4. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This study is both qualitative and exploratory. It attempts to identify all the nationalistic/patriotic themes in the selected films and show how they are portrayed. It means that examples from the movies will be provided to see themes' portrayal (what forms the theme) and variations of a theme among movies.

The objective is to see if nationalism often discussed in other studies with connection to China in the 21st century can be seen also in most consumed popular Chinese films. For this purpose, thematic textual analysis looking for the patriotic/nationalistic messages (themes) is used. Thematic textual analysis as described by Taylor & Bogdan (1984), Miles & Huberman (1994), Boyatzis (1999), Flick (2004) and other scholars is often explained as "way of seeing" or "search for meaning". It enables its users to look under the surface and gain an insight that does not appear to the less critical eyes. Thematic analysis is widely used in many areas such as psychology, sociology, anthropology or linquistics. It is also a method used for interpreting of dreams in psychoanalysis. In film studies, thematic analysis focuses on how a movie expresses meaning or thoughts trough narration and is used quite often (for example in a study by Dodds (2004) on Army recruiting themes in Guadalcanal Diary movie, by Devine (1999) on portrayal of Vietnam war in US movies or by Darby

(1997) when analyzing John Ford's westerns).

Themes, or subjects that construct the story line are defined as units that emerge from "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p. 131). Most movies can be divided into several thematic units (themes) for the purpose of analysis. Themes often constitute thematic structures that can be interpreted thereafter relating them to some ideology, point of view, etc. The main message of the structure constructs the superctructure.

Gries (2004) identified two nationalistic thematic superstructures in the stories told about the Chinese past: China as a victor, and China as a raped woman.   Smith's (1995) ethnic myths which help exalt people's sense of common identity and belonging can be also interpreted as nationalistic thematic superstructures. Smith identified the following myths (already depicted earlier):

1) A Myth of Temporal Origins

2) A Myth of Location and Migration

3) A Myth of Ancestry

4) A Myth of Heroic Age

5) A Myth of Decline

6) A Myth of Regeneration

In China's case these myths can be stories about mythical and ancient China (A Myth of Temporal Origins), about waves of immigration and assimilation of foreign peoples into the Han population and expansion of China (A Myth of Location and Migration), stories about great deeds of Yellow Emperor and other figures from Chinese mythology (A Myth of Ancestry), stories about the golden ages during Han and Tang dynasties (A Myth of Heroic Age), about the Warring State Period (A Myth of Decline) and about China's ascent (A Myth of Regeneration). Although superstructures defined by Gries and Smith were taken as a basis, the research was not limited to them, but tried to identify also others.

At the same time, simple thematic units were identified to see how they present nationalism and if nationalism often discussed in other studies with connection to China in the 21st century can be seen also in most consumed Chinese films. Research identifies the themes of both political nationalism and cultural nationalism as defined by Greenfeld (1992). It means that both manifestations of nationalism that identify nationality with citizenship stressing superiority and/or pride of China as a state and referring to PRC's symbols, and nationalism promoting greatness and/or superiority of ancient China and Chinese culture and/or calling for unity among Chinese people based on their common origins were included in the analysis.

<u>Selection of Films for Analysis</u>

This study focused on the content of Chinese box-office hits in mailand China, or, in other words, on the content of Chinese movies most popular among audience in mainland China. "Chinese" movies in this study were not just pure mainland China productions, but also co-productions with Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The reason for including these co-productions was multiple. First, these often costly co-productions with stars from the "three Chinas" are promoted as "Chinese" by Beijing government and included in mainland China´s domestic charts prepared by various magazines and also by official China Film Bureau. These films exceed the quota for foreign movies accepted for screening in China, and some of them even represent mainland China cinematography abroad. Second, this study is focused on nationalistic elements/messages in Chinese box-office hits. As has been discussed in previous discussions, Chinese nationalism is first of all cultural, based on the concept of "Chineseness", not political relying on state or government. Mainland China, Hongkong and Taiwan are referred to as the "Three Chinas" or the "Greater China Area" where the concept of "Chineseness" regarding people's identity is very true. Not to include the co-productions could be a serious flaw of the study. Third, co-productions between mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have been booming in recent years to the extent that some scholars have argued that pure mainland China

cinema does not exist anymore (nor do pure Hong Kong or Taiwan cinema). The current trend is showing rising co-operation in an entertainment industry among the three areas, that is at the same time happening in other areas and leads to greater economic co-operation and interdependency. Fourth, when one of the reasons for the boom of the co-productions between "three Chinas" (as has been explained on previous pages) is the need of Hong Kong and Taiwan filmmakers to get access to the mainland China market, these movies must follow mainland China regulations to be allowed there. It is obvious that these regulations and official tastes are taken into consideration even in the preparatory phase of film-making. Last, but not the least, these co-productions were approved for screening in China and gained popularity as blockbusters among mainland Chinese viewers.

