

## **Filmography of Canadian-Made Images About China and the Chinese**

By Gary Evans  
Adjunct Professor, University of Ottawa,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Copyright 2010

2010 marked the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and China. In honour of the occasion, it seemed appropriate to construct a filmography examining Canadian made films about China and the Chinese in Canada. This annotated filmography covers seven decades and reflects many social and political transformations. As time passes, these images serve both as a reminder of what has passed and as a statement of how different times have become. With this record, historians, anthropologists and archeologists looking back a century from now will likely have a better idea of how to explain the realities of these times. Seen chronologically both today and tomorrow, the images may take on new meanings as events that were important once might become less so, or issues that were tangential may assume a deeper significance retrospectively.

Perception and evaluation of imagery are coloured by knowledge of place, time, and history. For example, a wartime theatrical short about Japan's occupation of China may find today's viewer sympathizing with the then-Chinese victims and drawing the inarguable conclusion that imperial Japan's war of conquest was wrong. Another interpretation of the same film may conclude that a united China is essential to prevent foreign occupation from occurring ever again. A third might conclude that the West's indifference to events in China brought on that country's wartime agonies.

This filmography begins with two wartime newsreels about China. The Canadian government had barred Chinese immigration in 1923, thus China was too remote to be of much public concern. For the duration of the Second World War, just two theatrical newsreels from the National Film Board of Canada devoted themselves to the subject.

Postwar, a single film tried to explain the internal struggle for China's hearts and minds but the government in Ottawa disallowed its foreign distribution lest it meant articulating a possible communist outcome. From 1949, Canada's China policy paralleled that of the United States: to isolate China as the Communist behemoth. In 1949-50, a single Canadian filmmaker, Norman McLaren, went to China for UNESCO to teach animation techniques for public health subjects. After 1960, Canada discovered how important its own forgotten Dr. Norman Bethune was to the new China. Mao Zedong's praise of Bethune contributed to China opening the door to Canadian wheat sales; that, and a progressive Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau led to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1970.

When the first film crews from the National Film Board (NFB) accompanied young Canadian sportsmen and women to China, they discovered the obvious: young people the world over have more in common than not. Yet those same NFB filmmakers ignored or were shielded from the political reality of China in the throes of the Cultural Revolution. This might have been because of linguistic ignorance or perhaps they were succumbing to a very Canadian tendency to emphasize the positive over the negative.

The decade of the 1970s found a number of documentaries exploring the nascent industrial revolution beginning to transform China. They did not focus on the stunning differences between the Chinese socialist model and Canada's capitalist methods, although a viewer likely found him or herself making that obvious comparison in at least one film that had narrator Donald Sutherland describing the Chinese work ethic.

In the 1980s, Canada opened its doors to immigration from Hong Kong, a 180 degree shift from the historic "no-Chinese wanted" policy. This marked the beginning of a not yet perceptible demographic shift that gave rise to films about the fact that Canada was welcoming immigrants from Asia. The subsequent process of integrating into Canadian life tore many Asian families apart. As the children of these immigrants grew up Canadian, typical polarities were obvious in two commercial features. One daughter of Chinese immigrants told her story of flight, of falling into drug abuse, prostitution and nearly lethal hard times. Another turned her experience into a comedy film that concluded it was impossible to achieve "double happiness," hers and her parents'. For those Canadians who saw these films, their impact might have made them more familiar with, and understanding of the new arrivals. But the truth was that not enough of the population was seeing or appreciating Canadian features.

After a dull made-for-television drama about Dr. Bethune in the 1970s, Canada in the 1990s produced its most expensive feature film ever, in which the Canadian surgeon who embraced the communist cause was as interesting, complex and contradictory a figure as he was inscrutable. In the same decade, the Cultural Revolution came into accurate focus in a segment of a feature about the fictitious life of a red violin. But true to economic realities, few paid the theatrical admissions to both. If Canadians were becoming gradually more fascinated with China and the Chinese, the reverse was certainly true in the 1990s as 600 million Chinese laughed with Dashan, a white Canadian who went to China to thrill them in their own language. As the new millennium's emphasis became trade relations, a number of documentaries helped encourage the study of Chinese language, history, and culture in Canadian universities.

By the early 2000s, the National Film Board's Asian History Collection featured numerous works about the history of the sad Chinese experience in Canada. Canada itself was going through huge changes as the national demographic complexion changed. Films about Chinese Canadians helped many Chinese build their own identities upon the historical knowledge that they gleaned from documentaries that told the unvarnished truth about historic hardships. And as the Chinese immigrants struggled to build a home in Canada, Canadians themselves adjusted to an emerging multicultural population from Asia and the world.

In the present decade, as Chinese both of Canadian and Asian origin explore their own stories, there is no longer an uncritical view of the profound changes occurring in China. If China's internal politics remain uninvestigated, films about the massive social changes of the past few decades are helping Canadians to understand a culture that is so different from theirs. Chinese tend not to be an open people culturally, but the films and videos of this decade have made them more "ours" than people who were once recognizably "foreign." In truth, a multicultural Canada is still trying on its new garments,

unsure of how they look. This filmography bears witness to changing Canadian perceptions and understanding of China and the Chinese. Many of the films from the National Film Board are available in schools as well as online. The free NFB website recorded recently its seven millionth visitor.

