

Learning Journeys: The Educational Value of Film for Chinese Students'  
Adaptation to Quebec and Canadian Culture

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Learning Journeys: The Educational Value of Film for Chinese Students' Adaptation to Quebec and Canadian Culture**

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A rich body of research supports the educational value of learning from films and visual media such as documentaries. This study explores narratives provided by Chinese students about the place of films in their learning journey about Quebec and Canadian culture, both before coming to Canada as well as the role of film in providing a buffer against culture shock in the first year as students pursuing higher education in Montreal and Ottawa.

Data examined include the autobiography of the author, a comparative examination of relevant excerpts from her own and a childhood friend's diaries and journals, a story volunteered by a third student as well as the film reviews provided by three other Chinese students who participated in the study. These three students viewed the two films *C.R.A.Z.Y.* and *J'ai tué ma mère* and the documentary *The Attraction of Maple Leaves*. Following the viewing of the films, one-on-one interview sessions were held individually with the three students. All participants acknowledged the important role that films and documentaries played in facilitating their understanding of the new culture especially in the following areas: romantic relationships, sexuality and homosexuality, multiculturalism and individualism, family relationships, and feminist and gender issues. Special attention is given to comparisons of the Chinese and Canadian educational systems, classroom culture, student-professor relationships and behaviour codes. These narratives illustrate and support the fact that films provide a good starting point in understanding and immersion in a new culture and therefore their use is recommended in the preparation and entry phases for Chinese students going abroad in pursuit of higher education.

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## **Dedication**

To Mom and Dad, who have been my inspiration and support all the time.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction, Statement of the Problem and Research Questions**

This thesis will explore the educational value of film on Chinese students' learning journey about Quebec and Canadian culture. The focus is on Chinese students studying in Canada but who were born and brought up in China, and includes documentation through an autobiography and journal comments from my own experience of coming to Montreal, Quebec to pursue graduate studies immediately after graduation from a Chinese university.

The Chinese educational system varies from the Canadian one in terms of numbers of students, place in the social structure and policy issues. Students brought up in the Chinese educational system aim to enter a top university with the final goal of pursuing a financially successful career. Many Chinese students do not connect personal interest with their studies. Instead of a major related to their own interest, they prefer to choose an undergraduate major in a discipline which they think will help them succeed financially. Therefore, the purpose of learning is mainly to gain entrance to a great university. Textbooks and the authority of teachers are granted importance, not films. A good student in China is engaged in rote learning, memorizing everything from the textbooks and demonstrating such acquired knowledge in examinations through recitation. All teaching is to be understood without questioning. Students should be obedient and respect teachers. This kind of student behavior has been part of the Chinese culture throughout its 5000 years history.

The value of films is not recognized by Chinese school boards and teachers. Films are not used as teaching tools in schools. However, as Ellen Summerfield (1993) points out, one of the values of films is to reinforce critical thinking, and bring to light multiple perspectives, and she states that this process should begin at an early age. A related fact is that, in China, there exist no courses about Chinese

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culture for Chinese students. The underlying misconception is that one does not need to study the culture of one's native country, while living there. Over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of Chinese students have chosen to pursue their higher education abroad, especially in English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Canada. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 49,905 students from the People's Republic of China came to study in Canada (Canada 2009). Canada has always been a major destination for Chinese people for the purpose of study and immigration. Historically, Chinese couples chose to move to Canada to pursue better opportunities for themselves, but mostly for the next generation. Currently, Chinese people prefer to send their adolescent children to study abroad alone while they themselves stay in China. Some of these Chinese students may acquire immigrant status later on and stay in Canada, while others return to work in China.

Compared to those immigrants who come to Canada at a very young age with their parents, these Chinese college and university students experience culture shock. Indeed, it is more difficult for them to overcome the impact of this culture shock because their character and mentality have been formed in China and they are alone in the new country without families. Often, these students cannot easily make the transition from their home in China to the new cultural context to which they come to live and study.

### **Personal Background**

Two years ago, I made a similar decision to come to Canada to pursue a Master's degree. For me, like thousands before me, it was a brave decision.

After finishing my undergraduate studies as a Journalism student and completing a demanding internship in a TV station, it seemed that to accept the job offer as an assistant director in SMG (Shanghai Media Group) was the right thing to do. For the 21 year old young woman I was, this promised to be a brilliant opportunity



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to start my career in journalism and the communication industry. However, I was terrified to imagine that my life might become a static and boring routine year after year. I even pictured myself still asking the studio electrician to adjust the light after 30 years. The world was still mysterious to me; my curiosity drove me crazy with the urge to explore the unknown parts of this world. Until then, receiving education from both parents and schooling constituted my whole life. I hadn't really begun my independent life journey.

I remember doing a presentation based on a poem in my favorite advertisement, in an advertising course at journalism school. Life and journey are the core words of the poem, which tells us a journey is not simply travelling; it also has profound meaning about ourselves and the world we are in. Our life is a journey, and where will you go?

The words and message of the poem are still vivid to me after all these years. The poem is not long and full of fancy words. However, it inspired me about where I wanted to go and encouraged me to think about the preferred destination at that time in my life when I had to make such an important decision.

Therefore, instead of taking the job offer at Shanghai Media Group, I planned to start a long journey; a learning journey. My plan was to go to another country, to learn a new language and experience a different culture. For me back then, the perfect way to do this was to apply for graduate school abroad. I chose the city of Montreal because it's bilingual, multicultural and artistic. No one supported my decision except my mother. Everyone else in my network judged my decision to be immature and nothing but an attempt of escaping reality. But I thought it wouldn't hurt to try; I would still gain some life experience and personal growth even if it did not work out exactly the way I had planned it all. Graduate school is an appropriate venue to learn and meet people as well as good context for encouragement, support and inspiration. Through films and books. I had some knowledge of western education, but now I wanted to experience it personally. I felt certain it was possible

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to gain professional achievement as a journalist and artist through different venues and strategies. Much like the idea of my learning journey, John Dewey (1973, 1997) once said that “education is not preparation for life, education is life itself.”

Although my home city of Shanghai is also a large cosmopolitan city, I am attracted to the city of Montreal, with the prevalence of various art forms, spectacular architecture and cultural activities and riches. It's also a great venue for the photography and film making that are my interest. However, coming from an Asian country, the biggest obstacle I face in adjusting to life in Montreal is the cultural difference. Appreciating a foreign culture doesn't mean that you can adjust yourself to it easily. Everything around you is new, fresh and strange, it's normal to have emotions such as loneliness, fear and insecurity.

Knowing that I would have some of those negative emotions, I'm grateful that my friends helped me to prepare myself before entering the “wonderland”. What I call friends here are not human beings; they are films which are educational and cultural. How did I benefit personally from these films? During my four years of studying in a Journalism school, I watched countless films from all around the world; I gained knowledge in an unexpected way, and my horizons were expanded even before I realized it. More specifically, I viewed a variety of films and documentaries about Canada and Quebec before my departure from China to study at Concordia University. Films offered me numerous opportunities to learn and understand the world and other cultures in a better and clearer way. They have taken on the role of a teacher, a best friend and a family member in my personal life. This experience with films, and the recognition of how viewing films had helped my adjustment to a new culture laid the groundwork for my masters' research and is the reason I refer to my studies and those of my Chinese student colleagues as a “learning journey.”

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## **Statement of the Problem and Research Questions**

My experience as an international student challenged by cultural differences and changes provided me with a good understanding of what Chinese students may go through when they come to Canada to study. My personal observation of Chinese students in Canada was that many of them came to Canada when they were adolescents and had difficulties adjusting to the new culture. Most of them struggled for at least a year at school due to linguistic problems. They also had difficulties in adapting to the new culture because of cultural differences.

Studying abroad is not a short, temporary, phenomenon. It is the start of a long term and continuous process of adaptation. Therefore it is an appropriate and important topic of an on-going research program. We may then be able to find effective means to best help these students to benefit from the experience of studying abroad and reaching their own goals.

In my thesis, I explore the educational value of using film as a tool for helping Chinese students to gain some familiarity and perspective on Canadian and Québécois culture. I seek to present the effectiveness of using films to learn about a different culture and to alleviate, even eliminate the alienating feelings of culture shock upon entering that culture.

The main question asked in this thesis is: Can films help Chinese students like me to gain cultural knowledge and personal growth, in order to adapt better and with greater ease to their new environment? Although I was exposed to films about Canadian, and Québécois culture in particular, before my arrival, I still experienced significant culture shock upon coming to Montreal. So what about those students who did not have a chance to familiarize themselves with the culture through films? To be more specific, what can Chinese students learn about Canadian and Quebec culture from related films? The related questions this study will address are:

1. What can Chinese students learn about Canadian and Quebec culture from films?

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2. How can films help in this particular period of transition and adaptation?
  3. What is the experience of culture shock that Chinese students face during the transitional period to a new culture (Québécois and/ or Canadian culture)?

### **The importance of this study**

This study aims to provide a fuller understanding of Chinese students' experiences in and out of school, issues of identity, personal development and relationships with families and friends in a Canadian context. This study may encourage Chinese students to use film watching as indirect experience about Quebec and Canadian culture, and to reinforce their critical thinking and development of varied perspectives. It can also help Chinese students who plan to study in Canada to become prepared before facing the new culture directly, facilitating their adjustment to the new environment upon their arrival, reducing the negative impact of culture shock, and helping them to make more productive use of their time as students.

### **Some preliminary notes of caution:**

I realize that my personal background may cause bias to the study, and my participants may not recall or report their past experiences accurately because those past moments are memories which are not always objective. Thus, the focus of the study is on the narratives of a small number of individuals who agreed to share their own experiences with me. Moreover, the purpose of this study is to help students facing similar circumstances to compare their personal experiences with the narratives presented in my research; narratives which can offer important comparative information and inspiration. A further goal is to encourage international Chinese students to benefit from culture-related films in order to facilitate the process of adaptation to the new country and to reach their own goals with greater success and satisfaction.

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Film can be a very useful tool to help students learn about a foreign culture; however, it cannot be held as the primary vehicle through which complete understanding of that culture will be achieved.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter Two of the thesis will present the literature review and will describe the methodology I followed for data collection. Chapter Three will present the data collected through an autobiography, a comparative journal analysis based on the journals of the author of the thesis and her friend Ming from childhood days in China, a personal narrative of a student, reviews of three selected films by three other Chinese students and their interview responses. Chapter Four will be devoted to the discussion of the data and conclusion.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review and Methodology**

#### **Literature Review**

There is a rich body of literature based on research about the educational value of film. Some evidence suggests that people learn abstract, new, and novel concepts more easily when they are presented in both verbal and visual form (Salomon, 1970, 1979). Other empirical research shows that visual media make concepts more accessible to a person than text media and help with later recall (Cowen, 1984).

According to Joseph E. Champoux (1999), films have eight functions in teaching, which are:

1. Film as Case: well-chosen films as cases help develop the analytical skills of students.
2. Film as Experiential Exercise: some films lend themselves to inclusion in experiential learning.
3. Film as Metaphor: metaphors clarify complex thoughts, bring vividness to abstraction, magnify a thought for dramatic effect, and provide insight.
4. Film as Satire: well-done satire can leave an unforgettable image of concepts you want to emphasize.
5. Film as Symbolism: some scenes from films can offer a symbolic means of communicating theories and concepts.
6. Film as Meaning: film is an excellent medium for giving meanings to theories and concepts, better than printed or spoken words.
7. Film as Experience: the unique qualities of film described earlier can create strong experiences for viewers.
8. Film as Time: films portraying earlier periods can help viewers understand events and complexities of earlier times.

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Another function not mentioned by Champoux is film as discourse. Thus,

Pinterits and Atkinson (1998) specifically recommended the use of films that emphasize diversity and multicultural issues in multicultural education. Tyler and Guth (1999) highlighted the benefits of using popular media to convey controversial information, while simultaneously encouraging students to draw on their own experiences with diversity issues. Film has the potential to help the viewer reach what Freire (1970) termed critical consciousness. According to Freire (1970), critical consciousness is achieved when individuals begin to consider the historical, geographical, sociological, psychological, and cultural contexts.

Film's power as an entertainment medium is obvious; however, its educational value is not acknowledged as widely. Learning is a life-long journey. John Dewey (1973, 1997) was concerned about how to connect knowledge learned at school with daily experiences, a perspective manifested in many of his books. Students find it difficult to connect intellectual endeavors with the realities of their own lives, especially when they are teenagers. Films can inspire and motivate students to become reflective; in a way, we can say that films can be autobiographical. For Blessing and Tudico, "life is like a cinematic narrative that is constructed by each of us, that is narrated by each of us, and that stars each of us as the main character" (Blessing & Tudico, 2005, p.42). According to Giroux (2002), films are a source of shared joy, entertainment, escape, and a source of knowledge, connecting pleasure with meaning, in contrast to most other school experiences. Films connect audience, public and events within the concrete relations of power that characterize everyday life. Giroux argues that films can entertain and educate at the same time; they influence us unconsciously and help us to explore cultural contexts and construct the landscape of culture.

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According to Davos' (2002) perspective, language and culture are interrelated: a film can be useful in teaching the mannerisms, colloquialisms and other aspects of the culture that it portrays. More specifically, for those Chinese students who plan to study in Canada, films can help them to learn English and French, while providing them with an understanding of some of the nuances of the culture presented. Films can also help the learner to feel more closely connected to the community depicted; in other words, to gain some familiarity with the particular culture.

