

The Impact of Film and Film-based Activities on the Attitudes of English-speaking Secondary-school Students towards L2 Chinese

Qi Zhang

Qi.zhang@dcu.ie

Dublin City University

ABSTRACT

While foreign-language films can provide second language learners with authentic exposure to the target language in a relatively natural context, very few studies have been conducted on the use of film in the teaching of Chinese language and culture. This research project used two film sessions with a group of secondary-school students of Chinese in order to investigate the influence of Chinese film on students' attitudes towards the study of language from three perspectives: the importance of language study, motivation, and cultural awareness. Comparing pre- with post-event evaluations, the correlation tests show that the integration of film in the classroom can indeed increase motivation to learn Chinese and improve students' understanding of Chinese culture, but not their perceptions on the importance of language study. Gender was also considered as a factor, and interestingly, compared to their female counterparts, male participants consistently not only report lower motivation, but also demonstrate less cultural awareness after film sessions. The study shows that film may be used effectively in the Chinese language classroom to help learners understand Chinese culture and serve to contextualise the Chinese language, to which British students may have limited real-world access or holiday exposure. The cultural elements conveyed by foreign language films and the audience's comprehension of these elements could be the starting point for establishing intercultural exchange.

Keywords: Chinese; film; attitude; motivation; cultural awareness

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of reasons for and advantages to incorporating films into foreign/second language learning, such as increasing motivation (Sherman, 2003), developing intercultural communication (King, 2002; Pegrum, Hartley, & Wechtler, 2005; Pegrum, 2008), and preparing the learner for global citizenship (Starkey, 2007). Although foreign language films might inevitably bring a certain frustration to language learners who have not achieved a high proficiency level, it is nevertheless obvious that the use of film is one of the key channels via which learners can be exposed to what occurs in the real world (Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011; Pegrum et al., 2005). Apart from putting the target language in a relatively natural context, films are a visual medium and a good starting point for learners to explore and experience another culture (Pegrum, 2008). It is possible that the motivation to learn a language could be enhanced through the incorporation of films into the language classroom (King, 2010). Many studies have been conducted on teaching and learning through film in European languages such as English, French, German and Spanish (e.g., Dupuy & Krashen, 1993; Pegrum et al., 2005). However, we lack information on the use of films in Chinese language teaching and learning, which may, in part, be due to the fact that British students have relatively limited access to the language in their immediate environment or through holiday exposure.

In addition, studies have shown the difficulties which learners of Chinese encounter when studying a language that is dramatically different from those languages more closely related to English, such as Roman and Germanic languages (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009; Zhang, 2010). However, Chinese is also perceived as a beautiful language by learners and their parents (Bullo-Alos & Wang, 2009; Zhang, 2010). It might therefore be worthwhile incorporating aesthetic products such as Chinese films into language courses. This might reduce learners' concerns about difficulty and also enhance motivation for studying Chinese. The objective of the current research is to conduct two film sessions with a group of secondary-school students of Chinese in order to investigate the influence of Chinese films on students' attitudes towards language study from three perspectives: the importance of language study, motivational change, and cultural awareness.

BACKGROUND TO CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHING

There has been a steady increase in the number of learners studying Chinese as a foreign language because of the Chinese government's support via the expanding Confucius Institute network.¹ By the end of 2010, there were 322 Confucius institutes and 369 Confucius classrooms² across 96 countries and regions in the world (Lien, Oh, & Selmier, 2012). The HSK (*Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*, Chinese Language Proficiency Test), a Chinese version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), has

witnessed ‘an annual increase in examinees of about 40–50%’ (Gill & Huang, 2006: 18). Meanwhile, according to a survey by the National Centre for Languages (CILT) in the United Kingdom, the number of secondary schools providing Chinese language teaching increased from 70 in 2003 to 500 in 2008 (BACS, January 2013). By 2010, a Secondary Language Trend survey found that 16% of the 566 secondary schools in England reported offering Chinese (CILT, January 2013). Although there has been an expansion in the number of secondary schools offering Chinese in UK, it is not clear if teacher training is adequate or if there is sufficient access to up-to-date teaching materials that are pedagogically and theoretically appropriate to the teaching of this language. In fact, these issues have already been witnessed in the United States (Wang, 2009) and Australia (Liu & Bianco, 2007). Therefore, the current study aims to design film viewing sessions for Chinese language teaching. In considering the study results, valuable pedagogical implications may emerge for creating teaching materials and for teacher training.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Film selection

All the participants were aged between 12 and 14. Restrictions on the film content were imposed. Additionally, since the students were in the first or second year of Chinese study, the films chosen needed to contain appropriate linguistic and cultural elements in order to avoid the ‘frustration of watching a film in an imperfectly understood language’ (Pegrum, 2005, p.55). As a result, the two films chosen for the current study were *Little Red Flowers* (Dir. Yimou Zhang, 2006) and *The Road Home* (Dir. Yuan Zhang, 2000).