Let us now turn to specific Canadian-made moving images about China over the last seven decades. The National Film Board of Canada made the majority of these films. As a government filmmaking agency from 1939, it has enjoyed the privilege of the arm's length relationship that Ottawa has allowed over the decades. If the few privately funded films about China have played their role in helping to form public opinion, the majority of these visual stories have been made with taxpayer funding. They have helped interpret the Canadian and Chinese experiences to Canadians, to China, and to the world.

For centuries, the history of China was the history of foreign invasions. The last one occurred from 1931 until 1945 when militant Japan established its cruel occupation. Two 20 minute wartime newsreels from 1942, **Inside Fighting China** and **The Mask of Nippon**, used a compilation technique to show the determined Chinese combating the Japanese aggressors. The propaganda footage, shot by both Chinese and Japanese and edited by the National Film Board, hoped to convince Canadians to face Japanese aggression in the Pacific.

Following the war, **The People Between** (1947) documented the Chinese people trying to recover their ravaged land. Because the film emphasized the ongoing struggle between the Kuomintang Nationalists and the Communists, the United States, in its pursuit of a policy of isolating communism, forbade its circulation. From 1949, Canada's foreign policy echoed the United States policy of isolating China. No Canadians documented communist China for the next 25 years. An exception was the Film Board's Norman McLaren, who while on assignment for UNESCO, taught animation techniques and brought back two public service animation films his students in China created in 1949-50 (**Window on Canada #27**).

Two names would change this optic of isolation as Canada began to move almost imperceptibly away from American policy: Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Norman Bethune. In 1958, Pierre Trudeau and a colleague, Jacques Hébert, wrote *Two Innocents in Red China*, praising China's hospitality to twenty visiting Canadian intellectuals. Their book convinced many Canadians that they should no longer consider China an outcast nation. And more importantly, Mao Zedong's respect for the Canadian surgeon Dr. Norman Bethune in his *Red Book* signaled China's market was open to Canadian wheat sales in response to the famine of 1960. Both events probably contributed to the creation of the 1964 NFB documentary biography, **Bethune**. If the Chinese considered the surgeon a hero of internationalism the world outside of China did not know him. Canada had virtually forgotten him, but the fact that he served the Communist cause led the Canadian government, fearful of United States condemnation, to stop distribution of this film in both communist Europe and the United States.

After Prime Minister Trudeau's government established diplomatic relations in 1970, in the summer of 1973, Canadian filmmakers went to China for the first time in twenty-five years to film **Ping Pong**, table tennis competitions between teams of young Canadians and Chinese. The wordless film showed how rivalries brought both teams together in friendship and understanding. It also reminded Canadians that

Chinese youth shared the same enthusiasms as they did, even though both lived in very different political worlds.

Similarly, in 1974, **Thunderbirds in China** found members of the University of British Columbia's Thunderbirds hockey team in China to demonstrate their skills to Chinese teams that were new to the sport. Visually, the film provided insight into the differences between East and West as a stunned Canadian coach enthused about the 13,000 Chinese who showed up one morning to witness the Canadians practice. In the same year, a Canadian film crew illuminated contemporary China in streets, factories, homes and schools. **Glimpses of China** shared the excitement of discovery, curiosity, and perhaps some naiveté. It was uncritical in its recording of a population's selfless dedication to Mao Zedong's ideal of a new cooperative China and made no reference to the Cultural Revolution. So too was **To China with the Premier of British Columbia**, where Dave Barrett, the affable Premier of British Columbia, narrated the political junket that he and his official entourage embarked upon as they explored the vast hinterland. If they encountered the goodwill and polite friendship his hosts offered, Barrett's sunny disposition did not afford him a critical eye to understand or question the impact of the turbulent Cultural Revolution then roiling China.

In 1977, a made-for-television drama, **Bethune**, attempted a biographical treatment of the flamboyant surgeon's life with popular Canadian stars Donald Sutherland and Kate Nelligan. The drama emphasized the importance of background factors like his strict religious upbringing and failed marriage as well as a lifelong commitment to help the downtrodden. Sutherland's attraction and physical resemblance to the doctor gave rise to his decade long struggle to play Bethune again in a full-length feature film, which appeared in 1991 and eclipsed the earlier production.

NFB filmmakers more clearly articulated the theme of Chinese social organization in the 1980 documentary **North China Factory**. They explored a factory community of 6,000 workers, taking the viewer into the workers' residential, social, recreational, and educational facilities. The understanding voice of the Sinophile Donald Sutherland knitted the segments into a coherent whole and seemed to reassure the viewer, even if images revealed how different the Chinese lifestyle was from Canada's. The same year, **China Mission: The Chester Ronning Story** chronicled the life of Ronning, who was a member of Canada's political establishment and served in diplomatic posts to China from 1945-51. His lifelong ambition was to explain China to the western world and this compassionate documentary tried to facilitate the meeting of East and West, political differences notwithstanding.

One of the first attempts to explain the appalling history of Chinese immigration to Canada occurred in 1981 with **Bamboo, Lions and Dragons**. Two families, the Changs and Lims, told the history of the Chinese community in Vancouver. The Changs never integrated into the mainstream; the Lims, born in Canada, grew up as part of the Canadian multicultural mixture. Looking at Canada's sorry record, not all immigrant stories were happy. In **One of Many**, Dr. Nhan, an ethnic Chinese refugee from Vietnam, struggled in 1983 to overcome the obstacles that prevented her from practicing acupuncture. Five years later, **Who Gets In?** explored the many questions raised by Canada's immigration policy. The Hong Kong segment had a Canadian immigration officer scrutinizing an obliging Chinese couple to see if they met

Canada's difficult economic, social and political priorities. In contrast, **Eternal Earth** drew the viewer into the creative process as Canadian-born Chinese composer Alexina Louie completed a symphony in 1987, then witnessed its debut before an appreciative Toronto audience. The film served as a subtle reminder of how genuine was Canada's policy and practice of multiculturalism where talent, not economic position, determined social achievement.

