Qing Xue* winery won first prize in a Decanter World Wine Award Bordeaux category (Lechmere 2011). More examples will follow and new

implications for media and consumer research into the cultural globalization, cultural legitimation and consumption of fine wine in China will surely emerge for decades to come.

### Notes

1. We are aware that “China” and “the West” are far too broad as terms (and concepts). The research stems from an examination of specific U.S., UK, and Chinese media sources with affluent target audiences in first tier cities such as London, New York, Beijing, and Shanghai.
2. While there is a small but growing cadre of Chinese wine experts—Chinese sommeliers, retailers, educators and wine writers—whose cultural capital bridges European wine culture and Chinese culture (Smith-Maguire 2013), it is, as yet, too early to know what form a fully localized Chinese elite wine culture will take, and the degree to which it will contain hybridized forms of connoisseurship, good taste, and cultural expertise.

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**Acknowledgments.** The authors thank the anonymous reviewers for their kind and constructive remarks, which have enhanced the paper's analysis, and the editors of the special issue, for convening such a timely collection. Our warm thanks to Olivia Li Hou for her time and assistance in getting Chinese materials to us in a timely fashion, and to Joseph Maguire for bringing complementary media reports on Chinese consumption to our attention.