Little Red Flowers tells a story of a four-year-old boy, Qiangqiang, who is sent to a residential nursery school because his parents frequently work away from where they live, in Beijing. The nursery school appears rich and colourful and there are a variety of cheerful rituals and games meant to train the children to adapt to a carefully organised collective life. The cultural significance of the film from a didactic point of view is that it can be used to initiate a discussion on collectivism vs. individualism and a comparison of the differences between China and UK in this regard (Hofstede, 2001, p.215; Zhang, 2010). In *The Road Home*, Luo Yusheng, returning to his home village to arrange for his father’s funeral, recalls the stories he heard about his parents’ romance and courtship, which captured the attention of the entire village. The film’s director, Yimou Zhang, is famous for using colour symbolism and the colour red is his signature colour (Ye & Zhang, 2000). This film further employs beautiful cinematography to retell the romantic history of the mother and father in colour, whereas the present, the time of the narration when the father’s funeral takes place, is in black and white. The viewers’ attention is drawn to symbolic cultural elements, including the use of certain colours, in Chinese cinematography as displayed in this film.

The storylines of both films are set in the context of school, which the participants would have been familiar with. The participants, who were students in secondary schools, might not have understood every single word of the dialogues in the films, but they were certainly immersed in a familiar linguistic context. In addition, the language employed in both films is near-standard Mandarin Chinese. There is barely any regional accent or dialect, which minimised comprehension difficulties connected to linguistic variation.

Participants

There were 16 male and 33 female students in either their first or second year of studying Chinese. They were all of British origin, aged between 12 and 14, and were based in the north-west of the United Kingdom. Besides, they were of the same level in their study of Chinese and were roughly of the same year at school. Each participant was asked to fill in a pre-event (screening) form and a post-event evaluation form before and after the two film sessions respectively.

Instrument

The study employed questionnaires before (pre-event) and after (post-event) the two film sessions. The pre-event questionnaire was used to gauge the students' overall attitudes towards language study and to the use of films in the language classroom, while the post-event questionnaire was designed to document any change in the participants' motivation, cultural awareness, and perceptions of using films in the language classroom. The questionnaires consisted of three parts. The first part was on demographic information of the participant. Appendix A outlines the second part of the pre- and post-event questionnaires, which was structured to evaluate the general experience and perceptions of participants towards the learning of Chinese through watching films. There were a total of 17 questions, with 3 or 4 on each hypothesis. Most of the questions were adapted from the study of Pegrum et al. (2005) and based on findings from previous studies on attitudes towards Chinese language study (e.g., Bullo-Alos & Wang, 2009; Wang & Higgins, 2008; Zhang, 2010). The post-event evaluation consisted of six additional questions that were not included in the pre-event questionnaire. Participants were asked to respond to all questions on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 (definitely yes) to 1 (definitely no). The third part allowed participants to give any suggestions for (pre-event) or comments on (post-event) the film sessions. Before the actual data collection began, the questionnaires were piloted on four secondary school students from the same region as the participants. Some words in the questionnaires were fine-tuned according to the pilot study results.

Procedure

According to Swaffar and Vlatten (1997), there are five pedagogical stages for the implementation of video-based activities in a language classroom: (1) initial silent

viewing of the film to identify story structure; (2) second silent viewing to identify cultural differences; (3) verbalisation by students of visual themes; (4) identification by students of minimal linguistic differences correlated to differences in meaning; and (5) oral production by students in the form of role play and group discussion based on the topics identified in the video. The five stages were embedded in the current study.

Two film viewing sessions were conducted between February and May 2010 in a local art-house cinema in order to provide participants with the full cinematic experience. Each three-hour film session was divided into three parts with two 10-minute breaks: pre-screening activities (followed by a 10-minute break); the screening (with a 10-minute break afterwards); and post-screening activities. According to King (2002), pre-screening activities are designed to familiarise the participants with the theme(s) of the film in order to prepare them for the story structure; this is equivalent to stages (1) and (3) in the study of Swaffar and Vlatten (1997). Meanwhile, similar to stages (2) and (4), the participants are encouraged to explore potential linguistic and cultural details relating to the film's themes to equip them with the necessary vocabulary and scenarios to understand and follow the story screened later on. Following stage (5), the purpose of post-screening activities is to enhance comprehension of the film and motivate the participants to further investigate the topics identified in the film through role play and group discussion (King, 2002).