Criticism of Canada in the Second World War emerged as a popular Canadian subject in the 1990s. In **Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941**, several veterans returned to Hong Kong where 2,000 Canadian soldiers surrendered to Japanese forces in 1941 and spent the rest of the war as prisoners in horrendous conditions. Part of a series called *The Valour and the Horror*, this and two weaker films lacking serious historical context focused on Canadian failures in the war.

Practicing the now popular style of documentary that emphasizes victimization, **A Song for Tibet** was a 1991 polemic about Tibetans-in-exile. Their tearful plea for their homeland and Dali Lama is heartfelt as is the Tibetan struggle for cultural and political survival in an indifferent world. But with no attempt to balance the argument by presenting the Chinese optic, the sympathetic Canadian filmmaker undercut her own sober earnestness by using the word 'genocide' to describe China's policy. If some critics found this one-sided effort wanting, the film demonstrated that the National Film Board respected the filmmakers' freedom of speech.

In 1992, Canada produced the most expensive (\$20 million) privately funded Canadian feature ever, **Bethune: The Making of a Hero**. Its unevenness reflected the ongoing struggle between writer Ted Allan and actor Donald Sutherland, the latter having already played the martyred surgeon in 1977. Allan wanted the doctor to shine as a devoted communist; Sutherland wanted to portray Bethune as a Canadian hero who was a more complex character, both selfless and arrogant, an internationalist, and an intemperate alcoholic. The film did succeed in one sense: it emphasized that Bethune's noblest satisfaction was to sacrifice his life helping the communists fight Japanese fascism. Perhaps there were too many battle scenes; perhaps the screenplay could not decide how to present Bethune's own irreconcilable character traits. The tragedy was that the film missed the greatness it promised and confirmed the public's general consideration of Canadian features as unwanted children. English Canadian features continued to draw a scant two percent of the annual theatrical audience.

Since Canada opened its doors to Chinese immigration in 1947, the immigrant experience has proven to be a combination of success and failure stories. A true and almost tragic story of failure was **The Diary of Evelyn Lau**, a made-for-television feature in 1993 about an immigrant Chinese teenager in Vancouver who ran away from her strict Chinese parents. Struggling to deal with the ugly side of Canada's reality, she became a prostitute and drug-addict, and after saving herself, wrote a book about her ordeal that became this film. The feature's strength was its honest depiction of the often-negative side of the immigrant experience.

Developing the same theme a year later, but lightheartedly, **Double Happiness** found a similar female trying to satisfy her traditional parents' desire for an arranged marriage and her own desire to date

freely. There was more comedy than melodrama, and this commercial feature starring Sandra Oh showed there are no easy answers as one tries to find happiness both by following Chinese traditions and exploring Western freedoms.

Symbolic of the new globalized world of 1996, **Dashan: Ambassador to China's Funny Bone** focused on a Caucasian Canadian who had become fully at home in Chinese language and culture, and whose television audience of 600 million astounded observers. The documentary excerpted his performances and the young Sinophile discussed his art and developments in the new China. These images underscored how, for many Chinese, this "foreigner" who spoke their language signaled that China was reaching a new plateau: the Chinese language was at last significant in the English speaking world.

The 1990s found a more mature approach to Canadian made films about China. Gone was the remote place of exotic wonder. Instead there was a country whose raw edges punctured some of its good intentions. Some of China's politics were nakedly brutal as one Chinese-born new Canadian remembered in **Sunrise Over Tianamen Square**. The artist who abandoned his homeland for Canada employed a collage of original artwork and archival photos to present a personal perspective on forty years of historic consequence. For many of these artists-in-exile generation, China's cruel response to the student movement for democracy was the penultimate symbol of the new China. The tanks in Tiananmen Square led to his complete disillusionment and break with ideology.

Also in 1997, the commercial feature **The Red Violin** told the fictitious story of the life of a violin through three centuries, eventually ending up for sale at an auction. The red coloured violin inspired passions and one powerful sequence found the instrument in possession of a musician in China, who, beset by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, hid it from the incendiary Red Guards. This sequence more than any other earlier films about China, depicted the devastation wrought by the fanatical Cultural Revolution and the dangers of a state bureaucracy that unleashed terror and fear in millions of common people. This feature won international acclaim and an Oscar for best music, proving that sometimes fiction is the best avenue to find the truth.

The first Canadian documentary to detail the 1937-38 atrocity known in history as the 'Rape of Nanking,' **In the Name of the Emperor**, (1998) used graphic film evidence that an American missionary recorded at the time to show how Japanese forces committed horrible crimes that have generally escaped the verdict of history. The Hong Kong directors helped Canadian audiences appreciate this forgotten period and reminded worldwide audiences of the dangers of ignoring the past. This was the first in what would become a number of films on this tragic subject.

Again in 1998, **The Third Heaven** explored the impact of recent Chinese immigration to Canada from Hong Kong. Following one family, viewers learned how the cohesion of the Chinese diaspora was not only based on business, but also on strong, long-standing cultural and family ties.