Nadancer (1983) provides a broad and crystal-clear background on film's educational value. He suggests that, in order to learn how to develop a more adequate idea of the use of films, we must explore two other topics; one is the nature of educational experience itself, the other one is the actual accomplishment of film as part of our culture. Nadancer says: "What is needed, then, is a critical framework that mediates between the concepts of education and the media in their many cultural manifestations" (Nadancer, 1983, p.2). Moreover, Nadancer (1983) states that film can help learners gain educational growth from different situations by comparing them to their own. This perspective relates to the themes such as diversity, experience and even multiculturalism. Nadancer's 1983 study provides a broad and clear background on film's educational value, stating:

Film can present concrete, inventive depictions of how people in diverse situations see their worlds, enabling us to reflect more deeply upon their experiences. Film can also bring these diverse viewpoints to a dialogue among learners, and in this way contribute to the broadening of views fundamental to educational growth (p.2).

Nadancer also provides a framework for the use of films related to the nature of educational experience itself, and for the role of film as part of our modern culture. At the same time, the potential in film's educational value should be explored further, in terms of traditional conceptions of educational film, and also by encouraging present day critiques.



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Talking about the educational value of film, Ellis (1923, p.1) illustrates the close relation between education and film, stating “Education is the imparting and acquisition of knowledge. One way in which we gain knowledge and become educated is by experience. We gain experience through our senses. Seeing is believing.”

The limitations of film’s educational value are also illustrated in scholarly research, a reminder of the need to stay critical and objective in my study and exploration of the topic of my thesis. Still, there is strong evidence that films have educational value in learning about culture and are therefore an effective tool for inclusion in our curriculum planning, while always keeping a critical perspective.

In addition to films, there are many other vehicles for learning about a particular culture. More important, each individual may benefit from different forms, depending on learning styles and level of readiness to learn. One of these is journal writing, a vehicle I discovered to be of great importance to the research for this thesis, particularly because I had drawn on my own years of journal writing as I started to plan my thesis topic.

Of the uses and benefits of journal writing, Hiemstra (2001) says:

Journaling in its various forms is a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights. The process often evokes conversations with self, another person, or even an imagined other person. When we add to this list the advantage available in most journaling formats of being able to review or reread earlier reflections, a progressive clarification or insight is possible (p.19-20).

She encourages her own students to use the format of journal writing to acquire interaction, knowledge, and personal growth as much as possible through reading or other learning experiences. Hiemstra (2001) adds that:

There also is the potential for a journaling technique to promote critical self-reflection where dilemmas, contradictions and evolving worldviews are

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questioned or challenged. Learning something that is new or different, and then reflecting on what that means for a current or expected professional position, can be an important outcome (p.20).

Journal writing may take different forms. Autobiography and diary are in the category of journaling. Hiemstra (2001) refers to different forms, such as dream book, spiritual journal, theory log and others. In an earlier work Hiemsta (1988) states:

This recognition of personal values, beliefs, and the various changes a person undergoes throughout life, if combined with a personal philosophy statement, can result in foundational tools useful as guides or mirrors for subsequent professional action and ethical decision making (p.178).

As Heimstra (1988, 2001) has stated, journaling can be a useful way to gain personal development, and to promote learning. It was interesting to find that some of my participants preferred to write their film reviews in a form of journal writing, similar to autobiography and diary.

## **Culture Shock**

In research on international students' learning journeys, there is one phenomenon which is crucial to understand. We call it "culture shock." Pedersen (1995) defines culture shock as "the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment," applying to "any situation where an individual is forced to adjust to an unfamiliar social system where previous learning no longer applies" (p. 1). For an international student, culture shock is a response to an individual's experience with a foreign, unfamiliar environment, while facing all the unfamiliar beliefs and customs.

Pedersen also illustrates five stages of culture shock: "(1) the honeymoon, or first contact with the foreign culture; (2) disintegration; (3) reintegration; (4) autonomy; and (5) interdependence" (Pederson, 1995, p.8). These five stages outline the process of adjusting to the new culture, involving identity reconsideration and personal recognition in this cross-cultural experience. Somehow, the newcomers

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have to focus less on their own culture, and to learn and experience the new culture in order to respond and adapt, thereby moving toward the “hypothetical goal” of bicultural identity (Pedersen .1995, p. 263). This process also depends on the age of the person starting interaction with the new culture and how long the process is. Different individuals must deal with it differently, and there is no guarantee that everyone will reach the goal of bicultural identity. Indeed, we never know how long it takes from stage one to stage five. However, some information to decrease the suffering of culture shock is always necessary and helpful. In this circumstance, films can be very important. They can ease the process because viewing films does not require an immediate interaction with events and concepts that cause culture shock. This opportunity of reflection is shown in some of the comments made by study participants after they viewed films.

### **Methodology part includes:**

Participants and Procedures

Ethical Considerations

Selection of three films to be viewed

Research Setting

Reflection on the quality of data

### **Participants and Procedures**

Data was collected from different sources: autobiography, journal analysis, film reviews and interviews with four students studying in Montreal universities who watched the films selected for this research. . Through the process of conducting the research, minor changes to the original design were made at the request of some participants. In addition to my involvement as participant/researcher through my

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autobiography and journal reflections, five other students took part in this study. All of us had been brought up in China, and came to Canada in our teens and early 20s.

One of these participants played a unique role because we had known each other since childhood in China. Ming had come to Canada to study at the University of Ottawa, one year after I entered Concordia University in Montreal. Over several years in China, and before I planned the thesis, we had discussed films and foreign culture; in fact, I had suggested films to help him learn about Canadian culture.

Once I had begun data collection for the thesis, I conducted an in-depth interview with Ming, summarized the main points of our previous conversations about film, and requested that he allow me to use relevant parts of his journal to compare to my own journal data. These were particularly valuable because many of his journal entries were written both before and after coming to Canada, and are related to his recognition of aspects of Canadian culture, his adaptations to a new culture, the culture shock he has undergone, and the changes of viewpoint brought about by watching films. And, as will be documented in the discussion comparing the Chinese educational system and the Canadian system, he was especially thoughtful about this topic, including a discussion of the characteristics of good teachers.

Following my review of Ming's data, I added my own journals as well as film reviews I had written. Next, I screened the three films to be used in the study, and arranged for the participants to view them. Through one-on-one interviews, I explored the effects of these films on the participants after they completed watching them. They were requested to write informal critical film reviews, giving a sense of their feelings, opinions, and new perspectives gained, if any. For instance, what kind of knowledge is enriched? Is there any psychological change and benefit to you? After watching these films, has your perception of Quebec and Canadian culture changed? Do you think these films can help you learn about culture, and if so, in what way? What are your expectations and recommendations about learning from culture-related films?

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Of the four other participants: Grace, Wendy, Zee, and Chris, Zee chose to share with me her own story personally instead of writing film reviews. Zee's personal story is related to culture and film, so I kept it as part of the data set presented in this thesis. There are 9 film reviews of three films written by the other three participants. Each of the three participants contributed three reviews., originally written in Mandarin. I chose useful parts, edited and translated them to English. They also answered interview questions and their responses are included in my data set.

In summary: In addition to my own autobiography and journal entries which provided part of the data on which this thesis is based, five other Chinese students participated in this study, three wrote film reviews and participated in one on one interviews, one shared her own story and my main participant, Ming, provided part of his journals. They were all brought up in China and came to Canada in their adolescence for the sake of academic pursuits.

### **Ethical considerations**

All participants in this study were fully informed and took part in the research voluntarily. They were asked to sign a consent form, once the purpose of my research was refined. They were notified of the exact procedure, how and where the data will be used and to whom my research will be presented. I briefly introduced my research to the participants to request their participation in the study. I will make sure that all their personal information remains confidential and their identities are protected. Confidentiality will not be breached unless the participants have offered express consent. All the four participants were assured that any personal information from the interviews would be protected and never revealed. Furthermore, I removed all details from Ming's journal susceptible of compromising his confidentiality in my thesis.

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### **Selection of Three films to be Viewed**

In my experience as a fan of films, the “Canadian culture” I learned about in many Canadian films strongly reflected American influences. Because Canadian films are not widely recognized in China, it’s not easy to find a Canadian film either in cinemas or DVD stores where Hollywood blockbusters are more popular. Chinese people like French language films, but mostly the ones from France. They are more widely available in China compared to Canadian ones. For instance, if you ask a Chinese university student about *Jeux d'enfants* (两小无猜), *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (天使爱美丽) or *Paris, je t'aime* (巴黎我爱你), it is likely that a great many of the students have seen them. But the French language films made by Canadians are not that well known. Therefore, I chose to give greater emphasis to Quebec films. The films *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, and *J'ai tué ma mère* are set and shot in Quebec, and are in French. The third film, *The Attraction of Maple Leaves*, is in Mandarin, and was filmed in different locations in Canada.

I chose the film *C.R.A.Z.Y.* partly based on its achievements, and partly for its music. Moreover, it may be the first Quebec film widely welcomed in China currently. I saw this film before I came to Canada, in an event called “up-to-date excellent French language films.” This event was organized by a French professor whose wife teaches Film Studies. The couple is so interested in French language films that occasionally they hold events related to showing and discussing French films.

Xavier Dolan, the director of the film *J'ai tué ma mère*, is a genius; he is the scriptwriter, director, and the main actor at the same time in this film. Xavier is also a fan of the Chinese director Wong Kar Wai, who is one of my favorite film directors. Xavier Dolan was born in 1989 and is therefore almost of the same age with me and the other research participants. I chose his film, not only for its plot, but also because

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I admire Dolan's cinematography and believed that the other participants might be curious to see Quebec in a film through the eyes of a contemporary.

*The Attractions of Maple Leaves* is a documentary made by a Chinese film company, showing Chinese students' experiences in Canada. It was chosen because it so accurately portrays Chinese international students' lives. This documentary based on true stories is extremely vivid, helping all of us to reflect on our own experiences as international students studying in Canada. Because this documentary is filmed in Mandarin, it captures exceptionally well the impressions and differences about a foreign culture through a Chinese perspective.

### **Research setting**

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and film reviews first. The films *J'ai tué ma mère* and *C.R.A.Z.Y.* were purchased for viewing by the participants. The documentary *The Attraction of Maple Leaves* is available online. The link was given to all participants through email; all participants sent me their film reviews through email. Interviews were conducted in person and carried out in a place chosen by each participant, such as in a coffee shop or on the university campus. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, and all were conducted in Mandarin.

Because participant Ming is a friend from childhood who has discussed with me over a long period of time the issues which led to this thesis, information culled from our frequent conversations, previous emails, as well as his thoughtful journal comments has been invaluable in providing an alternate perspective to my own as researcher/participant. His extensive documentation provided a means of triangulation of data from my autobiography, and to a lesser extent, that of the other participants.

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### **Reflections on the Quality of Data**

The autobiography which follows in Chapter 3 is the story of my relationship with film since childhood and an illustration of how I explore foreign cultures through films. The parts of my journal entries presented here as data are mostly concerned with the differences between Chinese and Canadian cultures. In their film reviews, most participants connect the films with their own experience, and they, too, contrast the two cultures. Personal, one-on-one interviews were based on core questions.

Participants' impressions and perspectives about Canada and Quebec, as recorded in film reviews, interview responses and journal entries, are quite optimistic. Few negative viewpoints are expressed. The reason may well be that these participants chose to study in Canada for the advantages they saw in this process as compared to studying in China. For example, if they viewed the Chinese higher education system to be better than the Canadian one, why come to Canada.? Why not stay in China and be close to families and friends? Another reason may be that the Chinese are brought up to be polite and not to criticize, especially when living in a host country as guests or visitors.



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## **Chapter 3**

### **Presentation of Data**

This thesis derives its data from an autobiography based on the journal I have kept since arriving in Canada, as well as the journal of an acquaintance, Ming, who shared his own journal of experiences in living and studying in Canada, and the personal story told to me by another Chinese student. Three participants, all studying at the university level, were invited to view three films I selected and to write their own critical reviews of these films. These same students were also interviewed after the viewing of the films.

The data presentation prominently features an autobiography, illustrating my own experience of growing up with films, facing a new culture when I came to study in Montreal and how films have helped me to ease the symptoms of “culture shock.” In parallel, a journal analysis is presented as part of my data source, because journals can reflect the participant’s responses and reactions more directly, making them an important, almost autobiographical source.

I began keeping a journal at a very young age. My mother believed it would help me learn and memorize; she also thought that journaling would promote personal growth and development. Later, as a graduate student reading Hiemstra (2001) about the benefits of journal writing, I found my mother’s views and Hiemstra’s to be almost identical.

Because I can tell my journal everything without fearing the consequences, I think of my journal as a very close and trusted girlfriend. When I get into trouble, make a mistake, or do something embarrassing, I tell the journal first and calm myself down. After that, I consider the situation fully and make the decision about what to do next. Journal writing helps me to reduce stress, and keeps me healthy psychologically; it also leads me to solutions of the problem at hand. I learn to reflect and think critically

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through journal writing. When I look back to previous journals, I can see how I have changed and matured, and I can learn from this reflection.

When I entered Concordia University as an international student, I lost much of my confidence in writing because of the challenges of academic work and writing in English. I faced many doubts and obstacles, not knowing who I was and what I was doing. It was fortunate that I could turn to my journal with my complaints, trouble and sorrow.

In talking with other Chinese students about my feelings of self-doubt, I found that not only did they share these feelings, but some, particularly my childhood friend Ming, were writing about their experiences, even keeping diaries and journals. Later, when I began working on my thesis, I realized that journals and diaries would be important sources of data about how Chinese students were adapting to Quebec and Canadian culture.