The research information and consent form was provided to the teachers in charge of all the students in order to obtain approval from the participants and their parents before they attended the film sessions. The pre-event questionnaire was handed out in the cinema before the first film session started. The post-event questionnaire was completed at the end of the second film session.

Based on the above design of the film screening sessions, the current study aimed to investigate the following hypotheses:

- (i) The film sessions will raise Chinese learners' awareness of the importance of language study;
- (ii) The attitudes of Chinese language learners towards viewing films in the language classroom will be increased after the film sessions in comparison with before;
- (iii) The film sessions will motivate learners in language study;
- (iv) The film sessions will improve Chinese language learners' understanding and awareness of Chinese culture;
- (v) The film sessions will have a significant effect on the future language study plans of Chinese language learners;
- (vi) The factor of gender will have a significant effect on the perceptions of the importance of language study, motivation and cultural awareness.

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The results analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 17.0 were discussed first. The section continued with analyses of how the social variable of gender played a role in participants' attitudes towards Chinese. A Cronbach alpha test was conducted to measure the reliability of all the items in the questionnaire. All items appeared to have high reliabilities as Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.897$.³

Importance of language study

The paired-sample t-test result of the three questions concerning the importance of language study shows that the participants generally valued language study to the same extent before and after the film sessions ($t= -0.99$, $df=37$, $p=0.33$, >0.05). In other words, the participants' attitudes towards language study were not impacted by the use of film. This result demonstrates that British students consider an awareness of foreign languages as being important. Therefore, Hypothesis (i) should be rejected.

Table 1 Average ratings for the importance of language study

Attitudes towards the importance of language study	N	Mean (Male/Female)	Std. Deviation
Pre-event	36	4.42 (4.18/4.58)	0.53
Post-event	38	4.57 (4.55/4.58)	0.59

Two one-way ANOVA tests were conducted in order to determine whether gender (the independent variable) has a significant effect on attitudes towards the importance of language study (the dependent variable). Interestingly, the factor of gender seems to play a significant role in attitudes towards the importance of language study. As shown in Table 1, there is a difference between the ratings given by male and female participants before the event, and the first one-way ANOVA test confirmed that the difference is indeed significant: $F(1, 34)=5.44$, $p=0.03$, <0.05 . That is, before the film sessions, male participants did not consider language study to be of as much importance as the females did. This seems to suggest support for Hypothesis (vi). However, the second one-way ANOVA test revealed that the small difference in the ratings after the film event does not reach statistical significance: $F(1, 36)=0.03$, $p=0.86$, >0.05 . That is to say, both male and female participants perceived language study as being of importance after the film sessions.

In addition, a specific question, 'Do you think that less commonly taught languages such as Chinese, Arabic or Urdu are as important as more widely taught languages such as French, German and Spanish?', was asked in the pre- and post-event questionnaires. The results show that the less commonly taught languages,

including Chinese, are perceived to be as important as major European languages since the mean scores before and after the event are quite positive (pre-event Mean=4.13, post-event Mean=4.39). The small difference between the two mean scores does not attain statistical significance, meaning that this perception of Chinese as being of importance is not affected by the factor of having participated in the film sessions: $t=-1.26$, $df=37$, $p=0.22$, >0.05 . Since all the participants in the current research are studying Chinese, it is unsurprising to observe that they are aware of the importance of language study.

Attitudes towards using film in language study

In terms of attitudes towards the employment of film in language study, there is an increase in the mean scores of attitudes towards using film in language study before and after the two events: pre-event Mean=4.17, post-event Mean=4.54. The paired-sample t-test also shows that the difference between the two Mean scores reaches statistical significance: $t=-2.64$, $df=37$, $p=0.01$, <0.05 . In other words, attitudes towards the employment of film in language courses are significantly more positive after the film sessions in comparison with attitudes before. Hypothesis (ii) is supported.

There is also a statistical significance in the participants' motivation before and after the film sessions: $t=-2.63$, $df=37$, $p=0.01$, <0.05 , which confirms Hypothesis (iii). As Table 2 shows, the mean score of motivational change through watching a film is relatively high (Mean=4.13), which further confirms Hypothesis (iii). In the post-event questionnaire, three more questions were designed to determine which aspects of the use of film can motivate participants in language study. The result of the one-way ANOVA test demonstrates a significant effect of gender on motivational change: $F(1, 36)=12.28$, $p=0.001, <0.01$. Namely, the female participants were more motivated by the film sessions than the males. Hypothesis (vi) receives support here.