A year later, **Unwanted Soldiers** told of the long history of discrimination and racism against the Chinese in Vancouver. In the Second World War, Ottawa refused to accept Chinese Canadians as soldiers, yet a

handful of these men volunteered for secret missions as Allied (S.O.E.) agents in Southeast Asia. Their story had remained a secret for decades until this film.

On a completely different level, in a culture where the standard of beauty is unyielding, what happens to Asian women who are desperately unhappy with their looks? The documentary **Western Eyes** examined the search for beauty and racial identity by two young women who contemplated cosmetic surgery on their eyes. If they were in thrall to pop-culture beauty icons, it was clear that much pain lay deep behind their desire for plastic surgery. This fascinating examination of beauty and perception asked how we see, how we are seen, and how we see how we are seen. Similarly, in 2000, **Who Is Albert Woo?** examined the way identities are shaped and distorted by the popular media, history and culture. Distortions of reality start with clichés about Asian men and martial arts. Breaking that mould, this film discovered that there were numerous 'others,' from a comedic yo-yo champion, to homosexuals, and even those who sought traditional marriage. In the series **Talespinners Collection**, (2002) two animations for children, **The Chinese Violin** and **Roses Sing on New Snow**, dealt with the Chinese immigrant experience. In the first, the music of the violin (urhu) connected an immigrant child and her father. The instrument became a bridge that helped them face the challenge many immigrants find settling into a new place. The second told the story of chef Maylin, whose family ignored her skill until she showed a visiting dignitary how to cook a fabulous recipe that combined Old and New World cuisine.

At the Wing Fong Farm in Ontario, the 2002 documentary **Earth to Mouth** followed a Chinese family that grew Asian vegetables destined for Chinese markets and restaurants in Canada. In China, farming represents the lowest rung on the social ladder. For the son, in Canada, the farm represented personal and financial independence. For his mother, it was an oasis of peace. For their Mexican workers, it provided jobs that supported their families in Mexico.

In 2003, still photographer Serge Clément explored the texture of two Chinese cities, Hong Kong and Shanghai in **Fragrant Light**. His animated short revealed the contrasting lights and darks in this scintillating black and white photographic essay of both changing cities.

As part of a new millennium series called **Asian Canadian History Collection** (2006) the following films presented the unvarnished history of the often difficult Oriental immigrant experience in Canada. Beautifully crafted, they offered testimony that the past facilitates the emergence of a contemporary Chinese Canadian identity. **From Harling Point** was about an abandoned Chinese cemetery in Victoria that a young Chinese Canadian woman rescued from destruction. **The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam** unraveled the mystery of this internationally renowned Chinese acrobat and magician. His granddaughter retraced his roots to China and discovered how in Canada he overcame isolation, poverty, cultural and linguistic barriers, racism, and world wars to become one of the most successful vaudeville acts of his time. **In the Shadow of Gold Mountain** told the complex story of Chinese Canadians who survived an era that did not welcome their presence. Through a rich combination of poetry, unvarnished factual history, and raw emotion, the film informed the audience how this past hovers like a dark shadow over many Asian Canadians.

In 2004, **Mr. Mergler's Gift** told the story of a retired Jewish piano teacher who discovered an extraordinary musical talent in a Chinese immigrant child. Though he was dying of cancer while this documentary was being filmed, he devoted the last year of life to teaching her and then found an appropriate successor to nurture her talent. This deeply humanist film used documentary method and re-creations to illustrate a tender story of a teacher's love of music, talent, and teaching.

Using never-before-seen footage and interviews with former prisoners of the Korean war and their families, **They Chose China** (2004) told the astonishing story of 21 American soldiers who opted to stay in China after the war ended. Cold War rhetoric had convinced many that Chinese communists had "brainwashed" these men. What actually happened was a far more complicated and intriguing tale.

In contemporary Canada, the word "multicultural" is now virtually part of daily vocabulary. **Between: Living In The Hyphen** explored its meaning for seven multi-ethnic individuals who tried explaining what it meant to be a multi-ethnic (e.g., Caucasian-Chinese, Caucasian-Aboriginal, etc.). The film predicted that if in 2005, the person of multiple backgrounds struggled with the identity question, in the near future, they would probably find that being of mixed parentage was not unusual.

In the 2006 documentary **Cut and Dry**, Wendy, a Vietnamese/Chinese immigrant at the Rainbow Hair Salon, faced the numerous challenges of owning her own shop, from juggling clients who did not always speak the same language, to handling flirtatious men. Her work was exhausting and challenging in a fiercely competitive Canadian society.

That same year, **Manufactured Landscapes** followed the internationally acclaimed photographer Edward Burtynsky to China, where he documented the positive and negative effects of the country's massive industrial revolution. This documentary could have become a polemic, but the director's remarkably balanced effort left the viewer to meditate on the long-range consequences of contemporary human consumerist activity and the impact of manufacturing on the planet.

Also in 2006, **Jaime Lo, Small and Shy** was an animation for children that offered a child's glimpse into a common dilemma that many immigrant families faced. Her father set off to work in Hong Kong for a year and the family struggled to use all its creativity to cope with his absence.

**Iris Chang: The Rape of Nanking** was a Canadian made feature docudrama in 2007 that related the story of Chinese-American author Iris Chang, whose book detailed Japan's depredations in Nanking in 1937-38. Reminiscent of the documentary of 1998, the actuality footage and survivor interviews underscored the importance of remembering this grisly atrocity. The actor playing Chang revealed a second tragedy: consumed by the enormous responsibility of documenting Japan's militarist past, Chang perished by her own hand.