My autobiography is presented as part of my “learning journey.” It documents my own experience of growing up with films, facing a new culture when I came to study in Montreal, and tells how films have helped ease the symptoms of “culture shock.” My autobiography is followed by the story of Zee, who told me her personal story, a short autobiography, rather than write a diary or write film reviews.

Three participants watched the films I selected for viewing and then wrote film reviews. Personal interviews were conducted with them. The interview transcript was read repeatedly and carefully, locating important sections, and focusing on the major categories, such as culture shock experience, and the advantages of using film as a teaching tool. I compared the similarities and differences between the responses. Because these Chinese students are more comfortable using Mandarin rather than English or French, I conducted the interviews in Mandarin. The film reviews and journals were written in Mandarin. My translations to English are presented with the data on film reviews and interviews.

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## Autobiography

A sub-title for this autobiography could be “Growing Up With Film,” which illustrates why it is relevant to my choice of research topic. I have a close relationship with film, mainly due to the influence of my parents and early years in school.

My mother is a very artistic woman who plays the violin and is that rare person of her generation who loves foreign films. Although my father is an engineer, he has great enthusiasm for music. In her spare time, my mother took me to see films, and I still remember the first film I saw in a movie theatre. It was a famous Indian film called “Awaara” which was made in 1951 and the dancing scene is incredible, and memorable still. That film formed my childhood impression of Indian culture, which is that India is a country full of warmhearted people and music lovers.

In my early childhood in China, there were few foreign movies shown in movie theatres. At home, we watched films on video tapes. She and I watched many Alfred Hitchcock films because she was a great fan of that director.

As a child, it was fantastic to explore the unknown world outside China. When I was eleven years old, my mother and I went to see a newly released film, *The Sound of Music*. Amazed by the soundtrack, I studied and learned to sing most of the songs in the film. One of my favorites was the song “Edelweiss.” Several years later, my school organized a play in English which was a short version of the film. I was selected to perform. I played my part successfully, and my mother felt so proud.

I believed that my mother would support me if I wanted to go to a film making school, because of her fondness for art and film. However, when I announced my plans, my mother told me that she could not accept them. I was shocked and surprised. She said, “My baby girl, you can do whatever you like after work; be a photographer, actress or film director. But you don’t need to make it your career. It’s not easy to feed yourself as a film director.”

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As a compromise, I enrolled in a journalism school. Film-related courses were offered there, and my parents thought that being a journalist was an acceptable career in China. In my film making classes at the school, I wrote scripts and made short films with my team. I had opportunities to see and write film reviews of foreign films. I began to focus not only on the cinematography and storyline of the films, but also on the particular culture each film showed. At the same time, seeing and reviewing the foreign films helped me to look more closely at the Chinese culture I grew up with.

China and Canada have many differences in culture, politics, education, and many other aspects of society. In China, the term “the 80s generation” designates people who were born between 1980 and 1990. Compared to their parents’ generation, they are more accepting of new things and open to the outside world, and at the same time, more creative and open-minded. However, they are still Chinese and it is said that “Chinese culture is living in their blood.” Students of the 80s generation are struggling between similarity and difference; they want to follow their desires and satisfy themselves. But on the other hand, they are still traditional and afraid to be different or to fail to meet their parents’ expectations.

Typically, parental expectations are that their child will have high marks in University Entrance Examinations and get accepted by a top university, then find a good job after graduation, marry a decent person, raise children like their parents did and it goes on and on. The most frequent words I hear from Chinese parents are “study well” and “be a good child.” I ask myself what the meaning of life is, if it is all the same generation after generation. Are we living to fulfill our own potential or just to satisfy other people’s expectations?

Several films are examined as part of my autobiography to show how they broadened my horizons, how they helped me think critically, and introduced me to cultural difference in other countries. This too was part of my “learning journey.” An especially important genre of films dealt with the subject “What is a good teacher?”

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which is a topic I was to return to again in my discussions with participant Ming, when I conducted my thesis research.

An example of this is the film *Dead Poets Society*, which impressed me greatly. It is about a progressive teacher in a traditional educational institution. It inspired me to feel that what matters in life is that you know your passion and you fight hard to pursue it.

If we view films in this genre, such as *Dangerous Minds*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, or *Lean On Me*, we find many notions of what it looks like to be a good teacher. I'll expand on this in a film review I wrote about the French film *Les choristes* (*The Chorus*), and I will contrast this with the kind of teaching I experienced in the Chinese educational system.

Based on the kind of education I received in China as a teenager, I felt that most teachers in Chinese schools focus on students' academic achievement only. (The teachers I mention here exclude kindergarten educators and university professors.) It is not the teachers who are to blame, because it's not easy to make changes as an individual in one particular educational context. When we were high school students, we often talked about the characteristics of a good teacher. Palmer (1998) describes good teachers as having a strong sense of personal identity which shows through their work; and, having a capacity for connectedness (p.2).

As students, it seemed to us that good teachers have two characteristics: being kind to students and having passion for what they were teaching. The teacher liked by students who also brings positive educational effects is known as a good teacher.

The French film *Les choristes* (*The Chorus*) reflects this clearly as I show in my film review:

In January 1949, music teacher Clément Mathieu, arrives in "Fond de l' étang". This is a boarding school for orphans and problem boys. He was hired to work as a teacher. The school is administered by the cruel president Rachin, and most boys will

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get harsh punishments when they make mistakes. But ,Clément, the music teacher decides to teach the boys to sing in a choir when they have free time, and finds a singer with talent and career potential called Pierre Morhange. He also cares for the young orphan Pépinot, who expects his father to visit every Saturday near the gate, although, in fact, his parents died in World War II. In his own way, Clément changes the lives of those boys, his peers' lives, and his own.

The film shows a sharp contrast between the teachers in *Les choristes* and the principal Rachin. Students are like useless rubbish to him, and his style of teaching is “action, reaction”. Old Maxence, the school doorman, still believes in these children even though sometimes he is hurt by them. Clément doesn't agree with teaching by punishment; he cares about the children in his class and wants to make some changes to the horrible, traditional methods of education at Fond de l' étang. Through music, he finds the potential in those “useless rubbish.” The students' interest is gained and they feel care and love which they didn't have before.

Clément's relationship to three particular students in his class illustrates that he is a good teacher. When Clément arrived, he witnessed that the old doorman Maxence was hurt by a trap made by one revengeful student. Later Clément learned that the student Mouton was the one responsible for this prank. However, he does not send Mouton to the president because he knows what will happen to Mouton. On the contrary, he asked Mouton to take care of Maxence when he returns from his hospital stay as a way to apologize. Mouton felt deeply sorry in his heart, learned his lesson and made up to Maxence.

And then there is Pierre Morhange. Clément was told to keep an eye on him because he looks like an angel but acts like the devil. When Clément started the choir, Morhange didn't take part in it. One day he was found by Clément singing alone with an amazing voice. At that moment, Clément knew that with training, Morhange would be an excellent musician. At the end, Morhange left Fond de l' étang

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and went to a music school, and as we see at the beginning of the film he becomes a successful musician.

Perhaps the most touching and telling relationship is the one he has with the little orphan Pépinot who waits for his father to come every Saturday. Maybe, he knows that his parents are dead and he just doesn't want to believe it and tries to live in his own fairy-tale world that dad will come to visit one day. Clément tries to protect Pépinot against the bullies at school and to make him safe no matter what. On that special Saturday that Clément leaves the school, Pépinot's dream came true as "his father" takes him home."

Excellence, expertise and compassion are the words to describe Clément and his story as a good teacher. The ideal of the "good teacher" seems to be one of understanding, compassion and mastery. An old saying indicates that teaching is the kind of profession which teaches all professions. I know a very good teacher who has so many successful students working in all kinds of different areas, but they were not that great when they started the journey as students. Also from Clément's story, it's good that in his own way, Clément changes those boys' lives, the lives of the other employees as well as his own. Yes, a good teacher can make change happen.

I saw this film when I was in high school. I was surprised to realize that there are teachers who really care about the students irrespective of their academic success. When I entered university, in China, I met professors who are "good teachers" like the ones described earlier. However, it's difficult to be "a good teacher" in the Chinese education system. If your students don't get high marks, you are a failure to the world as an educator no matter how much your students like you. This cultural impact has strongly influenced Chinese teachers' teaching methods so it's not hard to understand why they treat student academic achievement as priority and care less for the rest. Nowadays, Chinese educators are eager to develop different education methods similar to ones in the western world. They can recognize the advantages

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and benefits of western education. That's one of the reasons so many Chinese students want to pursue education in western countries. Realizing the need for change and bringing about the actual change are two different things. Improving and developing any particular educational system is a huge project., and will take many years.

*Babel* and *Crash*: Living in a multicultural world.

Multiculturalism is a concept central to Canadian society, educational and social policy, as well as political discourse, but not in China. It is acknowledged that China does not have a history of recent immigration. Although there are 55 other ethnic groups besides the major one called Han, the other ethnic groups put together still form a numerical minority compared to the Han majority. As an adolescent growing up in China, differences between ethnic groups were never obvious to me, except for the conflicts in Tibet.

The first time I heard the word "multiculturalism," I thought about religious difference which is only one aspect of it. In 2007, I saw the two films *Babel* and *Crash*. Both of these films illustrate conflicts and miscommunication in a multicultural world. From watching them, I gained a better understanding of multiculturalism. I now know that conflicts and miscommunication in a multicultural context are not caused just by cultural or religious difference itself, but mostly by the refusal to understand and accept others and their difference.

From my perspective, the world is becoming a smaller and smaller global village, where immigration and migration of people from different ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds have created many multicultural societies. The fact of multiculturalism exists and impacts human life deeply. How can people understand each other from a totally opposite side? Once we thought that language is the most essential key to communication, but English is now used as a world language. Why then can't we understand people or do we not want to accept people who are not



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the same as ourselves? What prevents people of different race, ethnicity, religion or culture from understanding each other? Why there are conflicts in the multicultural context? No matter which way people are divided into groups, whether classified by race, ethnicity, religion or culture, individual difference is a reality.

Gail asserts, "In a multicultural society, good communication skills should always include an awareness of other cultures, including diverse ways of interacting and communicating" (Gail, 1999, p.155). For instance, you may understand a person's language well, and know every word and sentence spoken, but you may not have an awareness of the culture and other background embedded in the language. Maybe you never tried to understand. Then there would still be a huge communication gap between you two. On the other hand, by gaining awareness of that person's cultural background, you will be communicating differently. The problems of communication are the theme of the movie *Babel*, which is reviewed here briefly, and followed by my review of the film *Crash*.

The name of the movie *Babel* comes from a story in the Biblical book of Genesis, which tells us that God became angry when man tried to reach heaven by building a tower (later named Babel). God stopped the work by devising different languages that made understanding impossible. The word "babel" came to mean noise and miscommunication.

There are two kinds of conflicts in the movie. In the first, conflicts between different cultures with different languages arise because both cultural and language differences are major barriers between people's communication. Second, there are conflicts within the same culture. Hatred and misunderstanding between daughter and father, broken marriages, fighting between brothers, the feeling of loneliness, and the loss of trust between people are conflicts found within all cultures.

The movie *Crash* features violence and conflict within a multicultural society.. and city in the United States. The story takes place during one twenty-four hour period in Los Angeles, California:

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A black TV director and his wife were stopped by two white police officers on their way home, and they were insulted by one white cop for unwarranted reasons. The other one didn't join in the insults because he thought it was wrong to do so, but he couldn't say anything.. Later, at the end of the film, the white cop who should be punished saved the TV director's wife's life in a dangerous traffic crash. The honest Persian (Iranian) store owner almost killed the Mexican locksmith, but at last he was stopped by a little "angel"—the locksmith's daughter. In another sub-plot, the district attorney and his wife lost their jeep because of two black men's robbery; the wife was so angry but put her anger on the innocent locksmith. A black officer in the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) who was threatened by his boss tried so hard to find his little brother, but he didn't know his brother was the one who robbed the jeep. It seems as though these things are independent and have nothing to do with each other, but actually they were connected in a magical way.

To understand this film, it is important to know that the city of Los Angeles is known as a multi-ethnic and multicultural city which also carries the stereotype of being filled with violence in the pursuit of sex and money. It is a city of immigrants and great cultural diversity. However, such conflicts are not just happening in the United States of America but in all multicultural societies. As Joshi said in his book: "We must recognise that the problems of culture today are so complex and all-encompassing that they cannot be understood without a multi-disciplinary approach"(Joshi, 1989, p.89). There are so many conflicts here as in *BABEL*, not only racial and cultural conflicts, but also conflicts between colleagues, friends, families and even strangers just because of our suspicion, sensitivities, and other complex factors. Multiculturalism is not the only and most important reason leading to conflicts. There are conflicts between different cultures and even in the same culture. These vary from person to person from one individual to another. Director Paul Haggis tries to show people's struggles and emotional changes through the conflicts. The main point of the complex and interconnected conflicts shown in *Crash*

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isn't how dangerous these conflicts can be, but how they can be eased if we show our inherent humanity.

As Kreps & Kunimoto recommended in 1994:

Strive to become a role model in multicultural settings by demonstrating that you respect cultural diversity through sensitive cross-cultural approaches to intervention, communication, and care. Multicultural communication proficiency is affected ultimately by the two essential notions of content and relationship(p. 56).

