Film explores overseas study

2018-03-29

By HONG XIAO in New York |   
 chinadaily.com.cn |  
 Updated: 2018-03-29 03:53

With China's development, there has been an exponential surge of students studying abroad. Chinese students now account for over one-third to one-half of international secondary school students in the US. Many are children of the new Chinese wealthy elite whose parents found success in China's economic rise over recent decades.  
Part of the enormous wave of "parachute students" from China enrolling in US private schools, introspective Harry and bubbly, fun-loving Stella come seeking a Western-style education with expectations of a Hollywood-style US high school experience, not to mention escaping the Chinese college entrance exam.  
In a sleepy little town in Maine, as Stella and Harry's fuzzy visions of the American dream slowly gain more clarity, they ruminate on their experiences of alienation, culture clash and personal identity, sharing new understandings of home and country.  
Filmed over three years in China and the US starting in 2012,   
"While the documentary is primarily a coming-of-age tale, it is also an eye-opening cultural commentary on two seemingly opposite countries," commented  
In 2017, the film won the Special Jury Award for Excellence in Observational Cinema at South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas.  
In 2011, Fryeburg Academy invited Wang to screen Beijing Taxi on their campus. Upon arrival, she realized that Fryeburg, as one of the oldest private schools in the US, had an international student body of 160, and more than one-third of them were Chinese.  
"The American teachers and the staff at the school remarked how little they understand of the Chinese students," Wang said. "A couple of Chinese students told me'If I knew there were so many Chinese students in the school, I wouldn't have come'."  
"I became fascinated by the thought of these Chinese students studying in small-town Maine, newly arrived from a megalopolis, often setting foot in the US for the first time," she added.  
Wang said that as an increasingly large body of Chinese students comes to study in the US, many of the schools are similarly stymied by how to integrate this new student body into their life.  
It is also a relevant story for Wang herself.  
Growing up in Beijing, at the age of 13 Wang immigrated to the US with her parents.  
"The next five years were very difficult but formative years," she recalled.  
Crossing continents from one culture into another at a young age is the most important turning point for anyone who has gone through that experience. Wang believes her transnational identity provides a perspective that reveals the nuances and humor of both cultures.  
"It also shaped me into a firm believer in the value of cultural and educational exchange as a fundamental basis for inspiring and building a better understanding between people of different nations," she said.  
The rapidly growing elite class in China, which has the second-largest number of millionaires in the world, wanted to find the best education for their children.  
With the increase in the number of Chinese studying in high schools in the US — a 1,000 percent increase in five years  — this film has the potential to impact the discussion of this social phenomenon.  
Wang said the film also raises some important questions: Does studying abroad necessarily guarantee a better life for them? Some may integrate into American society; some may never make any non-Chinese friends, while some may return to China sometime after college as government or business leaders, she said.  
How will an overseas perspective change a new generation of young Chinese and what may that lasting impact be on the future of China and the world? Could they perhaps eventually become part of a bridge across the cultural divide?  
"These are questions I hope to leave with the audience at the end of the film," she said.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201803/29/WS5abbf2bba3105cdcf6514eba.html