A year later, in **Up the Yangtze**, a Chinese-Canadian documentary filmmaker followed a luxury cruise boat filled with Western tourists navigating the mythic waterway that was being transformed by the Three Gorges Dam, the biggest hydroelectric project in history. The narrative recorded its impact upon a peasant family that forced their daughter to work on the cruise boat while the Yangtze waters rose and



submerged their tiny homestead. Their story was a microcosm of the sacrifice required of thousands so China could realize its 21st century dream.

In 2010, in the visually poetic **Blossom**, an imaginary young Asian female immigrant to Canada started to build a new life. This lyrical, tender, live action animation took the viewer through the passage of time and seasons. The film's universal message was that the persistence of love between a mother and daughter endured, as resolute and unchanging as Canada's weather cycles.

## Conclusion

Over seventy years, the National Film Board produced almost forty films about China as well as documenting the Chinese immigrant experience in Canada. As a whole, these films familiarized audiences with a once unknown society that was reshaping the entire economic world. The film patterns are noteworthy.

In the 1940s, Canada's theatrical newsreels emphasized the threat of militarist Japan and information about remote China was superficial. Postwar, a lone film tried to explain China's reconstruction and turmoil, but it had very limited distribution. Echoing the United States policy of exclusion and isolation of communist China, Canadians remained visually ignorant of China for the next two decades. An exception occurred with the 1964 NFB documentary *Bethune*, which reminded Canadians of the martyred surgeon's iconic stature in the *Red Book*, where Mao Zedong's adulation made him a national hero to tens of millions. In 1991, a Canadian feature about Bethune was dubbed into Mandarin and Cantonese and the heroic doctor became better known in China than in Canada where the film did poorly at the box office.

Canada's China film policy of non-confrontation was one of the most evident historical patterns. For much of this past decade, that policy changed. It reflected what Paul Evans has called recently "cool politics and warm economics," a less than successful approach that tried to make human rights a core issue while Canada benefited from accelerated trade relations. In contrast, most NFB films remained silent on the issue of China's politics and reflected the more satisfying Canadian tradition of finding mutual interests. More prosaically, in China, Canadian filmmakers understood why visitors remove their shoes before entering a host's domain.

As a whole, these images about China and the Chinese offered viewers the delight of discovery. Recent critical comments that Canadians tend to have an Alice in Wonderland approach to foreign affairs do not apply to the films in this filmography. Canadian films about China tend to favour a one-on-one relationship of viewer to subject. Understanding evolves slowly without the splash of grandiose gesture. In each of the works above, the director shaped the film to create a number of impressions: to allow the viewer the pleasure of learning, to view history as it unfolded, to note the implications of people reshaping their environment, or to witness the immigrant struggle to overcome the ferocious odds of living happily in a new culture. In a long Canadian tradition, these films portrayed common people in the quiet light of ordinary humanism. And if the viewer gazes at these images with an open mind, the delight is that the human condition in our globalized world is more a shared experience than an isolating

one. It is that which makes us richer as we understand others and they understand us. In an era of bowdlerized “communication,” these images may be useful to educators to enhance authentic visual education. Many of the above titles are available today for free viewing on the National Film Board website, <http://www.nfb.ca> , or through loans and/or purchase.

4890 words

Gary Evans  
Adjunct Professor  
Department of Communication  
University of Ottawa  
Canada

## Filmography of Canadian-Made Images About China and the Chinese

Compiled by Professor Gary Evans

Copyright Gary Evans , December 2010

1. **Inside Fighting China** NFB 1941 22 min Stuart Legg. This wartime newsreel from 1942 documents the heroic efforts of China to deal with Japanese aggression and occupation.
2. **The Mask of Nippon** NFB 1942 20 min Stuart Legg. Using newsreel footage provided by China, this film argues that militant Japan is sinister and menacing but that the Allies face this aggression with a single voice. Japan will be defeated by united purpose and action.
3. **The People Between** NFB 1947 23 min Grant McLean. A film about China and its people trying to recover their ravaged land from Japanese occupation. Because the film emphasizes the ongoing struggle between Chiang Kai Shek, with his nationalists, and Mao Zedong, with his communist forces, the United States refused to allow its circulation in the USA.
4. **Window on Canada #27** NFB 1954 29 min Guy Glover Animator Norman McLaren discusses teaching animation techniques in India and China while on loan to UNESCO from 1949 to 1950. He shows two short educational films on public health made by his students in China.
5. **Bethune** NFB 1964 58 min Donald Brittain A film biography of Dr. Norman Bethune, the Canadian doctor who served with the Loyalists during the Spanish Civil War and with Mao Tse Tung's 8<sup>th</sup> Route Army during the anti-fascist war (WWII). He pioneered the world's first mobile blood-transfusion service in Spain, while in China, his work close to the battlefield saved countless wounded and he set up cadres to train doctors and nurses. He contracted blood poisoning while operating on wounded Chinese and died at 49. To this day, Bethune remains the single most important Canadian to the Chinese.
6. **Ping Pong** NFB 1974 13 min Marcel Carrière. The NFB filmed the table tennis competitions between teams of young Canadians and Chinese that took place in the People's Republic of China in the summer of 1973, the first time in twenty-five years that such filming was made possible. This film without words shows highlights of play at the China-Canada Friendship Meet, as well as the young Canadians' visit to the Great Wall of China.
7. **Thunderbirds in China** 57 min 1974 Les Rose Members of the University of British Columbia's Thunderbirds hockey team travel to China to demonstrate their skills to the new teams in the East. While hockey there still has a long way to go, this film leaves no doubt that the Chinese players are up to the challenge. A film propelled by

discoveries, it goes a long way to providing insight into the differences between East and West.