When I embarked in my studies in Montreal, I learned about the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). The organization's objectives are as follows:

The overarching objective of the National Film Board is to produce and distribute audio-visual works which provoke discussion and debate on subjects of interest to Canadian audiences and foreign markets; which explore the creative potential of the audio-visual media; and which achieve recognition by Canadians and others for excellence, relevance and innovation---Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage (2009)

Few other Canadian institutions have been as effective as the National Film Board in showing the history and culture of Canada. I always introduce my friends to the films of the NFB; you can watch online every film produced by the NFB. One of my favorites, which I first saw in a reading course at Concordia University, is the documentary *Earth to Mouth*. The 2003 documentary, directed by Yung Chang, was filmed at the Wing Fong Farm in Ontario, showing the planting and harvesting of Asian vegetables grown for Canada's Chinese markets and restaurants. The major roles in this documentary are the owner Yeung Kwan, his mother Lau King-Fai and the farm's Mexican workers.

Yeung Kwan feels proud of his independence, personally and financially; he is the farm owner who has total control, and he can take care of his mother well. Lau King-

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Fai finds the place peaceful for her, and living with her son and helping on the farm is her happiness. For the Mexican workers, although it's hard working on the farm, they earn enough money for their families back home.

*Earth to Mouth* explores many cultural, social and economic issues. For example, immigrants are not all the same; some have their own businesses and some work hard for others. But they all have the same hope which is to take care of their families. However, those immigrants who are financially successful have their own problems. Immigration is a major issue in Canada, related to many social issues such as diversity, multiculturalism, or what is referred to in Quebec as "reasonable accommodation."

Immigrants from China working in farming plant Chinese vegetables because of the market need. It shows that Chinese people maintain their Chinese background through their foods. The situation has not changed much even though they have been living in Canada for a long time now. They don't accommodate to Canadian food fully. It also shows the living style, and relationships between family members, as well as parents' expectation of their children in both Chinese and Mexican culture. We can see from Lau King-Fai what it means to recognize Canada as a new home.

This film can be used to elicit students' self-awareness regarding diversity and cultural issues, and it can serve as a starting point for discussing multiculturalism. *Earth to Mouth* was of special interest because of its topic of Chinese Canadians, but it is just one of the many National Film Board documentaries which do an amazing job to help people understand multiculturalism, not only for the Canadians, but also the new immigrants.

The analysis of Canadian films will be extended in a later chapter to show how these films can help viewers to understand Canadian and Quebec culture.

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### **Comparative Journal Analysis: Mine and Ming's**

As I have already written in an earlier section (pp. 19-20), I began the habit of keeping a journal at a very young age. At that time it was just one of my mother's parenting methods to help me learn and memorize. She believes that there are tremendous benefits of journaling, such as promoting personal growth and development. Later I found that my mother's view has many agreements with Hiemstra (2001) about the benefits of journal writing, although she has not even read one single article of Hiemstra's.

I treat my journal as a very close girlfriend. I tell her everything without fearing the consequences. When I get into trouble, make a mistake or do something embarrassing, I tell the journal first and calm myself down, after that I consider the situation fully and make the decision about what to do next. Journal writing helps me to reduce stress and keep me healthy psychologically. It also leads me to solve the problem at hand. I learn to reflect and think critically through journal writing, I write frequently about my viewpoints of life, friendship, art, society, and so on. It doesn't matter whether those perspectives of mine are right or wrong, my ability of thinking and reflecting are promoted and my horizon is broadened because of my journal. Sometimes when I look back to my previous journals, I can see the flaws and my immaturity at the time of writing and I can learn from this reflection. Journal writing inspires the growing awareness of my personal thoughts and feelings.

I was always the top student in my Chinese Literature class, especially the writing part. It came easy for me to do well in writing and literature exams. However, when I entered Concordia University as an international student, everything became so hard. I lost my confidence in writing because all the academic work is required in English instead of Mandarin. I faced so many doubts and obstacles. There was a period that I really didn't know who I was and what I was doing. It's fortunate that my journal is always around, to listen to my complaints, trouble and sorrow. She never asks me to

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stop complaining, she never gets annoyed because of what I say and she never leaves.

There are thousands of Chinese students studying all over the world, especially in developed English-speaking nations in search for better educational opportunities. When these Chinese students start their studies in the new cultures, they feel in difficulty, and disoriented both socially and educationally. These are the same feelings and challenges I faced when I began my studies in Montreal, and part of the basis for the research of this thesis.

Some students may need a very long time to adjust. They may experience culture shock, language learning difficulties, homesickness and loneliness, as well as differences in local customs. One of my friends once told me that what we lack most as international students is the feeling of recognition; the recognition of us as fellow students, and as individuals. Because many of us do not have established social networks close at hand, everything, even small matters, becomes complicated and difficult. We may also face stress and depression, or sometimes acts of discrimination.

Chinese students moving abroad make a major personal and financial decision in order to pursue their education, so it is important to recognize the difficulties they face in school. First, Chinese students sometimes find that their Canadian classmates are much more outgoing, brave and they always fully participate in class which makes the Chinese feel more and more self-doubting and humiliated. The behavior Chinese students were taught since their childhood makes it hard for them to take part in the classroom discussions.

Since their first days in school, students are expected to be shy, hard-working, and respectful of teachers, so that they do not challenge what is said in class. They are not a group who makes trouble, they are polite, and they do well academically. They have had pressure about excelling in their studies from the moment they were born.

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Chinese students are not expected to help with household chores, or with family income generation if they have not finished their studies, even at the masters' or doctoral level. However, they are expected to work very hard to get good scores in their studies. If they do not do so, the entire family will feel ashamed to face friends and relatives, so they cannot disappoint their parents. They hear constant reminders in the form of these old sayings:

“You should speak only when spoken to;

You should not question your elders;

You should respect your peers;

Sit properly, listen attentively, don't fidget.”

When I first started my studies in Montreal, I made notes in my journal about classroom behavior which would never be seen in a Chinese classroom. I wrote them in my journal:

“Today is the second week of my first semester in Concordia. I have to admit that I still feel uncomfortable. Everything is strange and different, and the most terrifying thing is that it seems like I'm the only one who feels the strangeness and difference. I figure maybe it's because I'm the strange and different one comparing myself to other classmates. I feel like an idiot sitting in the corner. But everyone is nice and welcoming, especially the professor. I never expected to talk to a professor as a friend when I was in China. In the classes I've taken, I found that sometimes my classmates eat during class, I was a little surprised at first. Because you can never eat in classroom in China, only water is allowed. Eating in class is very impolite in China; it shows no respect to teachers. If you do this, you may make your teachers angry. You can only eat during the breaks when class is over, but some strict teachers such as my high school head teacher don't allow students to take any food to school. Everything here is so fresh and different, and think I kind of like it.”

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In the schools and universities in China, teachers and professors receive maximum respect. From kindergarten on we're taught "Respect your teacher and revere learning." Students in China participate in class only by listening attentively to teachers without interruption, and by taking notes of everything teachers say. If you have a doubt, you ask your classmates first to make sure the question you have is not what the teacher has already talked about. Sometimes your classmates will help you with the queries you have. But if you are still puzzled, you wait outside the classroom or the teacher's office and humbly ask your questions. If you are sure that your teacher has made a mistake in class, you should never mention that for fear of hurting the teacher's feelings. Many discussions are held outside the class between classmates, because in class it is a very serious place for just listening to the teachers and to keep quiet. At the end of each class, teachers usually ask students if there are questions, and you must remember not to ask any stupid, irrelevant ones.

This sharply contrasts with what I remember of the beginning of my first semester at Concordia University. I talked to one of my professors about this and she told me to participate in class more. I said to her that I'm so afraid to ask something stupid because of my little knowledge of the new program, "No question is stupid, don't worry," was her answer. But in China, if you ask a stupid question, teachers may say "Why don't you understand something so simple, what have you done in class?" That may be why those Chinese students who are new arrivals look so quiet and silent when they first beginning a western style education. In China, they are taught to focus more on hard work, and they feel the pressure of bringing recognition to their families. They are therefore more likely to focus on effort instead of cultivating their imagination and creativity and their participation in classroom discussions.

Contemporary Chinese education tends to emphasize repetition, rote learning, and memorization or "surface learning" (Biggs, 1996). In contrast, a process of Socratic questioning and evaluating of beliefs and knowledge underlies Western



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education or “deep learning” (Biggs, 1996). On this topic, Ward (2001, p.32) writes that

The educational environment is a microcosm of the larger society, reflecting its values, traditions, and practices; thus, two dimensions that exert strong influence on classroom communication and interactions are individualism , collectivism and power distance.

As Ward (2001) reports in a research study of Asian students at Lincoln and Canterbury Universities, 80% of students in the study spoke of different learning styles as a significant study problem, and many remarked on difficulties in group discussions with local students. To get used to the new circumstance of education, Chinese students have to adjust their way of learning.

Every Chinese student studying abroad has a unique story; however, there are similarities. For further illustration, the following section presents comments from the journal of one of my participants, Ming, who is a student in Ottawa.

Ming came to Ottawa for a master’s degree program in August of 2010, one year after my arrival in Montreal. Excerpts from his journals, translated from Mandarin, are presented to indicate what he thinks of Canadian culture . These comments were prompted by, and relate to films. He chose the parts of his journal which he considered useful for my research, and allowed me to translate them into English.

Ming and I have been friends since childhood in China. After I started my academic journey in Canada, he decided to pursue a Master’s degree in Canada. However, Ming’s application to graduate school did not proceed that smoothly. Although he had good marks as an undergraduate, at first, he did not get accepted by any of the schools he applied to. “I’m really kind of plain, I guess I’m just so similar to every other Chinese student, nothing special. That’s it.” Luckily he eventually got accepted by one of his first choice universities, the University of Ottawa. His comments reflect his feelings of self-doubt and disappointment.

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‘Today it’s unforgettable. I received an email from Waterloo University telling me that I’m not chosen by them in an extremely polite way. I can’t describe my disappointment, then I told myself if I can’t go to study in Canada, I’ll just go and *work* in my father’s company, no big deal. However, not long after that mood, I was informed that I got accepted by University of Ottawa, what can I say. It was like I had suddenly gone wild. I can’t wait to share this good news with Di. And Ottawa is not far away from Montreal. We can visit each other quite often. I felt so relaxed. What a day!’

Ming became one of the participants in my research study, and provided not only the material from his journals, but also extensive responses to the questions about films. He told me that his first impression of cultural difference between China and the western world was the attitude about romantic relationship.

“I suddenly decided to go to see a film. At last I chose a romance called *He’s Just Not That Into You*. It’s a film illustrating different people’s romantic relationships and their attitudes about romance. I always sense that through films in western societies, romantic relationships are part of normal adolescent student experience, and those experiences can lead to personal growth. They may become capable and mature in relationships in their 20s. By contrast, in traditional Chinese society, romantic love in adolescence is never encouraged either in school and home. Chinese parents never encourage their children’s romantic relationship early; they are told to focus on academic pursuits. And in most high schools in China, romantic relationships are restricted and forbidden by school rules, even today. However, it doesn’t mean students cannot start a romantic relationship; they just need to keep it secret. And at the same time, one thing puzzles me a lot is why there is not proper sex education in Chinese school curricula. Why do teachers feel that is unnecessary? In my opinion, romantic relationship can not be forbidden in high school. It’s acceptable not to encourage it, but in fact it’s so natural and should not be treated as bad behavior.

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What school should do is to guide students and provide information about how to have a healthy relationship. I think that's something Chinese schools should learn from western education. I can't forget the time in high school when I was dating my girlfriend; we were hiding from everyone like we were thieves or something. ”

When Ming arrived in Ottawa, he already had some idea about what he might face at university because I talked to him about it frequently. But he was still frustrated by the difficulties in studying in a totally new language environment and the feeling of peer separation. He wrote:

“In my studio, most students are international students from India, China or Arab countries. I guess this is because of the nature of my major. There is an obvious phenomenon which is that the studio is divided by ethnicity. Chinese always hang out with Chinese, Indians form their own small group. Moreover, we are using our mother language in our own group. We do talk to each other and study together. But I still sense the feeling of peer separation which is not what I want to pursue in Canada.

I feel like I don't have same interests with my Canadian friends, and they don't understand me either. One embarrassing thing is when they are joking, I don't get it. It's not because of language, I understand what they say. I just don't understand the humor.”

Although I had experienced the same feelings of peer separation that Ming mentioned, the cause could be different. Most of my classmates are older, and many are married and even parents themselves, and the life style is different.

Grace, another one of my participants, came to Canada as a teenager. Like Ming, she found that in high school, students separate into groups by ethnicity, or race: White group, Chinese group, Mexican group, Indian group, Arab group and so on. Grace spoke of many different groups within the Chinese category; there are 'CBC group' (Canadian-born Chinese), 'Banana group' (yellow face with white mind), as well as 'fresh face group' (new immigrants). It is understandable that the feeling of

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peer separation can be called a normal experience, for international students, not only for the Chinese, but also because members of other ethnic groups may have experienced this.

Documentaries about Chinese students studying abroad present a common and familiar theme--loneliness. Distance from family, friends, familiar environments, social networks, and even favorite foods may cause loneliness for Chinese students. Students may be told that if you interact well with the host nationals, you will feel less lonely. However, it's not easy to interact well with people in the host country. Excerpts from my journals record my own experiences with loneliness:

"Joyce called today and told me she misses me. It reminds me of the documentary I saw with her in my undergraduate years. The documentary was about a young student's studies in London. She was 16 and she cried almost everyday because of loneliness. At that time, Joyce knew I would go to Canada soon. She comforted me and said, "Di, you are always sweet, people always like you. I think you won't be lonely when you get there. I believe you will have lots of new close friends."