Table 2 Motivational change after the film event

	N	Mean (Male/Female)	Std. Deviation
Post-event Motivation	39	4.13 (3.48/4.44)	0.94
Question (a)	39	4.30 (3.79/4.54)	0.91
Question (b)	39	3.93 (3.14/4.29)	1.25
Question (c)	39	4.18 (3.50/4.50)	1.11

Note: (a) Have your views about learning languages become more positive after attending the events?
(b) Has watching films increased your interest in learning languages?
(c) Do you find watching a film makes it easier for you to learn?

The average score for motivational change is further broken down in order to find out why the female participants were more motivated than the males as a result of

participating in the film events. Table 2 shows that the mean score for question (b) is lower than those for (a) and (c). Furthermore, three one-way ANOVA tests indicate that gender has a stronger effect on the evaluation of question (b) compared to that of questions (a) and (c).⁴ In other words, the male participants did not agree that the two film sessions increased their interest in learning languages. A possible explanation is that the films chosen were not of particular interest to the male participants. Instead of an action-adventure film with a dramatic and exciting storyline, which is usually favoured by a male audience (Fischoff, Antonio, & Lewis, 1998), the two directors of the films used in the present study convey their interpretation of Chinese culture through personal stories, daily routines and the sophisticated use of cinematography. *The Road Home* depicts a love story in a small village in rural China, which might have attracted more interest from the female audience than the male (Fischoff et al., 1998).

The paired sample t-test suggests that the difference in cultural awareness reaches statistical significance: $t=-2.38$, $df=37$, $p=0.01$, <0.05 . Hypothesis (iv) is confirmed. As shown in Table 3, Hypothesis (iv) is likely to be further supported since cultural awareness tended to be high after watching the films. Two additional questions in the post-event questionnaire evaluate to what extent the film sessions might raise the cultural awareness of the participants. A breakdown of the evaluation of cultural awareness indicates that the participants generally agreed that they understood Chinese culture better as a result of watching the films.

Table 3. Cultural awareness after the film event

	N	Mean (Male/Female)	Std. Deviation
Cultural awareness	39	4.20 (3.54/4.61)	0.99
Question (d)	39	4.48 (4.00/4.74)	0.79
Question (e)	39	3.98 (3.07/4.42)	1.42

Note: (d) Do you think you have better understanding of Chinese culture from watching films?

(e) Would you like to see more films to learn cultural differences?

Interestingly, the one-way ANOVA test suggests that the factor of gender has a significant effect on cultural awareness: $F(1, 35)=13.91$, $p=0.001$, <0.01 . This suggests support for Hypothesis (vi). As shown in Table 3, the male participants tended to give consistently lower ratings than the females and the evaluation for question (e) is particularly low (Mean=3.07). These findings lead back to the above discussion regarding the choice of film. It is possible that the male participants evaluated question (e) more negatively as soon as they read ‘to see more films’; this is likely due to the possibility that the two films screened in the current study were not appealing to them, as discussed above.

Future plans for language study

Although the results for questions about future plans for language study appear to suggest that the participants were slightly more motivated to study language in the future (pre-event Mean=3.63 vs. post-event Mean=3.65), a paired-sample t-test demonstrates that the difference between pre- and post-event does not achieve significance: $t=-0.07$, $df=36$, $p=0.95$, >0.05 . Therefore, the two film sessions did not have a significant effect on the participants' future plans for language study at A-level or even university. Hypothesis (v) should not be considered to be supported. Certainly, a two-film screening event over three months cannot be said to play an important role in students' future academic choices, which usually involve a variety of factors. It is possible that longitudinal research using films more intensively during language study might provide us with a better picture of whether film can motivate students to study languages at the next academic stage.

However, bivariate correlation tests show that there is a significantly positive association between participants' future study plans and their motivational change/cultural awareness.⁵ In other words, the higher a participant's motivation or cultural awareness, the more likely he/she is to study a foreign language at A-level or university, regardless of gender. Below is a table summarising the results relevant to all the hypotheses.