8. **To China with the Premier of British Columbia** 1974 20 min  
[http://www.gcpnews.com/articles/2009-11-20/C1423\\_45726.html](http://www.gcpnews.com/articles/2009-11-20/C1423_45726.html) Dave Barrett, the affable Premier of British Columbia, narrates a political jaunt that he and his official entourage experience while exploring key areas of China, enjoying the goodwill and friendship his hosts offer. The surfaces are all positive and the Chinese are very polite, but Barrett's equally sunny and polite disposition ignores understanding or questioning the impact of the turbulent Cultural Revolution.
9. **Glimpses of China** NFB 1974, 68 min Marcel Carrière. One of the first films illuminating contemporary China, as recorded by a Canadian film crew. In streets, factories, homes and schools, the film witnesses a population's selfless dedication to Mao Zedong's ideal: a new cooperative China.
10. **Bethune** Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1977, 88 min Eric Till. This made for television drama, based on the surgeon's true story, stars Donald Sutherland and Kate Nelligan. The drama emphasizes the importance of background factors that influenced the cantankerous surgeon's life and failed marriage. His commitment to the less fortunate helped shape his determination to fight fascism in Spain and finally in China, where he succumbed to accidental blood poisoning in 1939.
11. **North China Factory** NFB 1980 56 min Tony Ianzelo and Boyce Richardson This documentary depicts a factory community in China where over six thousand workers process, spin and weave raw cotton into 90 million yards of high-quality cloth per year. It takes us into the workers' residential, social, recreational and educational facilities, all of which are located on factory property. The film presents an engrossing study of a lifestyle that is very different from that of the Western world.
12. **China Mission: The Chester Ronning Story** NFB 1980 57 min Tom Radford This documentary chronicles the life of Chester Ronning, best remembered for his close and longstanding relationship with China. Over the course of his life, Ronning worked as a cowboy, ambassador, college president, missionary and a member of the Alberta legislature. But throughout it all, his lifelong ambition was to explain China to the western world. His story is a rare example of how a compassionate, remarkable man did much to facilitate the meeting of East and West.
13. **Bamboo, Lions and Dragons** NFB 1981 26 min Richard Patton Two families, the Changs and Lims, tell the history of the Chinese community in Vancouver. The Changs came in 1908 never integrated into the mainstream; the Lims were born in Canada grew up acculturated as part of the Canadian multicultural mixture.
14. **One of Many Dr. Nhan** NFB 1983, 16 min Jan-Marie Martell Dr. Nhan, an ethnic Chinese refugee from Vietnam, emigrated to Canada in the late 1970's. Dr. Nhan tries to overcome the obstacles that prevent her from using her knowledge and skills as an acupuncturist. Yet she is committed to people and medicine, and is determined to one day practice acupuncture in her new country.

15. **Eternal Earth** NFB 1987 28 min Larry Weinstein Chinese-Canadian composer Alexina Louie creates a symphony combining Western and Eastern musical influences. The creative process is still a mystery, but one that is better understood. The completed piece is played before an appreciative Toronto audience.
  
16. **Who Gets In?** NFB 1989, 52 min Barry Greenwald **Who Gets In?** explores the many questions raised by Canada's immigration policy in the face of one of the world's largest immigration movements. Shot in Africa, Canada, and Hong Kong in 1988, the camera reveals first-hand what Canadian immigration officials are looking for in potential new Canadians, and the economic, social and political priorities reflected in their choices. Those priorities come under scrutiny in this candid documentary.
  
17. **Savage Christmas: Hong Kong 1941** NFB/CBC 1991 104 min Brian McKenna The series *The Valour and the Horror*, deals with Canada in World War II. In this film veterans return to Hong Kong, where in 1941 they and 2,000 untested Canadian soldiers surrendered to Japanese forces. They recall their experiences as prisoners of war who suffered terrible deprivations for years.
  
18. **A Song for Tibet** NFB 1991 56 min Anne Henderson. A land of snow and mountains, of burgundy-clad monks and prayer wheels--this mythical image of Tibet hides the tragedy of a forgotten people. Since the invasion of their territory by China some forty years ago, Tibetans have been struggling for cultural and political survival in a world surprisingly indifferent to their plight. Filmed in the Indian Himalayas and in Canada, *A Song for Tibet* tells the dramatic story of the efforts by Tibetans-in-exile, including the Dalai Lama, to save their homeland and preserve their heritage against overwhelming odds.
  
19. **Bethune: The Making of a Hero** Filmline International 1992 116 min Philip Borsos. This \$20 million feature film about China's best known Canadian ever, was shot in Canada, Spain and China. As the most expensive Canadian film ever made, its unevenness reflects the ongoing struggle between writer Ted Allan and actor Donald Sutherland. Perhaps because of Bethune's own controversial character, the film misses the greatness it promised. Allan wanted the Canadian surgeon to prevail as a communist; Sutherland wanted to portray Bethune as a Canadian hero who was a complex character, both selfless and arrogant, an internationalist, and an intemperate alcoholic. Yet the film does emphasize that Bethune's greatest satisfaction was to sacrifice his life helping the communists fight Japanese fascism.
  