"But, I'm sorry, Joyce, I may disappoint you. I don't have any friends and I'm so lonely everyday. I really wish you are here with me"

"Today is the end of December, it will be New Year's Day soon. Actually I'm not that interested in the festival itself. I just miss the feeling of being with friends and families. January 1<sup>st</sup> is Dad's birthday and Mom always makes a fantastic meal to celebrate. I won't be around this year. It will be my birthday seven days later, I just can't imagine how I will spend it alone."

In Ming's journal, there is a slightly different aspect about loneliness; not having time to interact with classmates, a theme repeated by many students:

"I've already been in Ottawa for more than three months. I'm catching up with my English, and I did well in assignments. But I used to play PS2 or basketball after class with roommates, now I'm watching boring talk shows. What a day!"

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Ming relates this theme to differences between Chinese and Canadian student culture, and continues:

“To be honest, I like my Canadian classmates. They are outgoing and funny. They have invited me to hang out with them sometimes too, to dance in a club or to drink beer together. I guess this is the typical way of spending time with your friends here in Canada, but I need more time to focus on my study, especially because the language environment suddenly changed, there is so much going on for me to handle. I can’t fail my parents’ expectation. I don’t know what Canadian students think about Chinese classmates. Smart? Quiet? Hard-working? Boring? Dull? This moment reminds me of a scene of a TV series called *Gossip Girl*. A Japanese girl who is so excellent in study still tries hard to be friends with her high school’s homecoming queen, for the sake of peers’ attention. Here in western culture, you can’t be popular only because of your academic success. Personal charm can’t be ignored if you want to be popular in school. This is different from China. Academic success alone can definitely offer you popularity when you are a student in China.”

Last Christmas, Ming came to Montreal to visit me. I was beginning to think of topics for my thesis. As we often did, we talked about our experiences as students in Canada and compared them with our experiences in China. Later, Ming wrote in his journal much of our conversations about parental expectations:

“I feel like the parental expectation in China is just to ensure academic success. For instance, children are expected to get “straight A’s” and this is the way to earn respect and attention from their teachers and classmates. They are not allowed to date in high school which may distract them from studying. At first, I thought this situation only describes Chinese students in China. However, the second generation of Chinese immigrants in the western world is also struggling with this. Not only Chinese, but most Asians. There is not right or wrong about this. I just become aware that we should not give children so much pressure; we should encourage them to pursue what they really like and want. Or they may break down at some point.

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Chinese children must hear about Filial obedience all the time from their parents. It is one of the most important aspects in Chinese culture. You should obey your parents unconditionally because they love you most. You should appreciate and follow your parents' advice. Now it is the twenty-first century, some traditions can be developed. Of course we should respect our parents, there is no doubt. However, we should know how to make decisions for ourselves instead of obeying our parents all the time."

Although I agree with many of Ming's observations about Chinese parents' expectations, it is ironic to note the improvement of my relationship with my parents. They still want to know everything about my life and they still give advice. However, I realize they are not doing that just to exercise their authority but mainly to provide suggestions as experienced individuals. My parents are making great efforts to listen to my viewpoint and support my decisions. I am pleased that I talked often about the difference between Chinese and Canadian culture with my parents, and they realize some of the disadvantages for me of parenting in a traditional Chinese way. Also, I find that my parents do acknowledge I am an adult now, and they agree that it is time for me to control my own life.

### **Zee's story**

Zee chose to tell me her story of school and personal experiences instead of writing a film review. I have translated her story from Mandarin.

"I came to Montreal at the age of 15. I still remember my first day in class. I had no knowledge of French, and my English is not good either. I was terrified to go to school; I cried loudly and wouldn't let my uncle leave when he dropped me in the classroom. Everyone was staring at me and I felt so embarrassed. There were so many students in the French welcoming class that the teacher could not pay attention to each single one separately. To be honest, French was so difficult to me when I just started that I wanted to quit school so many times. I did not ask questions but only

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listened. The experience of studying in French was hard, but I have to say it is easier to learn a language at younger age. Many of my friends who came here in their 20s find it much harder to learn French than I did. After several years, I became fluent in French; school work was not a tremendous obstacle for me. I had more time to make friends and enjoy my youth.

If you ask about my own experience about films, well, it started since I was eight or nine. At that time I found myself different from other girls, but I didn't know what the difference was. And then around 13, I think, when teenage girls were talking about which boy they liked or did not like, I realized I liked girls more than boys. Suddenly I realized my difference even though I still didn't know what it really meant to be homosexual.

I remembered one day I saw a film called *Boys Don't Cry*, directed by Kimberly Peirce, which is about a lesbian girl who went to a new city where nobody knew her. Tina pretends to be a boy; she wants to forget that she is a girl and wants to start a new life as a boy. *Boys Don't Cry* shone a light on my life, as I knew that I am not the only different girl in the world. I wanted to know more. I was so confused and afraid of who I was before, I couldn't tell anyone and I suffered a lot. What I did was to find as many films or books about homosexuality as I could. Those books and films supported me through my time of darkness. I became clear about what was going on with me. At that time there wasn't much knowledge or understanding about homosexuality in China, and even though China is not a religious country, it is difficult for people to accept someone being homosexual. I was not a brave girl, and I can't face the circumstance of being pointed at and called a freak. I couldn't expose my identity as a lesbian. By the way, two of the films Di selected for this research also have the storyline of homosexuality.

Before I came to Canada, I knew that gays and lesbians can even get married legally in Canada. I figured that maybe I won't be called a freak in Canada, and maybe I won't be discriminated against. In Montreal I met girls who are of the same

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sexual orientation as I, and then I started not to feel ashamed of myself. There is nothing wrong in being different. That is the part of Canadian culture I like most, I enjoy my life here. I feel so free and happy. I'm now having friendships and I also do well in school. My French is fluent and I'm improving my English in an English-speaking university. However, there is still a big regret in my life. I guess my parents will never accept their daughter as a lesbian. I don't know when I will be able to gather enough courage to tell them. I love them so much, so I don't want to see them hurt."

## **Film Reviews**

The aim of my study is to explore the educational value of film in the learning journey about Quebec and Canadian culture by Chinese students. There were numerous films and documentaries about Quebec and Canada to select from., for viewing by my student participants. It was also important to choose films that would be engaging and appealing to the participants, who had agreed to write informal film reviews of the films they saw, and to analyze and discuss them in one-on-one interviews. The three films chosen are:

*1. J'ai tué ma mère* (2009) directed by Xavier Dolan.

The haughty teenager Hubert fights his mother violently; he hates her cheap sense of clothes and artificial decorations in the house. Besides these superficial details, Hubert rebels against the manipulation and control by his divorced parent. At the same time, he feels guilty and sorry about the attitude toward his mother. Confused by this complicated emotion, Hubert is struggling against this love/hate relationship day by day. Moreover, Hubert suffers through the mysteries of adolescence, about loss, ostracism, art, love, and friendship. This film reveals the turbulent relationship between mother and teenager son, and the contradictory sentiments experienced in that particular period of time.



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2. *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005) directed by Jean-Marc Vallée

Zac Beaulieu was born in a traditional Christian family in Quebec on December 25, 1960. C.R.A.Z.Y stands for the first letter of names of the five boys in Beaulieu family, Christian, Raymond, Antoine, Zac and Yvan. It is important to the storyline that the father is a devoted fan of singer Patsy Cline's version of Willie Nelson's classic song "Crazy." Zac is the fourth child and his father's favorite son. However, when Zac realizes that he is homosexual, everything changes. Zac suffers because of his own sexuality, identity and relationships with family. It is a story about a simple seven-member Quebec family, but it is not a simple story. The story questions family, sexuality, identity, and friendship within a Quebec context.

3. *The Attraction of Maple Leaves.* (2004), directed by Xu Sun

This documentary is a record of the experiences of twenty Chinese students studying and living in several Canadian cities, from Vancouver to Montreal. We discover how they start new lives, how they face culture shock, how they go through home-sickness and loneliness and how they achieve successes far away from home. Different from the former two films, this film is produced by a Chinese film company and narrated mainly in Mandarin. China has made several documentaries about Chinese student in different countries: United Kingdom and Japan, to name a few. This documentary not only recorded the lives of these twenty Chinese students, their conversations with principals and teachers in Canada, but also interviewed their parents in China. When you come to Canada, you leave everything you used to depend on behind, so the first thing you learn is independence. This is a preview of real experience for students who plan to study in Canada.

These three films reflect Quebec and Canadian culture in multiple visions, contrasting similarities and differences to offer a broader perspective. I selected relevant parts of my participants' film reviews and translated these excerpts.

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## Film Reviews of *J'ai tué ma mère*

**By Chris:**

"I saw *J'ai tué ma mère* "right after finishing all my final exams. I'm surprised by the script which was written by a 16-year-old boy. He directed this film and played the main role too. If you ask me what my first impression was, I have to admit that I really don't like the accent of Quebec French, just kidding. Based on my personal experience of living in both Paris and Montreal for many years, I have some knowledge about French and Quebec culture. At the same time, I'm a Chinese which makes my perspective interesting. Montreal is a really unique city, it's different from many other big cities in Canada, for instance, Vancouver and Toronto. In my view, Vancouver and Toronto are similar to American cities, but Montreal is more French and European. You can feel that from this film, the structure of the city, the atmosphere of art, the relationship between people. It's totally different from those blockbusters made in Hollywood, this film is very Quebec. You can sense the culture of Quebec in detail through this film. Of course, you have to be patient and to slowly allow yourself to sense it.

However, what I want to talk about is the relationship and communication between this boy Hubert and his mother. There are a group of people in the world who are mothers. I remember my friend once shared a joke with me, which is, if someone becomes a poet, he must have a terrible mother. I can't see the film without recalling my own memories. There was a period of time when I hated my mom, because I couldn't approve what she did in the name of loving me. I saw myself through Hubert's sad eyes.

Before I came abroad, I knew that western culture encourages people to express their feelings in a forthright manner. Yet, the Chinese are always good at hiding their true negative feelings in order to show respect and be polite. This is the influence of thousands of years of traditional Chinese culture. "If someone hurts my Mom, I'll kill that person. However, if you ask me to find a reason of preferring that person over

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my Mom, I can give you a hundred reasons.” When I heard this line of Hubert in the film, I realized this was what I thought about my mother in that particular time. But I never have the courage to express my emotions like this. As a teenager boy, I had so many fights with my mother, I love and need her, at the same time, I don’t understand her and sometimes I hate her. I thought she was a control freak. I had no freedom and I didn’t want to follow her will. I thought I would never satisfy her because her expectation for me is so high. My mother is always an elegant and amazing woman in other people’s eyes, but to me, she is a selfish person full of vanity who gets angry easily. Now I look back, I feel sorry about all these complaints about my mother, especially when I left home to Paris, I found out how much she loves me and how much good she has done for me. When I was sick alone in a foreign country, I missed her so much. I remember when I had a fever at home, she didn’t sleep just in order to look after me.; I remember that she wakes up at five everyday to make breakfast for me, and so on. Suddenly, I understand her, the same as Hubert.

If you ask me what I like most about Quebec culture, maybe not just in Quebec, but many western countries, it is the fact that people really express their feeling easily and firmly. Children say “I love you” frequently to their parents, friends share complaints about each other, people apologize for what they have done wrong. Chinese people prefer to be polite, so they don’t express their negative feelings directly. I don’t know whether this is good or bad. What I prefer now is to let someone you love know your true feelings even if it is anger, jealousy or complaint. In this way, everything is easier and sometimes things work out even better.

I can’t forget the first time I came back home from Paris, I sat by my mother and said “Mom, I’m sorry about everything that happened before. And I love you.” She cried so hard in my arms. For the first time I really listened to what she said and tried to understand her. These things are not hard, it’s just we don’t do them often because of our culture.

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In my view, what Xavier Dolan wants to indicate, in the final analysis, is that although misunderstanding and chaos exist, the son still loves his mother so much, not less than how his mother loves him. After all the hurt and embarrassment, love is the end and love is endless.”

**By Wendy:**

*On aime sa mère presque sans le savoir, et on ne s'aperçoit de toute la profondeur des racines de cet amour qu'au moment de la séparation dernière.*

----*Guy de Maupassant*

“When this sentence appeared at the beginning of the film, I guess it must be a story about mother. And it is, in a heavy and violent way. To be honest, sometimes it's hard to see. I really don't feel comfortable when I saw Hubert shouting at his mother in this film. I do understand the complicated relationship between Hubert and his mother because of his identity recognition journey. And when you are a teenager, it's normal to rebel and to find out who you really are. I have experienced that also. However, based on my culture, I will never speak to my parents in that tone even when they are wrong. The relationship between parents and children in Canada is not the same as in China. In this film, Hubert screams at his mother, and even tells his teacher that his mother is dead. I know this is also partly because Hubert is living in a broken family where he is raised by his mother alone. I feel that maybe it's good to express your feelings straight, but I can never shout at my parents. Compared to Hubert, I do feel the atmosphere in my family is sometimes so serious; we don't hug or kiss each other. Even so, knowing that my parents love me is what matters, although it is not always shown in an obvious way. And at last Hubert feels the deep love from his mother after all the confusion and misunderstanding. He holds his mother's hands, and all the great memories of childhood with her are flashing by, that makes a fantastic ending for the film.