Table 4. A summary of the results for all Hypotheses, (i) – (vi)

Hypotheses	Results	Hypotheses confirmed or not
(i) The film sessions will raise Chinese learners' awareness of the importance of language study.	$t=-0.99$, $df=37$, $p=0.33$, >0.05	Not confirmed
(ii) The attitudes of Chinese language learners towards viewing films in the language classroom will be increased after the film sessions in comparison with before.	$t=-2.64$, $df=37$, $p=0.01$, <0.05	Confirmed
(iii) The film sessions will motivate learners in language study.	$t=-2.63$, $df=37$, $p=0.01$, <0.05	Confirmed
(iv) The film sessions will improve Chinese language learners' understanding/awareness of Chinese culture.	$t=-2.38$, $df=37$, $p=0.01$, <0.05 .	Confirmed
(v) The film sessions will have a	$t=-0.07$, $df=36$, $p=0.95$, >0.05	Not

positive effect on the future language study plans of Chinese language learners. confirmed

(vi) The factor of gender will have a significant effect on the perceptions of importance of language study, motivation and cultural awareness.

Importance of language study: Confirmed $F(1, 34)=5.44, p=0.03, <0.05$;
Motivation: $F (1, 36)=12.28, p=0.001, <0.01$;
Cultural awareness: $F (1, 35)=13.91, p=0.001, <0.01$

Apart from the statistical data, some participants also provided comments and suggestions for the film sessions. Most of the comments were very positive, indicating that the participants had found the cinematic experience enjoyable. Interestingly, six participants pointed out that they enjoyed the films very much since these were their very first encounters with Chinese films. Another three participants even specified that these were actually the first foreign language films they had ever seen. This finding is intriguing, especially in the era of globalisation, and will be discussed further below.

DISCUSSION

The present research has shown that the participants perceive language study as important, including Chinese, Arabic and Urdu, which are less commonly taught in comparison with French, German and Spanish. This perception is, however, not conditioned by the employment of film in language study in general. Participants answered similarly on the pre- and the post-test. This finding actually contradicts previous findings that the British are reluctant to learn a foreign language (Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002). Indeed, previous studies might have focussed on the attitudes of students towards European languages, such as to Spanish (Bueno, 2009; Pegrum et al., 2005), and French (Dupuy & Krashen, 1993). On the contrary, the current research concentrates on the perception of Chinese language. Previous studies have also observed a rising interest in the Chinese language and consequently an increase in the number of learners studying Chinese worldwide (Gill & Huang, 2006). Moreover, all the students who participated in the current study are learning Chinese as one of their subjects in secondary school. This fact indicates their motivation towards learning Chinese. This finding further confirms their positive attitudes towards foreign language study and Chinese language learning in particular.

When the results are further divided by gender, it is clear that the male participants tended to have more positive attitudes towards the importance of foreign languages after the event in comparison with their attitudes before attending the film

sessions. This finding should, however, be considered in view of the fact that there seems to be a tendency that male students attending primary or secondary schools are much less motivated to learn a foreign language or an East Asian language in particular than their female counterparts (Sung & Padilla, 1998; Williams et al., 2002). The lower motivation of male students is revealed by the results showing that they did not perceive foreign languages as important before the film sessions. After the two film sessions, male and female participants had similar positive attitudes towards language learning and responded positively to the question on whether three less commonly taught languages (i.e. Chinese, Arabic and Urdu) are as important as French, German and Spanish. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the employment of film might be a good technique to raise learners' awareness on the importance of foreign languages, especially for male learners.

However, compared to their female counterparts, male participants consistently reported not only lower motivation, but also demonstrated less cultural awareness after the film sessions. The result that female participants are more motivated to study a language after two film sessions might also be due to different learning styles, not simply to film choice, as discussed above. Previous studies have found that female learners are more likely to use a variety of strategies in language learning (Green & Oxford, 1995; Sy, 1994). Specifically, female learners are usually more willing to study a language through reading and writing than male learners (Maubach & Morgan, 2001). If film is considered as a type of reading material that can develop media literacy (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006, p.20), it is unsurprising to find that the female learners tend to perceive the employment of film in language study as a suitable learning strategy. Besides, the effect of gender on cultural awareness can also be interpreted from the aspect of film choice.

As explained earlier, the two films screened in the study might not be of particular interest to the male participants and consequently they were not keen to 'see more films'. Two studies (Fischhoff et al., 1998; Richards & Sheridan, 1987) employed interviews and questionnaires, respectively, to look at the stereotyped gender difference in film preference: males tended to prefer films that are action oriented, whereas females enjoyed romantic films. Recent studies also present parallel findings regarding the effect of gender on film enjoyment (Chausson, 2010). Interestingly, Fischhoff et al. (1998) pointed out that the 'gender–genre differences are most dramatically expressed in the age group below 26 [years], i.e., the Young'. In other words, the younger the male audiences are, the more likely they prefer a film in the action-adventure genre. Another study of fifty-and-older subjects confirmed this by demonstrating 'decreasing preference among older men for "masculine" genres' (Hoffmann & Schwender, 2007, p.489). Since the male participants of the current research were aged between 12 and 14, it is very likely that they might have given highest preference to themes of action and adventure.