Box-office hits as the study material were picked because they have achieved the biggest popularity and attracted the largest audience. As so, they had the biggest potential to spread the messages they carry since the message should or may resonate in the audience. Selection of these box-office hits was made according to the data provided by *Dianying Yishu,* the Beijing-based scholastic film art magazine founded in 1956. *Dianying Yishu* annually publishes charts of Chinese top box-office hits in mainland China according to the data provided by the Chinese State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). The chosen time period was the 21st century,

beginning the year 2000 up to the year 2007. From the list of top box office hits pure Hong Kong and Taiwan productions were excluded. Top five films per year were chosen. From the list of 40 movies those with nationalistic content were analyzed making it 14 movies altogether. First, from the list of 40 movies films that according to the plot clearly did not fit into the category of nationalistic movies were excluded. Movies that were according to the synopsis considered to be on the borderline were viewed and included in or excluded from the analysis depending on their content.

To avoid the subjectivity in analysis, another two coders – one American with China studies background and one European with media studies background - were trained to flag the nationalistic themes in the movies. As so, they had to develop thematic analysis guides (which are explained later) while watching selected movies. Their findings were later on compared with the one of the author and differences were discussed enabling to come up with more objective findings.

The film materials needed were either borrowed or bought from DVD shops in Taipei. Some of them were ordered from internet database *YesAsia.com* and others viewed online. The films chosen for analysis are given in Table 1. Those labeled with * were not found and couldn't be analyzed. These movies, *Deng Xiaoping, Zhang Side* and *Ren Changxia*, however, fit into the category of patriotic revolutionary movies. The first one being a biography of great political figure, the second one biography of Mao's

bodyguard and the last one bringing the story of Chinese model policewoman.

Table 1. Selected Movies for Analysis

Year	Title	Box office no.	Director
2001	*Purple Sunset (Ziri)*	3	Feng Xiaoning
	Red Turn (Zou chu xi bo po)	5	Shan Liang, Li Xiepu
2002	*Hero (Ying xiong)*	1	Zhang Yimou
	Charging Out Amazon (Chong chu ya ma xun)	3	Song Yeming
	C.E.O.	5	Wu Tianming
2003	*Warriors of Heaven and Earth (Tian di ying xiong)*	2	He Ping
	Deng Xiaoping*	5	Ding Yinnan
2004	*Deng Xiaoping in 1928 Deng Xiaoping, 1928*	3	Li Xiepu
	Zhang Side*	4	Yin Li
2005	*The Promise(Wu ji)*	1	Chen Kaige
	Ren Changxia*	3	Shen Haofang
2006	*Curse of Golden Flower (Man cheng jin dai chuang jin jia)*	1	Zhang Yimou
	A Battle of Witts (Mo gong)	3	Zhang Ziliang
	The Knot (Yun shui yao)	4	Yin Li
	Tokyo Trial (Dongjing Shenpan)	5	Gao Qunshu
2007	*The Warlords (Tou ming zhuang)*	1	Chen Kexin
	Assembly (Ji jie hao)	2	Feng Xiaogang

Source: *Dianying Yishu* (2000 to 2008)

Research Instruments

To gather the needed data for the study, the researchers came up with a thematic

analysis guide (thematic code) for inductive analysis. Since the research was

exploratory, this guide was created in the early stage of analysis and then applied to the rest of the selected movies. In other words, coders were marking, defining and describing nationalistic themes while watching the first movies. Since the nationalistic themes are to the great extent repetitive among movies, in the latter stage already created guides were used. When the new theme was identified, new guide had to be developed. The guide was constructed according to Boyatzis (1998) and had a label, a definition of what the theme concerns (characteristics or issue constituting the theme), description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme (how to flag the theme), and examples.

Limitations

The caution was related to the mandatory viewing from schools and free tickets from work units for some leitmotif films in mainland China (all three movies that were not included in the analysis because of their inaccessibility – *Deng Xiaoping, Zhang Side* and *Ren Changxia* – fall into this category). This fact can help some   films in general not popular among audience to gain the status of "box-office hit" even when its popularity is low. This problem has been mentioned by Zhang (2004) and Zhu (2003) in relation to revolutionary historical films and the propaganda films in general. However, this limitation is overcomed by providing additional contextual information about movies background.