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I was brought up in a very traditional Chinese family; I respect and obey my parents even as an adult. I'm used to sharing problems and troubles with my family and searching for the solution based on their suggestions. Once one of my Canadian friends thought this to be really bizarre, she even asked, "Do you have your own opinion or you still listen to your parents on everything?" Of course I have my own viewpoint. But because of the environment I was brought up in, I have the similar values with my parents. Besides they are much more experienced than I am. I don't find it strange to consult them to know their opinion. I feel that in Western culture everything is based on individualism rather than on group and community. However, in China everything is based on family or even a larger group. For instance, in western society, individual rights are so important. This is absolutely different in China where a country, society or family is set above your own self. "

**By Grace:**

"Divorced family, communication failure, campus life, homosexuality and so on are revealed in this film. I thought it would be a film about teenage crime just from the title. However, after all the superficial contexts, it's a film about how to understand and forgive each other. At the end of the film, Hubert's mother accepts his boyfriend and his homosexual identity. The mother and the son recognize the love filled in them and forgive each other. In my view, director Xavier Dolan is smart not to make homosexuality a key role in the story. It is shown just like other normal romances, no difference from the love between a teenage boy and girl. Still, I want to talk about it a little bit more.

It's not normal to talk about homosexuality in public around China, although people have acknowledged it. Of course, there are gays and lesbians in China. However, as same-sex marriage is not allowed in China and people are more conservative, it feels like being homosexual is a crime in China. It's because of traditional Chinese culture; they treat it as wrong even though most Chinese don't

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believe in God. As there are some organizations in China trying to promote human rights by stopping discrimination towards homosexuality, one reason they use is Christianity is not an accepted institution in China.

This puzzles me a lot, because religion is a part of Canadian culture. But at the same time Canada is the third country to accept gay marriage. I just don't understand. Maybe I should see this issue through the concept of freedom, human rights or marriage equality. Yet, to me, Christianity and same-sex marriage are totally contradictory. That's what I thought about in the first place after viewing this film and I still don't have an answer for my confusion. This is one interesting part about Canadian culture which I can't comprehend."

### **Film Reviews of *C.R.A.Z.Y.***

#### **By Chris:**

"In this film, I find many scenes of praying. It is acknowledged that China is a country without official religious orientation. So I can't relate with this aspect properly to make comments. I see Zac uses God and religion to resolve human and spiritual relationships. When he realizes his homosexual identity, he prays. In case of problems with himself, he just prays. I personally don't understand this. I don't know because I have never interacted with any kind of religion. When I'm in trouble, I just work harder, I believe in hard work, I guess. At the same time, I have no knowledge about the power of praying which is seen as common here. However, I was told by some Canadians that right now religion doesn't matter terribly to many people in their daily life. People may say that they believe in God, but that doesn't mean God plays an important role in their lives. However, maybe science and capitalism are more valued today in Canada. I know that religion is still an important part of Canadian culture. In the film, you can discover the Beaulieu family goes to church on Sunday frequently and it's also a part of their social life.

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When I started living in Montreal in the downtown area, I discovered that there are so many churches. Once I went inside one of them and coincidentally heard choir singing, I felt peaceful. I sat there and just listened until they finished singing. I can't distinguish whether I was touched only by the music or something else.

I started to read the Bible recently as one classmate who is a Christian gave me one. It's not like suddenly I want to have a religious belief or whatever, I just want to get in touch with it since it is part of Canadian culture. I also want to experience different values and perspectives through the lens of the Bible."

**By Wendy:**

"This film is about a boy called Zac Beaulieu who was brought up in a family with his four brothers. This film crosses 20 years of political and cultural turbulence in Quebec, but more importantly, it's about relationships and love between family members.

I started living in Quebec three years ago. From what I have experienced and observed, people know very little about Quebec in China, and people don't know much about Canada either. They think Quebec is just one province of Canada, nothing special. Many years ago the Chinese came to Quebec without knowing it is a French-speaking province, they are not aware of the history of independence fighting either. Frankly speaking, there are not so many great Canadian or Quebec films compared to American blockbusters. However, this film is the evidence which proves Quebec cinema is still active, as it really reflects Quebec culture and it's marvelous. It stands for the pureness and honesty of Quebecers, their passion for life and their love of making music in the cold snowy weather. Moreover, it pictures the deep love between family members which reminds me of those lovely Québécois.

Quebec is trying hard to preserve the French language and culture, even though they are fighting for independence in a non-violent way. Quebecers are still so in love with their culture. Last century Canadians were following the trend of American

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culture, but they were still persistent with their own, especially in Quebec. Quebec culture is a combination of Canadian and European culture, and the uniqueness is how Quebecers understand nature and family. When the Europeans are tired of religion and the Americans are facing political storms, Quebecers are still singing their hymns in the church. To them, religion is not just a form, but the bond connecting family relationships. Christmas is not just a religious ceremony, but the opportunity to gather together as a family. The love of Quebecers for music is another line in this film, the dad in the Beaulieu family sings the same song year by year, and at the same time the sons follow the fashion trend of music. Although the Beaulieu family is a traditional Christian family, we can see how family members try to protect the little son Zac when he is called a gay and accept him as who he is.

I want to share a story Zac heard in the film. There is a man who is so faithful, he walks everyday and leaves two lines of footsteps, one belongs to him, and the other belongs to God. However, when he was facing tremendous misery in life, he only found one line of footsteps. He was disappointed and suffered a lot to overcome that difficult period of time, and then one day he saw God. He questioned God, "Why do you say you'll be with me all the time? Why did you leave me when I needed you most?" God was silent for a moment and answered, "When your life was most difficult, you only saw one line of footsteps because I was carrying you on my back."

Sometimes I ask myself why we love films; maybe it's because they come from life and they are so real and close to us. Films show us everything that might happen around us, through the lens of the camera which points to some details in life which we may otherwise ignore. Moreover, thanks to films, we reflect on our own lives deeply. To me, the Beaulieu family is just like a normal Quebec family living around me here in Montreal. They are so real, I know them and I like them. I'm fond of Quebec films, they are simple but touching, and the culture, the people and the city are just as fascinating as they are in the real world."



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**By Grace:**

“Catholicism was once a major force of Quebec society. Through this film, we can see the difference caused by the Quiet Revolution in the 60s in Quebec. I luckily read a book about that particular period in advance. It is not expressed obviously in *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, but you can still sense it.

On December 25, 1960, Zac Beaulieu was born in a normal Quebec family. He is Mr. Beaulieu’s favorite son. He was seen as a boy with magic power, he can make a baby stop crying, even let a bleeding wound heal. The experience of coming back from death twice proves that Zac is special; everyone also thinks he is a blessed kid because he was born on the same day with Jesus. Zac is always father’s favorite until his homosexual identity has been revealed. In the end, it’s the love for music that helps Zac and his father ease their turbulent relationship.

We can see the change in teenager Zac, through his dressing style over a decade. We can see David Bowie, Bruce Lee, Elvis and Johnny Rotten. The soundtrack is amazing: Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Jefferson Airplane, The Rolling Stones, and especially the singer, Patsy Cline. They all remind me of that golden time of music.

Quebec has a really special relationship with Canada because of politics and history. I’m not interested in politics. What I know is that to me Montreal is a very artistic city. The passion of music by Quebecers is one reason. In the soundtrack, there are great Quebec classics as well as rock legends of that time. It shows that Quebec culture is also mixed with pop culture. It’s like historical Quebec meets modern mainstream. There are so many music festivals during the year in Montreal. I realize that music is definitely a key part of Quebec culture.

One of my friends once told me that this film is a vivid portrait of Quebec culture and captures its beauty and contradictions. He also said that if you were lucky to be born in the same period as Zac, you may find many touching points about being a Québécois.”

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## **Film Reviews of *The Attraction of Maple Leaves*.**

### **By Ming (written as a journal entry):**

“My impression of the documentary which talks about Chinese students’ lives in Canada is so vivid. There are so many similarities compared to my own experience. There is no doubt that I benefit from the traditional way of Chinese education. My memory is trained to be very active and the level of my mathematics is higher than normal Canadian students. But I also acknowledge my deficiencies in creativity and imagination. The western format of learning has opened my eyes and broadened my horizon to a new level. Now I have the opportunity to think about one problem works instead of just giving a correct answer. This is the difference between answer-oriented and idea-oriented, right? It is amazing, that’s all I can say...”

“....I still remembered how I was fascinated by those films talking about western high schools. The classroom is active and interesting, there are a lot of things to learn but at the same time less pressure. You are encouraged to think and create. Your mind is open and your imagination is inspired. I was so jealous of that kind of high school life. Now I’m living in my dream now, to study in a Canadian way. Although I still feel grateful about my previous year’s learning in a Chinese way which trains my memory well and ensures my strong skills in science courses. It’s awesome to experience these two different education styles in one life.”

### **By Chris:**

“This documentary interviews more than 10 students. There are similarities in their stories, the difficulties and the obstacles they face. Because I know it’s filmed by a Chinese film corporation, I assumed it wouldn’t be too objective. My dad is a journalist; I have a critical perspective about Chinese media. It is always trying hard to protect the perfect image of the nation to Chinese people and form a dream bubble that we are living in the best country in the world. However, in a word, even though some issues are over-exaggerated in this documentary, it is a good film. Many

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scenes are familiar to me as I have experienced the same process personally, especially the story of Liu..

In Liu's story, we learn that he has graduated from a university in Vancouver, and is working in a local company where he finds differences between him and his peers. Liu still holds the attitude toward work based on Chinese culture, for instance, obedience. Because obedience is always expected in Chinese value (I think it's not just Chinese, Japanese and other Asian cultures do too). This is one obvious difference, as the western world encourages individualism. There is a shot of Liu's boss saying "Liu is a very polite and gentle person. He shows total respect for everyone. But he is used to agreeing with my ideas and he never challenges me." We can also sense it in the documentary that in Canada, if you are personally talented, you have more opportunity to be valued. An individual who is intelligent deserves to be appreciated. On the other hand, for the Chinese, one person's brightness is not enough because at the same time you have to work in the interest of the entire community. In Canada, a person is taught to have individual creativity and work based on individual performance. However, it doesn't mean that the Canadians don't value excellent teamwork performance. It's just different.

There are definitely some bizarre sounding or strange looking things for you to get used to and to understand about a new culture. Sometimes there is no right or wrong, just differences. In my viewpoint, cultural difference is not scary at all, what is scary indeed is that if you still continue to live completely immersed in Chinese culture and avoid trying to adapt to the culture of the host country. I feel lucky to be a Chinese in Canada, which makes me special and unique. It also helps me to form a critical and objective viewpoint. "

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**By Wendy:**

“As this film is about Chinese students’ lives in Canada, most scenes are shot in school and are about their academic experience. I remember one line stating, “The hardest thing is fitting in.” I can’t agree more. It’s not that we don’t want to fit in; it’s just not that easy. However, you have to try. You never know. Now one of my closest friends is a Quebecer. We started talking because of one CD on my desk which happens to be her favorite. We found we are both jazz fans, then we agreed to go to the Jazz Festival together and we hung out together often since then. We had so much fun that summer. Even now we still don’t understand each other completely because of cultural differences, but we communicate and explain our own thoughts to each other to achieve better understanding. As it’s illustrated in the documentary, it’s hard for international students to fit in the mainstream. But I believe that if you don’t make that effort yourself, you will never be able to fit in.

The documentary also talks about a girl named Wang working on her Ph.D. In China ; everyone is telling her that a Master’s degree is enough and if a young woman gets a Ph.D, it won’t be easy to get married. Men don’t want their wives to have higher education than themselves. But Wang finds it pretty normal to be a female Ph.D in Canada. Most of her classmates are females whose education level is even higher than their husbands’ education level. Wang shared her perspective about education which is to learn what you like and learn whenever you want to. This part of culture difference is related to women’s and gender issues. China is still a more patriarchal society, so it’s acknowledged that men should have higher education than their wives. For instance, I’m not sure it’s just in Canada or most western countries. I find that it’s so normal for girls to smoke. In China, if a young man smokes, it’s pretty normal. But if a young woman smokes, people will assume she is not well behaved. When I first saw several girls smoking together on Saint-Catherine Street, I noted that they were laughing and so happy. Do you know what my first impression was? “That’s a beautiful scene.” That’s what popped in my head.

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Then I was confused. How can you make assumptions about the character of a young woman just because she smokes? Why is it OK for boys to smoke at the same time? Quebec is really doing a good job protecting women's rights. But what makes me happy is that recently, I see huge progress being made by China about women's rights. I witness the development of efforts to protect women's rights in current China; this is positively amazing."

**By Grace:**

"I've seen a documentary in the same category with this one before, about the stories of Chinese students studying in Japan. At that time I was shocked by what those students have been through, because there are many similarities and customs in common between Japanese and Chinese culture. Also linguistically, the Japanese language is easier for Chinese to learn, and the food is similar. Moreover, there are not always obvious differences of appearance between Japanese and Chinese. However, Chinese students are still facing culture shock in Japan. I remember there is a period in history when the relationship between China and Japan was not good, and many Chinese who were living in Japan exaggerated their experience of hard times, not in an objective way.

The story of Shuang Chen in this documentary impresses me most. She comes from a middle class family in China. It's understandable that the life of a middle class family in China doesn't equal the same level in Canada. Her parents can't afford a lot of money to support Shuang, so she found her own way to save and earn money. She's great at her studies and always gets scholarships which makes her satisfied and proud of herself. On the other hand, Shuang finds herself really weak at social life compared to academic achievement. She's very shy and quiet. Without enough friends, the feeling of homesickness becomes stronger and stronger. Living in Canada provides an opportunity to learn from her Canadian classmates, Shuang starts to be more open and outgoing. This personal transformation makes it easier for

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her to get along with Canadian classmates and adapt to Canadian culture. Like Shuang, I learned here in Canada that if you want to make friends with someone, you should not just stand still and wait. You need to make a step forward. Friendship is not a one-sided affair. It is true that we Chinese are often shy and quiet, but we can not always use this as an excuse of not having friends. We are always afraid of making mistakes or doing something stupid in front of people, and we are sometimes so serious about something that doesn't need to be so. People won't laugh at you or make fun of you just because of your little mistakes, even when it's kind of a stupid mistake. When I tell myself to relax and be easy-going with people, I feel less nervous and I behave less awkwardly. Then I started to have friends. That's the beginning of feeling recognized in this strange city.