Indeed, finding an appropriate authentic video or film for a particular group of

learners at a certain level has never been an easy task (Ciccone, 1995, p.205-207). Three main criteria are identified from previous studies (Bueno, 2009; King, 2002; Voller & Widdows, 1993), as well as from the findings of the present research. First of all, linguistic diversity and cultural variety are essential for selecting a suitable film for a language class. Secondly, the choice of film should be based on good comprehensibility and artistic appeal from the perspectives of strong storylines, correlation between dialogue and visual support, and clearly drawn main characters. The third criterion is the most important one – learners' interest. Students are usually interested in and enjoy entertaining films that are relevant to their own appreciation of popular culture. The second criterion is closely linked with the third. Previous research (Bueno, 2009; Voller & Widdows, 1993) has pointed out that slow-moving films with frequent monologues are less likely to be appreciated or comprehended by students. That is, these kinds of foreign language films tend to not motivate or interest language learners. Both films shown in the present study are slow-moving and do not have dramatic storylines. Instead, the second film, *The Road Home*, embeds the cultural elements through a romantic love story. Moreover, this event has provided some of the participants with their first experience of Chinese language film. As a result of these factors combined, the female participants were more willing to continue this experience than the males.

Although the participants already perceived the use of film relatively positive before the event, the statistical test reveals that the two-film event made their attitudes towards the employment of film in language study significantly more positive. This generation of young learners might be familiar with various ways of accessing authentic learning material because of the Internet. However, there is some evidence that foreign language films might not be that easy to access. According to the UK Film Council (2011), there were 227 foreign language films released in the UK, accounting for 41% of the total releases in 2010. A majority of them were from Europe (N=103) or India (N=71). Chinese films were listed amongst those from the 'rest of the world' (N=53). Therefore, it is unsurprising that some participants gave additional comments in the questionnaires that 'it is the first Chinese language film' or 'first ever foreign language film' they had seen in their lives. The first experience may have a significant impact on their attitudes towards using films in language learning.

Interestingly, the gross box-office sales for these 227 foreign language films represented only 4.2% of overall box-office figures in 2011. Pegrum et al. (2005, p.58) outlined that the top two reasons for UK audiences not going to see these films are linguistic barriers (i.e. 'not knowing the language is closely followed by the irritation of having to read subtitles') and cultural distance (i.e. consequently 'a preference for, or familiarity with, US and UK models'). These factors were acknowledged in the present study and the methodology involved a variety of carefully designed pre- and post-event activities to guide and assist the group of learners. These structured activities enabled them to prepare for and understand the linguistic and cultural elements and address difficulties they might have encountered in the films, which would eventually encourage

'active viewing and stimulate involvement for making the most of learning opportunities from films' (King, 2002, p.520–521). The improvement of their attitudes towards the use of film in language study supports the usefulness and success of such film-based activities.

Although cultural barriers might stop people from going to see a foreign language film in the cinema or reduce the entertainment value of a film, foreign language films have significant cross-cultural value, and can offer opportunities to experience and gain insights into another culture. For this reason, film is increasingly being integrated into foreign language classes in order to provide learners with a better understanding of cultural differences (Bueno, 2009; King, 2002; Pegrum et al., 2005). The current research confirms that the integration of film into language study can indeed impact on learners' understanding of Chinese culture.

The employment of film did not have a significant effect on the participants' future academic plans due to the small number of films and the students' still relatively low experience of foreign language films. However, the positive correlation between their future study plans and motivation/cultural awareness is also consistent with previous findings (Sung & Padilla, 1998). Students are more likely to continue to study a foreign language if they are motivated to learn about and/or are interested in the culture.

CONCLUSION

The current study has investigated the attitudes of English learners of Chinese towards the employment of films in language classes and how these films affect learners' perceptions of the importance of language study, their motivation, and their cultural awareness from a quantitative perspective. The current research revealed that male participants consistently reported not only lower motivation, but also demonstrated less cultural awareness after film sessions. For future research, it is recommended to employ films in the action-adventure genre in order to investigate the effect of gender on the perceptions of males towards language study. It would also be worthwhile to conduct a longitudinal study observing the attitudinal change after a series of films. The two film sessions did not significantly influence the participants' future academic plans; however, the experience of seeing films while learning the language had indeed impacted on, and improved, their attitudes towards the use of film as a tool in language learning. This finding suggests an application of films in language learning and teaching in a wider context: from European languages to Chinese, from language acquisition to cultural enhancement or media literacy improvement. The results show that the female participants have higher motivation and better cultural awareness through film watching which lead us to explore the issue of film choice. The three criteria for selecting films yield valuable pedagogical implications for the future employment of film in language study.