20. **The Diary of Evelyn Lau** Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1993 90 min Sturla Gunnarsson A commercial feature film telling the true story of a teenage girl who runs away from her Vancouver home and her very strict Chinese immigrant parents. Struggling to deal with the ugly side of Canada's reality, she becomes a prostitute

- and drug-addict, and after saving herself, writes a book about her ordeal which becomes this film. The feature's strength is its honest depiction of a negative side of the immigrant experience.
21. **Double Happiness** B.C. Film Commission, Fineline Features and more 1994 87 min  
Mina Shum Trying to satisfy her traditional parents' desire for an arranged marriage and her own desire to date a non-Asian freely, this lighthearted feature shows how there are no easy answers to finding happiness in a different culture.
  22. **Dashan: Ambassador to China's Funny Bone** NFB 1996 50 min Guy Nantel Mark Rowswell, a Canadian comedian virtually unknown in his own country, has an enormous following in mainland China. Known as Dashan, we see a Canadian who has become fully at home in Chinese culture—his appearances on national television have drawn up to 600 million viewers. Rowswell performs, entertains, talks about his art and popularity, and discusses the West's role in the development of the new China.
  23. **Sunrise Over Tianamen Square** NFB 1998 29 min Shui-Bo Wang's feature documentary is a visual autobiography of an artist who grew up in China during the historic upheavals of the '60s, '70s and '80s. A rich collage of original artwork and family and archival photographs presents a personal perspective on the turbulent Cultural Revolution and the years that followed. For Shui-Bo Wang and others of his generation, Tiananmen Square was the central symbol of the new China – a society to be based on equality and cooperation. This animated documentary artfully traces Shui-Bo's roots and his own life journey as he struggles to sort through ideology and finally abandons China for Canada. Nominated for an Academy Award (Oscar).
  24. **The Red Violin** Rhombus Media 1998 130 min Francois Girard. A perfect red-colored violin inspires passion, making its way through three centuries over several owners and countries, eventually ending up at an auction where it may find a new owner. The powerful sequence depicting the devastation wrought by the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976) depicts the dangers of a state bureaucracy that unleashed terror and fear in millions of common people. This commercial feature won an Oscar for best music.
  25. **The Third Heaven** NFB 1998 49 min Georges Payrastre *The Third Heaven* explores the impact of recent Chinese immigration from Hong Kong. Following one family we learn how the cohesion of the Chinese diaspora is not only based on business but on strong, long-standing cultural and family ties.
  26. **In the Name of the Emperor** NFB and Film News Now Foundation 1998 50 min  
Christine Choy and Nancy Tong This is probably the first film to document in detail the atrocity known in history as the 'Rape of Nanking.' Japanese forces committed

a massacre of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians, raped thousands, and have generally escaped the verdict of history. An American missionary recorded the most graphic evidence at the time.

27. **Unwanted Soldiers** NFB 1999 49 min Jari Osborne Vancouver had a long history of discrimination and racism against the Chinese. In World War II, Ottawa refused to accept Chinese as soldiers; later, a handful of Chinese Canadians proudly volunteered for secret missions as Allied (S.O.E.) agents in Southeast Asia. Their history remained secret for decades and only recently came to light.
  
28. **Western Eyes** NFB 2000 39m Ann Shin. In a culture where the standard of beauty is unyielding, what happens to Asian women who are desperately unhappy with their looks? This documentary examines the search for beauty and racial identity by two young women who contemplate cosmetic surgery on their eyes. They reference their stories with pop-culture beauty icons. Shin looks at the pain that lies deep behind the desire for plastic surgery. This examination of beauty and perception asks how we see, how we are seen, and how we see how we are seen. Shin produced it as part of the Reel Diversity Competition for emerging non-Caucasian filmmakers.
  
29. **Who Is Albert Woo?** NFB 2000, 51 min Hunt Hoe. This documentary examines the way identities are shaped and distorted by the popular media, history and culture. Distortions of reality include assumptions that Asian men are like the martial arts movie star Jackie Chan. Breaking that mould, this film shows that there are numerous 'others' like a passionate, artistic, ultra-hip, funny yo-yo champion, or Asian men who practice sexual diversity or others still, who like the rest of society, seek traditional marriage.
  
30. **The Chinese Violin** NFB 2002 8 min Joe Chang In this animation for children, a young girl and her father move from China to Canada, bringing only their Chinese violin. As they face the challenge of most immigrants starting fresh in a new place, the music of the violin connects them to the life they left behind and guides the girl towards a musical future.
  
31. **Roses Sing on New Snow** NFB 2002 7 min Yuan Zhang Another children's animation tells the story of Maylin, the female chef, whose family ignores her skill until she shows a visiting dignitary how to cook a fabulous recipe that combines Old and New World cuisine. She, as chef, is the most important ingredient of all.

32. **Earth to Mouth** NFB 2002 41 min Yung Chang Filmed at the Wing Fong Farm in Ontario, this documentary follows the tilling, planting and harvesting of Asian vegetables destined for Chinese markets and restaurants in Canada. On 80 acres of land, Lau King-Fai, her son and a half-dozen migrant Mexican workers care for the plants. For Yeung Kwan, her son, the farm represents personal and financial independence. For his mother, it is an oasis of peace. For the Mexican workers, it provides jobs that help support their children back home.
33. **Fragrant Light** NFB 2003 9 min Serge Clément This Canadian photographer explores the many nuances of life in Hong Kong and Shanghai in this animated rendition taken from his book of black and white photos of the same name.