There were many difficulties I experienced at the beginning; I tried hard to adjust to the new environment. I appreciated the nature of schooling here in Canada. We don't just recite and memorize the books. We listen to stories, play games and communicate. This style of learning was the reason I overcame language difficulties. I think you can learn anything well if you enjoy the process of learning. And I also want to share that after coming to Canada, my character changed in a good way. I was so shy and fearful, because in China the environment at school is quite dull and teachers are very solemn and oriented toward keeping discipline. But I learned to open myself up and enjoy friendship. I also discovered my own sense of humor which provides me with more opportunities to make friends.

This is not just a simple documentary about the information of studying abroad, or the beautiful landscape of Canada. There are moments in this film which make you laugh and cry, especially for us who are sharing the same experience right now. I believe that we can all find sentimental segments in it and look back in our own lives to think about. I was silent after finishing this film. You can find the answers to your own unique confusion and uncertainty. No matter what kind of Chinese student you are, it will definitely leave something deep in your heart."

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**Interview results:**

Responses to questions asked of all participants are summarized after each question; responses are not identified by individual participant's names.

Question one: What is the greatest challenge of studying in Canada?

"The language, I think, at first. My confidence in study was kind of destroyed when I first came here. My parents are supporting me in every way; I really don't want to disappoint them."

"I think the thing that troubles me most is the feeling of loneliness, the way of making friends here is different from China. Maybe I am seen to be a boring person because I'm shy. I want to have close friends, I just don't know how."

"One problem is that I'm still hanging out with Chinese students most of the time, and it feels like I'm still in China. This is fantastic sometimes. But I really want to get into deeper touch with Canadian culture through daily life, such as having Canadian friends; it's just not as easy as I thought."

Question Two: Had you seen some films about western culture before coming to Canada? What did you think at that time?

"My first impression was that the style of education is amazing. China is still following the elements of traditional education, and I'm not saying that is bad. However, education should be the tool of encouraging imagination and individuality, not putting everyone into the same mold."

"I felt that the way people treat relationships with parents, friends or lovers is different, how to say, they are dealing with their feelings openly. Chinese people like hiding their feelings instead of expressing them straight; sometimes this makes things more complicated."

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“If you ask me, I’ll think about the word “religion.” Maybe that’s because most people in China don’t have religious beliefs, so it feels a little strange when I heard “God,” “church,” “bible” and other religious terms frequently. At present, I’m reading the Bible out of curiosity and want to know more about what it means for my friends.”

Question Three: Can you give me one word each to describe Canada and Quebec?

“Multicultural, Artistic”

“Peaceful, Pleasant”

“Polite, Energetic”

Question Four: What do you like about Canadian or Quebec culture, and what do you miss about Chinese culture?

“In Canada, music is an important part of its culture. This country is so energetic and artistic. That’s what I like most. But I miss the deep connection between friends when I was in China, the close bonds between people in the community.”

“Canada values freedom and individualism which is awesome. However, I can’t stop thinking about Spring Festival and Chinese food.”

“I love the way in schools, they encourage you to create and imagine. At the same time, I do miss the highly disciplined style in Chinese education, I’m more used to that. I know what I am saying is kind of contradictory.”

Question Five: What do you think about your experience of culture shock?

“The culture shock I faced was mostly academic. The education style is so different. I felt frustrated at first, but not because of language. I found myself lacking in ideas, creativity and imagination. “

“To me, experiencing culture shock will be a great adventure in my life. It’s arduous but also amazing. It broadens my horizon, for real. There are still many parts I’m not familiar about Canadian culture, but I don’t stop learning.”



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“Don’t be afraid, fear will not help. When you are facing culture shock, I mean, it’s not a bad thing. My advice is when you feel it is hard to understand about the new culture, get help from books or films. Or just find someone who was brought up in that culture and ask.”

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## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **Discussion**

The main research question of this study is: What can Chinese students learn about Canadian and Quebec culture from films about those cultures?, or, as in the thesis title, what is the educational value of viewing films about Quebec and Canadian culture? The other research questions addressed in this study are:

2. How can films help in this particular period of transition and adaptation?  
What are the benefits of using film in learning about cultures?
3. What is the experience of culture shock that Chinese students face during the transitional period to a new culture (Québécois and/ or Canadian culture)?

In order to answer these questions, data collection was designed to include several types of sources to ensure valid triangulation, especially as I was both the author of this study and thesis and also one of the participants. For example, my autobiography and diary notations related to these questions were compared with those of a close childhood friend from China, who is also studying in Canada., and who agreed to be another participant. Four other Chinese students participated in my study and viewed three films I had chosen for them. One of these participants decided to share her story with me and the effect of films on her own discovery of her sexual identity. The three other students viewed the films I had chosen and wrote film reviews about them. In addition, they individually participated with me in an interview session approximately three-quarters of an hour long, to answer the main

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questions and to clarify the meaning of their film review statements where needed. The data are presented in detail in Chapter 3.

Research Question 1: What can Chinese students learn about Canadian and Quebec culture from films about those cultures?

In response to this main question of the thesis, we see many themes presented through films about Canadian and Quebec culture. Based on the examination of the collected data, themes which appear frequently include romantic relationships, sexuality and homosexuality, individualism, family relationships and socialization styles, religion, contradictions with religious tenets and personal behavior, feminist and gender issues, classroom culture including student-professor relationships and behavior codes among others. Language differences and difficulties related to learning a new language were mentioned as well, but most students had anticipated them before coming to Canada. Rather, classroom culture of the Canadian educational system stood out as a major problem. This was reported both in the case of one student who experienced problems at the high school and CEGEP level, as well as by other participants, as they documented university classroom experiences. These included the pattern of relationships with peers and with teachers and professors as well as free expression of ideas and creativity, in contrast to the more formal and reserved behavioral norms in China.

This group of Chinese students acknowledged gaining an overview and general understanding of these issues mentioned above and the contexts in which they arise, when they watched the films utilized in this study. This was the case even though every film did not address all of these issues directly, as in a documentary fashion.. These acknowledgements support the point of view that films may not be able to give a full and complete understanding about one culture, but they can be a good way to start. Students' comments related to cultural themes addressed in the films are recorded here.

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## **Homosexuality**

“....Zac is always father’s favorite until his homosexual identity has been revealed...”

“...Before I came to Canada, I knew that gays and lesbians can even get married legally there...”

“...I do understand the complicated relationship between Hubert and his mother because of his identity recognition journey...”

“Canada is the third country in the world to have accepted same-sex marriage. This is different from China, it’s OK to talk about homosexuality, and it’s protected legally. Furthermore, discrimination is not tolerated.”

## **Religion:**

“...Catholicism was once an icon of Quebec society...”

“...When he realizes his homosexual identity, he prays. In case of problems with himself, he just prays...”

“...I want to share a story Zac heard in the film. There is a man who is so faithful, he walks everyday and leaves two lines of footsteps; one belongs to him, and the other belongs to God....God was silent for a moment and answered, “When your life was most difficult, you only saw one line of footsteps because I was carrying you on my back.”

In many of their comments, participants stated that they first assumed cultural differences to be the same as religious differences or based on religious differences. Through their experiences, they gained a better understanding of differences, as well as the more tolerant ways of a multicultural society which are not entirely based on religion.

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As one participant recommended, when we cannot understand the ways of the new culture, it is best to approach someone knowledgeable in that culture and ask the question which is bothering us.

**Individualism:**

“...In Canada, a person is taught to have individual creativity and worth based on individual performance...”

“...For instance, in western society, individual rights are so important. This is absolutely different in China where a country, society or family are set above your own self...”

These comments show that participants were clear that compared to the value of collectivism in China, Canada focuses more on Individualism which promotes freedom, independence and self-reliance. This is widely recognized not only in Canada, but also in other western countries. This was not the case in traditional Chinese society. However, in China today, there is a trend that encourages individualism and recognizes the benefits of individual creativity.

All participants mentioned the value of film for their understanding of the new culture in Canada and Quebec where they are pursuing higher education. This conforms with research literature, which reports that film is a uniquely rich medium for the purpose of studying culture because it communicates on several levels (Champoux, 1999; Summerfield, 1993). Films tell stories about people, their emotions, troubles, and challenges, how they relate to others, how they fit in the society and how they learn through daily experience. In this way, film provides an important representation of culture and related issues. All of the student participants also reported the importance of further readings and discussion with local friends and school mates, in order to validate with others the knowledge gained from films and journal reflections.

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Research Question 2: What is the experience of culture shock that Chinese students face during the transitional period to a new culture?

From the data presented in the previous chapter it becomes obvious that the students do indeed recognize the manifestations of culture shock but they do not attribute this culture shock to the strangeness of the new culture . Instead it is expressed as personal feelings of loneliness, peer-separation, missing home and occasions of festive gatherings. It is quite remarkable, however that none of the students think of this culture shock as negative or insurmountable. Some even think that culture shock has value because it motivates them to learn new things and to grow as individuals. They think that Quebecers in particular and Canadians in general are nice people, individually and collectively. Interestingly, Quebecers and Canadians are believed to be artistically (musically in particular) inclined and inventive and belief in this particular cultural trait helps students to adapt more easily to the culture.

Once Chinese students start to form an overview of the main traits and cultural characteristics of Quebec and Canada through films, they can compare them with their own Chinese culture to acknowledge the advantages the new culture can offer. Better understanding through viewing films will ease the hardship of culture shock and help the new students to adapt to the new culture. At the same time, they can be inspired to explore the host culture deeper through other channels such as reading relevant books, attending festivals and making friends.

It is also interesting to mention that the Chinese students analyze the context in which they are trying to adapt with some nuance and understanding. For example, about the difficulty of making new friends to counter peer-separation and loneliness they can understand that their age may be a factor. One participant mentions that her classmates are all older and have families and children to care for and therefore they do not have extra leisure time or flexibility to make friends with Chinese students who are unmarried and much younger in age. Another one acknowledges that the

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obstacle is mainly from his side, since he gets invited to join friends and socialize with them and participate in their leisure activities,. However, because he has to spend more time studying due to language differences, and the pressures of preparing for classroom discussions, he does not feel that he can take time off to join in, at least not yet.

Research Question 3: What are the benefits of using film in learning about cultures?

Based on these film reviews written by Chris, Wendy and Grace, and the story of Zee, we can become more familiar with the differences between Chinese and Canadian cultures. The journals presented and the personal stories also support the conclusions. The difference is not just a linguistic one. We can form an idea through the stories of films and the lens of the camera about differences in values, accepted norms of behavior and the different norms governing daily relationships between family members and individuals in other contexts in society. Films normally provide the opportunity to reflect on our own experience based on the examples offered as illustrations and highlighted through the stories on which these films are based. Therefore, it can be said that films offer an opportunity to compare one's own culture to the Canadian cultural context on which the films are based, and may lead to a better comprehension of both Chinese and Canadian cultures. As Chinese, we can also see how the western world views China. through the experience of studying and living here in Canada, outside of China. We therefore learn to be more critical about both cultures.

Films may not give you a full understanding about one particular culture or help you adapt to that culture perfectly, because culture is deeply embedded in each of us through socialization. It is impossible to recognize one culture entirely by only one single aspect of it. However, what films can do is to provide an overview, to generate questions and ideas and encourage the viewer to explore further. For example, two of the participants said that they had started reading the Bible to gain a better

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understanding of the religious elements in Canadian culture. Another stated that the film context facilitated a better understanding of some aspects of the culture which are not as easy to comprehend through the subtle context of everyday jokes. Therefore, films can be used as tools to open windows on a new culture and to encourage questioning and more in-depth exploration of the multiple layers of cultural differences as well as similarities.

## **Conclusion**

Films that focus on culture afford an outstanding opportunity to explore the real experiences in life. It is hoped that this study opens the way to a fuller understanding of Chinese students' experiences in and out of school, their identity development, personal development and relationships with families and friends in a Canadian context, along with re-evaluation, re-assessment and re-confirmation of their own culture and value system. This study may encourage Chinese students to learn about Quebec and Canadian culture easily and objectively through indirect experiences, and to reinforce their critical thinking and development of varied perspectives, through film watching. It can also help those Chinese students who plan to study in Canada to become prepared before facing culture shock directly, facilitating their adjustment to the new environment upon their arrival. It is also hoped that educational agencies and university recruiters will include relevant films and documentaries in the preparation stage for students who are planning to come to study in Canadian universities. However, limitations still exist in the process of using films to study culture. It is impossible to encompass all experiences within films; there are vast areas that are external to films, in which individuals learn through daily life experiences.

To conclude, films and documentaries can be a very useful tool to help students learn about a foreign culture, but they cannot be the primary vehicle through which complete understanding of a new and foreign culture will be achieved. Journaling



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after viewing a film is a very important additional tool and enhances the reflection and learning started by the story presented in the film. We may say that life and life's journey is the most spectacular film on earth and writing one's own story and journal as a reaction to a film gives us a chance to become more reflective and critical individuals and to make the journey worthwhile.