NOTES

1. Confucius institutes and Confucius classrooms are committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide. They are public organisations affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education (see http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm).
2. Please note that both Confucius institutes and Confucius classrooms are funded by the Chinese government. Institutes are usually established in tertiary level institutions while classrooms are established for primary and secondary schools.
3. A Cronbach alpha value can estimate the reliability of a questionnaire. The acceptable values of alpha usually range from 0.70 to 0.95, indicating the inter-relatedness and internal consistency of the items in a questionnaire (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; see also Field, 2009, p.675–676).
4. Question (a): $F(1, 36)=6.91$, $p=0.013$, <0.05 ; Question (b): $F(1, 36)=9.00$, $p=0.005$, <0.01 ; Question (c): $F(1, 36)=8.49$, $p=0.006$, <0.01 .
5. Future study plans and motivational change: $r=0.63$, $p=0.00$, <0.01 ; future study plans and cultural awareness: $r=0.48$, $p=0.00$, <0.01 .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Dr Robert Hamilton, Senior Lecturer in Film Studies, for sharing his insights into the choice of films, and Prof. Jenny Williams for comments on the early draft of this paper. The author would like to extend her sincere appreciation to two anonymous reviewers for comments that greatly improved the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- BACS. (January 2013). British association for Chinese studies: Chinese in UK schools. Retrieved from http://www.bacsuk.org.uk/BACS_CHINESEINSCHOOLS.php
- Bueno, K. A. (2009). Got film? Is it a readily accessible window to the target language and culture for your students? *Foreign Language Annals*, 42(2), 318–339.
- Bullo-Alos, S. & Wang, A. (2009). Parental attitudes to language learning in Arabic and Chinese supplementary/complementary schools: A case study. Paper presented at *BAAL Language Learning and Teaching SIG conference*, Newcastle University, UK.
- Chausson, O. (2010). Who watches what? Assessing the impact of gender and personality on film preferences. Retrieved from http://mypersonality.org/wiki/doku.php?id=movie_tastes_and_personality
- Ciccone, A. A. (1995). Teaching with authentic video: Theory and practice. In F. R. Eckman, J. Mileham, R. R. Weber, D. Highland, P. W. Lee (Eds.), *Second language acquisition theory and pedagogy* (pp.203–216). London: Routledge.

- CILT. (January 2013). The National Centre for Languages: Language trends surveys 2010. Retrieved from http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/research_and_statistics/language_trends_surveys/secondary/2010.aspx
- Dupuy, B. & Krashen, S. D. (1993). Incidental vocabulary acquisition in French as a foreign language. *Applied Language Learning*, 4, 55–63.
- Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Fischoff, S., Antonio, J. & Lewis, D. (1998). Favourite films and film genres as a function of race, age, and gender. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 3(1). Retrieved from <http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/sfischo/media3.html>
- Gill, B. and Huang, Y. (2006). Sources and limits of Chinese 'soft power'. *Survival* 48(2), 17–36.
- Green, J. M. & Oxford, R. (1995). A closer look at learning strategies, L2 proficiency, and gender. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(2), 261–297.
- Hayati, A., & Mohmedi, F. (2011). The effect of films with and without subtitles on listening comprehension of EFL learners. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 42(1), 181–192.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organisations across Nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robinson, A. J. & Weigel, M. (2006). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for 21st century*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- King, J. (2002). Using DVD feature films in the EFL classroom. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 15(5), 509–523.
- Lien, D., Oh, C. H., & Selmier, W. T. (2012). Confucius institute effects on China's trade and FDI: Isn't it delightful when folks afar study Hanyu? *International Review of Economics & Finance*, 21(1), 147–155.
- Liu, G. & Bianco, J. L. (2007). Teaching Chinese, teaching in Chinese, and teaching the Chinese. *Language Policy*, 6, 95–117.
- Maubach, A. & Morgan, C. (2001). The relationship between gender and learning styles amongst A-level modern languages students. *The Language Learning Journal*, 23, 41–47.
- Pegrum, M. (2008). Film, culture and identity: Critical intercultural literacies for the language classroom. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 8(2), 136–154.
- Pegrum, M., Hartley, L. & Wechtler, V. (2005). Contemporary cinema in language learning: From linguistic input to intercultural insight. *Language Learning Journal*, 32, 55–62.
- Richards, J., & Sheridan, D. (1987). *Mass observation at the movies*. London: Routledge and Kegan.
- Starkey, H. (2007). Language education, identities and citizenship: Developing cosmopolitan perspectives. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 7(1), 56–71.
- Sung, H. & Padilla, A. M. (1998). Attitudes and involvement in the learning of Asian Languages in elementary and secondary schools. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(ii), 205–216.
- Swaffar, J. & Vlatten, A. (1997). A sequential model for video viewing in the foreign language curriculum. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81 (2), 175–188.