**Asian Canadian History Collection** NFB 2006, From the opening the West to baseball, Canadian of Asian heritage have helped build Canada. This collection of NFB documentaries highlights their contributions and recounts some of the injustices Asian Canadians have faced. These films will spark discussion and animate lively debates in the classroom. Use these titles to explore racism, the building of the Canadian West and World War II history. The following titles come from the series **From Harling Point, In the Shadow of Gold Mountain, The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam**

34. **From Harling Point**, NFB 2003, 40 min Ling Chiu. Traditional Chinese belief says that the soul of a person who dies in a foreign place wanders lost until their bones are returned home. Harling Point cemetery, Victoria was such a temporary resting place. This documentary is an eloquent exploration of tradition, belonging and the notion of home. It offers one explanation as to how the past reflects the emergence of a contemporary Chinese Canadian identity.
35. **The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam** NFB 2003, 88 min Ann Marie Fleming. Long Tack Sam's great granddaughter, Ann Marie Fleming, unravels the mystery of this internationally renowned Chinese acrobat and magician. Her quest for his roots in China reveals how he overcame isolation, poverty, cultural and linguistic barriers, extreme racism and world wars to become one of the most successful vaudeville acts of his time.
36. **In the Shadow of Gold Mountain** NFB 2004 43 min Karen Cho. This film relates personal testimonials of Chinese Canadians who survived an era (1885-1947) that threatened to eradicate their entire community. Through a rich melding of sobering and often unhappy history, poetry and raw emotion, it reveals the profound ways this history still casts its shadow over a fifth-generation Canadian of mixed heritage.



37. **Mr. Mergler's Gift** NFB 2004 30 min Beverly Shaffer Mr. Mergler, a retired piano teacher, discovers extraordinary piano talent in a Chinese immigrant girl and though he is dying of cancer, he devotes the last year of life to teaching her and then finds an appropriate successor to nurture her talent. The film uses documentary method and re-creations to illustrate this human story of a teacher's love of music, talent and teaching.
38. **They Chose China** NFB 2005 52m Shuibo Wang. Using never-before-seen footage from the Chinese camps and interviews with former POWs and their families Shuibo Wang tells the astonishing story of 21 American soldiers who opted to stay in China after the Korean War ended in 1954. Cold War rhetoric led many Americans to believe Chinese communists had brainwashed these men. What really happened is a far more complicated and intriguing tale.
39. **Between: Living In The Hyphen** NFB 2005 44m Anne Marie Nakagawa. Seven multi-ethnic individuals (eg., Caucasian-Chinese, Caucasian-Aboriginal) try explaining what it means to be a multi-ethnic in a world that today struggles with multiple backgrounds but tomorrow will probably find that being mixed is not unusual.
40. **Cut and Dry** NFB 2006, 12 min Siu Ta What do you get for a \$6 haircut? At the Rainbow Hair Salon, Wendy Su can make you look like Jackie Chan or Tiger Woods! This documentary follows Wendy, a Vietnamese/Chinese immigrant as she confesses the numerous challenges of owning her own salon, from juggling a multicultural clientele who doesn't always speak the same language, to handling overly flirtatious clients. Through it all Wendy takes each with stride.
41. **Manufactured Landscapes** NFB 2006 90 min Jennifer Baichwal. Jennifer Baichwal follows the internationally acclaimed photographer Edward Burtynsky to China, where he captures the positive and negative effects of the country's massive industrial revolution. This remarkable film leads us to meditate on human endeavour and its impact on the planet.
42. **Jaime Lo, Small and Shy** NFB 2006 8 min Lillian Chan. This lighthearted animation for children of small and shy Jaime Lo offers a glimpse into a common dilemma that many immigrant families face. Her father is sent to Hong Kong for a year in order to provide for the rest of the family back home. Jaime uses her creativity to cope with his absence.
43. **Bethune** Pristine Entertainment and Worry Free Productions 2006 90 min Yang Yang. This television miniseries, shot in Mandarin and English in Montreal, is a faint echo of previous film interpretations of the noted surgeon. A low budget remake of

the 1964 Chinese film **Baiqiuen dai fu**, it does little justice to Bethune's life and work in Spain, then China.

44. **Iris Chang: The Rape of Nanking** Real to Real 2007 103 min Bill Spahic and Ann Pick. This Canadian made feature docudrama tells the story of Chinese American author Iris Chang, who wrote a book documenting the horrific Nanking Atrocity of 1937-38, a massacre committed by the occupying Japanese army. Documentary footage and survivor interviews underscore the importance of remembrance of this terrible episode of 20<sup>th</sup> century history. The film reveals a second tragedy: consumed by the enormity of having documented this event, Chang perished by her own hand.
45. **Up the Yangtze** NFB 2008 93 min Yung Chang. Chinese-Canadian filmmaker Yung Chang follows a luxury cruise boat filled with Western tourists navigating the mythic waterway. The Yangtze is about to be transformed by the Three Gorges Dam, the biggest hydroelectric dam in history. He records its impact upon a peasant family whose daughter leaves to work on the cruise boat as the floodwaters rise to submerge their small homestead, a sacrifice that is required so China can realize its 21st century dream.
46. **Blossom** 2010 6 min Julia Kwan. A young Asian woman immigrates to Canada to build a new life. Throughout the passage of time and seasons, the persistence of love between mother and daughter endures, as resolute and unchanging as the Canada's cycle of the seasons. This animated film was produced as part of the 2010 Cultural Olympiad.