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## APPENDIX 1

### List of Motion Pictures, Documentaries and Television Series

- Alejandro, G.I. (Director). (2006). *Babel* [Motion Picture], USA, Japan, Mexico, Morocco; Paramount Vantage.
- Avildsen, J.G. (Director). (1989). *Lean on Me* [Motion Picture], USA; Norman Twain Productions & Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Barratier, C. (Director). (2004). *The Chorus* [Motion Picture], France, Switzerland, Germany; Vega Film.
- Chang, Y. (Director). (2003). *Earth to Mouth* [Documentary]. Canada; National Film Board of Canada.
- Dolan, X. (Director). (2009). *J'ai tue ma mère* [Motion Picture], Canada, Mifilifilms.
- Haggis, P. (Director). (2004). *Crash* [Motion Picture], USA, Germany; Lions Gate Entertainment & Bob Yari Productions.
- Kapoor, R. (Director). (1951). *Awaara* [Motion Picture], India; R.K. Films Ltd.
- Kwapis, K. (Director). (2009). *He's Just Not That Into You* [Motion Picture], USA, Germany, Netherlands; New Line Cinema & Flower Films (II) & Internationale Filmproduktion Blackswan.
- Peirce, K. (Director). (1999). *Boys Don't Cry* [Motion Picture], USA; Fox Searchlight Pictures & The Independent Film Channel Productions and Killer Films & Hart-Sharp Entertainment.
- Ross, H. (Director). (1969). *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* [Motion Picture], USA; APJAC Productions & Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM).
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- Sun, X. (Director). (2004). *The Attraction of Maple Leaves* [Documentary], "Chinese Overseas Students Series 2" China; Contemporary Chinese Audio Publishing.
- Vallée, J-M. (Director). (2005). *C.R.A.Z.Y.* [Motion Picture], Canada; Cirrus Communications.
- Van Sant, G. (Director). (1997). *Good Will Hunting* [Motion Picture], USA; Be Gentlemen Limited Partnership & Lawrence Bender Productions & Miramax Films.
- Weir, P. (Director). (1989) *Dead Poets Society* [Motion Picture], USA; Touchstone Pictures & Silver Screen Partners IV.

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## APPENDIX 2

### **Consent Form: Learning Journeys: the Educational Value of Film for Chinese Students' Adaptation to Quebec and Canadian Culture**

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Di Chen of the Department of Education of Concordia University as a requirement of a Master's of Arts degree.

I have been informed that the purpose of the research project is to identify the educational value of films in helping Chinese students learn about Quebec and Canadian culture.

I was informed that the research will be used for a Master's thesis. I understand that I will be asked to write short informal film critiques after watching those culture-related films selected by the researcher and that I may be chosen to participate in separate interviews. I am aware that these interviews will be recorded.

**(For the main participant only):** I also understand that the researcher will read my journals and I agree to offer detailed descriptions of my experiences before and after arriving in Canada, to record my awareness of the differences between Chinese and Canadian culture, and to share with the researcher the elements in the journal related to my feelings about culture shock and culture differences. I agree to provide my journals as a reference for the research for the thesis. I understand that my participation in this research is intended to help Chinese students to learn about Quebec and Canadian culture through films, and my involvement in the research will not be accessed.

**(For all participants):** I understand that even if I decide to participate at this time, I can change my mind in the future and withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation. I agree to personally inform the researcher of any decision to do so. In such a circumstance, all the data I have contributed will be removed.

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I understand that the data collected for this study may be published,; however, only the researcher will know my real identity and my name will not be disclosed. My identity will remain confidential in the research.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Print name (First name, last name): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## APPENDIX 3

**Examples of film reviews in the original Mandarin. Participants are not named.**

**The film *J'ai tué ma mère*:**

考完试后看了 89 年出生的 Xavier 少年 16 岁时写下的剧本，自导自演。如果你问我，看完电影最直观的感受。那就是，魁北克的法语真是没有巴黎的好听。开个玩笑而已，因为自身在巴黎和蒙特利尔居住的个人经历，还算是法国及魁北克文化有一定了解的。但同时因为我是一个中国人，这让我拥有的有趣的见解。蒙特利尔是个非常特别的城市，和大部分加拿大大城市是不一样的，比如说温哥华和多伦多。以我所见，温哥华和多伦多更美国化，但蒙特利尔充满了法国和欧洲情调。

从这部电影中你可以感受到，城市的结构，艺术氛围以及人际情感。这 and 好莱坞的大片是完全不一样的，它十分魁北克。你可以在细节上感受到魁北克文化，当然要有耐心，要慢慢地去感受。但是，我更想谈论的是片中男孩 Hubert 和母亲的关系。世界上有这么一群人叫母亲。想起以前朋友和我分享的一句玩笑话，说的是，如果一个人成了诗人，那他一定有一个非常糟糕的母亲。好吧，我承认，我无法理智地观影。我总是在 Hubert 忧郁的眼睛中瞥见自己的少年时光。我无法客观地去欣赏这部电影，每时每刻它都勾起我的回忆。曾经有一段时间我也恨我的母亲，因为我不能赞同她以爱我的名义而进行的各项行为。在我出国前，我知道西方文化更倡导人直接表达情感。而中国人一向比较内敛含蓄，有什么消极的情绪更习惯藏着掖着，在表面上都是有礼貌的，毕恭毕敬的。这应该是几千年传统的中国文化导致的。“若有人伤害她，我会恨不得将那个人杀掉，可是如果让我想，我会想出一百个让我爱他更甚于爱我的母亲的人”。当我听到 Hubert 在电影中说的这句话，我意识到曾经的我对母亲也是这样类似的情感。但我从来没有勇气像这样直接地表达我的情绪。作为一个青春期的男孩，我和母亲曾有过数不尽的争执，我爱她我需要她，但同时我不理解她，甚至有时候我恨她。我觉得她是个控制狂，我完全没有自由，而我也根本不想完全按照她的



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意愿行事。我认为我永远也无法达到她的期望，那期望太高了。不管母亲在外界的形象多么优雅多么精致，她在我眼里都是一个自私，虚荣，狭隘，脾气暴躁，肤浅毫无内涵的女人。现在回顾当年，我感到很抱歉，曾经那般的抱怨母亲。尤其当我离家一个人远赴巴黎时，我才体会到她是多么爱我，她为我付出了多少。当我在异乡生病时，我特别怀念她，我想起有一次我在家生病的时候，她整夜未眠就是为了照顾我，我想起她每天五点就早起为我做早餐，还有很多。突然，我理解了我的母亲，和 Hubert 理解了他的母亲那般。

如果你问我魁北克文化中我最喜欢什么，我想，可能不光是魁北克，而是西方社会。人们更善于轻易且直接地表达情感，孩子们和父母说“我爱你”，朋友间直接表示对对方的不满，人们会为所犯的错道歉。中国人更习惯展现礼貌的一面，那些负面的情绪很少直接表达出来。我不知道这是好还是不好。但我更倾向于向爱的人表达真是的情感，无论是愤怒，嫉妒还是抱怨。这样很多时候，事情反而更简单，有时会是更好的方式来处理问题。

我忘不了第一次从巴黎回家的场景。我坐在母亲身边，和她说：“妈妈，我为以前的一切表示抱歉。我爱你。”她哭得很厉害，而我紧紧地拥抱了她。这也是长大后第一次我真正地去倾听她并去理解她的想法。这些完全是很简单就可以办到的事情，仅仅是因为我们的文化习惯，我们很少这么做。但是，我算是体会到了直接表达情感的美好之处。

在我看到，Xavier 想表达的是，虽然误解和混乱会存在，但儿子始终都是深爱着母亲的，就像她深深爱着他一样。经历了所有的伤害与尴尬，爱是最后的结果，而爱是无尽的。

**The film *C.R.A.Z.Y.*:**

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这是关于一个魁北克孩子在一个普通的五个男孩的家庭中的成长过程。影片跨越20多年魁北克的政治和文化动荡，但是更重要的是家庭成员之间的关系和感情。

我三年前开始在魁北克生活。就我了解的而言，中国人关于魁北克知道的很少，或者说关于加拿大知道的很少。他们认为魁北克仅仅是加拿大普通的一个省份而已，没什么特别的。很多年以前，中国移民来到魁北克，竟然都不知道这里是说法语的，更别提关于抗争独立的历史了。和好莱坞大片相比，加拿大或者说魁北克电影并不多，尤其被中国人熟知的就更不多了。但是在我看来，这部电影是魁北克电影依然存活的一个证据，因为它带有如此强烈的魁北克气息。那种魁北克人特有的纯朴和宽容，那种在冰天雪地里培养出来的对于音乐和生活的热情，那种浓浓的家庭的亲情让我怀念那些可爱的魁北克人。

魁北克一直在努力保护法语和魁北克文化，即使他们现在闹独立劲头没有那么大了。魁北克人一直以自己的文化为骄傲。上个世界加拿大人受到美国流行文化的影响，这个趋势在加拿大也普及起来。但加拿大人还是保留这对自己文化的热爱，尤其在魁北克。魁北克文化是美国和欧洲文化的融合体，独特的地方就是在于魁北克人是怎样看待自然和家庭的。当欧洲人已经厌倦了宗教，当美国人经历一拨一拨的政治风暴的时候，魁北克人还是老老实实的在教堂里唱着赞歌。因为宗教并不只是一种形式，还是一种连接家庭的纽带。圣诞节不仅是一个宗教仪式，更重要的是全家人聚会的机会。魁北人对于音乐的热爱是本片的一个副题，片中的父亲执著地年年唱着同一首歌，而年轻的孩子们则追随者时尚。虽然 Beaulieu 是一个传统的基督教家庭，我们仍然可以看到在 Zac 被视为同性恋时家人是怎么保护和包容理解他的。

很想分享在电影中，Zac 听到的一个故事。说的是有一个人很信仰上帝，他每天行走，身后会留下两串脚印，一串是自己的，另一串是上帝的。但是在他最困苦的时候，他发现自己身后只有一行脚印。等他摆脱了困苦后，他质问上帝，“为什么说和我

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同在，却在我最需要你的时候离开我？”上帝回答说，“在你最困苦的时候，你看到只有一行脚印，那是因为是我背负着你前行。”

很多时候我问我自己，我们为什么喜欢电影，我想是因为他们来源于生活吧。它们那么真实那么亲切，就像是都发生在我们身边那般。电影能展示各种各样的可能性，并通过镜头去促发我们留意生活中被忽略的细节。要感激电影，我们能更深地思考我们拥有的生活。对我而言，Beaulieu 家庭就是一个生活在我身边的普通的魁北克家庭，就在这里，就在蒙特利尔。他们太真实了，我认识他们，我喜欢他们。我一直很喜欢魁北克电影，并不华丽却很感人。电影中的魁北克人和魁北克城市就和现实生活中的样子一样可亲可爱。

### **The Documentary Film: *The Attraction of Maple Leaves*:**

我以前看过类似于这样取材的纪录片，是关于中国留学生在日本求学的生活。如果我没记错的话，应该是叫“我们留学的日子”。说实话，当时看那个纪录片时，我是有被其中关于留学生求学的内容情节震撼到的，毕竟中国和日本的文化习俗是有很多类似相同的地方的。从语言学上讲，中国人学日语会比其他语系的人学更简单。而中日在饮食文化上也是接近的，另一方面，在外貌上中国人和日本人也是没有显著不同的。可是，中国学生们在日本还是经历了文化冲击。当然有阵子中日关系比较紧张的时候，不少在日本生活的中国人对自己的辛苦生活经历夸大其辞，造成了一定的负面影响，那显然也是不客观的。

这个纪录片中关于小女孩陈爽的故事让我印象深刻，她来自于中国一个工薪阶级的家庭。可以理解一个中国的中产阶级家庭是不能和加拿大的中产阶级家庭相等同的。她的父母并没有富足的经济实力去支持陈爽额外的生活费用，而她却很努力的用自己的方式省钱赚钱。陈爽的学习成绩十分地优秀，经常获得学校的奖学金，这让她非常满意和自豪。但是，陈爽发现自己在社交生活环节非常薄弱，完全不像她在文化学习

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上那样出众。她非常害羞非常安静，这样导致她没什么朋友。而当你身处异乡，朋友又不多是，想家的情绪会越来越强烈。在加拿大生活给了陈爽向本地同学学习的机会，她开始慢慢变得开朗活泼，这在一定程度上扩大了她的交友圈，并且给予她机会去和本地同学成为朋友并更好地融入当地的文化。

以我的个人经历而言，在加拿大，我了解到交朋友是另一种方式。如果你想和谁交朋友，你不可以仅仅呆在原地等待，你自己必须有所行动。友谊并不是单方面的事情。的确，中国人大部分时候是害羞内向的，但我们不可以用这个一直做交不到朋友的借口。我们常常太过于认真，害怕犯错，害怕在人前出丑，对于一些没必要的事情又过于较真了。其实大家完全不会因为你小小的错误就取笑你，即使它是有些可笑。在我渐渐告诉自己要放轻松，我反而不那么容易紧张了，在他人面前也表现地自然多了。这是我觉得被这所陌生城市认可的第一步。

这并不仅仅是个关于留学生活，或者说加拿大美丽风景的纪录片。我看它的时候，简直可以用又哭又笑来形容，尤其是对于我们这些有着相同经历的学生来说。我相信在这纪录片中我们都可以找到那些柔软感性的东西，并且回顾自己的生活，能思考的东西很多很多。说实话，看完这部纪录片的时候，我沉默了很久。我想我们这些留学生对于自己的困惑和不确定，那么肯定就能在其中找到共鸣及答案。无论你是哪种类型的中国留学生，你肯定都会被它感动，并且在内心深深地留下些什么。”