- Sy, B. M. (1994). Sex differences and language learning strategies. Paper presented at *The 11th Conference of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages of the Republic of China*, Taiwan.
- Tavakol, M., & Dennick, R. (2011). Making sense of Cronbach's alpha. *International Journal of Medical Education*, 2, 53–55. Retrieved from <http://www.ijme.net/archive/2/cronbachs-alpha.pdf>
- UK Film Council. *Statistical year book 2011*. Retrieved from <http://statisticalyearbook11.ry.com/?id=82764>.
- Voller, P. & Widdows, S. (1993). Feature films as text: A framework for classroom use. *ELT Journal*, 47(4), 342–353.
- Wang, L., & Higgins, L. T. (2008). Mandarin teaching in the UK in 2007: A brief report of teachers' and learners' views. *The Language Learning Journal*, 36(1), 91–96.
- Wang, S. C. 2009. Preparing and supporting teachers of less commonly taught languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(ii), 282–287.
- Williams, M., Burden, R. & Lanvers, U. (2002). 'French is the language of love and stuff': Student perceptions of issues related to motivation in learning a foreign language. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(4), 503–528.
- Ye, T. & Zhang, Y. (2000). From the fifth to the sixth generation: An interview with Zhang Yimou. *Film Quarterly*, 53(2), 2–13.
- Zhang, D. & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2009). Language attitudes and heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 22(2), 77–93.
- Zhang, Q. (2010). Students' attitudes towards Chinese and their development of intercultural sensitivity. Paper presented at Conference of the First Teachers College, Columbia University Roundtable in Second Language Studies (TCCRISLS), Columbia University, New York, USA.
- Zhang, Y. (2000). *The Road Home* [Film]. (Available from Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia Ltd).
- Zhang, Y. (2006). *Little Red Flower* [Film]. (Available from Eureka Entertainment Ltd., Unit 9 Iron Bridge Close, Great Central Way, London, NW10 0UF).

About the author:

Dr. Qi Zhang received her PhD in Linguistics from Newcastle University. She joined Dublin City University in 2011 as the coordinator of Chinese Language and Culture. Her main research interests are sociolinguistics, language attitudes, technology in language classroom and intercultural communication.

APPENDIX A: Second part of pre- and post-event questionnaires

Pre- & Post-event questionnaires	Importance of language study	<p>Do you think that learning foreign languages is important?</p> <p>Do you think that learning foreign languages is as important as other subjects in school?</p> <p>Many people from other countries who speak lots of different languages live in the UK. Do you think learning languages is important for English people?</p> <p>Do you think that less commonly taught languages such as Chinese, Arabic or Urdu are as important as more widely taught languages such as French, German and Spanish?</p>
	Attitudes towards using film in language study	<p>Do you think learning through film is important?</p> <p>Are you interested in learning languages through watching films?</p> <p>Would you like to watch films at school in this subject? (Pre-.)*</p> <p>Would you like to watch more films at school in this subject? (Post-.)*</p>
	Motivation	<p>To what extent are you motivated to study languages?</p> <p>Have your views about learning languages become more positive after attending the events? (Post-.)*</p> <p>Has watching films increased your interest in learning languages? (Post-.)*</p> <p>Do you find watching a film makes it easier for you to learn? (Post-.)*</p>
	Cultural awareness	<p>To what extent do you think you can understand Chinese culture?</p> <p>Do you think you have better understanding of Chinese culture from watching films? (Post-.)*</p> <p>Would you like to see more films to learn cultural differences? (Post-.)*</p>
	Future plans for language study	<p>Would you consider studying this language for GCSE exam?</p> <p>Would you consider studying this language at A-level?</p> <p>Would you consider studying languages at university?</p>
Note:	* This question is phrased differently in the pre- and post-questionnaires as indicated by 'Pre-' and 'Post-' in the brackets.	