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Framing China's National Image through Film: Chinese Political Films in the 1980s and the 2000s

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Framing China's national image through film: Chinese political films in the 1980s and the 2000s

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how Chinese political films frame national image at the present time (2000s) and compares that portrayal with an earlier time period (1980s). Attempting to build a bridge between framing theory and film studies, and also trying to provide an comprehensive measurement of national image, this research expands the concept of national image to include political and cultural aspects: the former involves key dimensions such as major political figures and state capacity, while the latter contains traditional cultural representations, national culture portrayals, and patriotism appeal. Through a qualitative content analysis of two films, *The Founding of A Republic* and *The Birth of New China* this study finds that: (1) back to 1940s, China was portrayed as a nation that desired change in society as a whole, including its politics, economy, and culture; (2) Chinese society reflected typical Eastern culture and traditional Chinese values that served to evoke people's patriotism; and (3) Chinese films have developed more nuanced views on the role of key political players such as the Kuomintang at that time. The study has important theoretical and practical implications for scholars of national image building in popular culture.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of 2011, China put its first national publicity film in Times Square, an event that sparked widespread discussion of Chinese national image in the academic world. Since then many scholars have analyzed the content as well as the effects of the national publicity films (e.g., Liu, 2011; Tang, 2011; Tan, 2012), concluding that the actual effects of those films were not as favorable as expected. Two years earlier, China was successful in framing its national image domestically through a popular political film titled *The Founding of A Republic*, which was produced to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC). After that the Chinese film industry started focusing on historic war films, which was not a common choice in the past 30 years, and those films have become quite popular in the country since then. Two examples include *The Sounds of Wind* and *The Silent War*, two political films based on the historical battle between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Kuomintang, both of which achieved high box-office numbers that exceeded two hundred million RMB (Chen, 2009; Chen, 2010).

This phenomenon indicates an important development: film, as well as media content in general, has become a significant resource for national-image building efforts. Framing theory provides a social scientific approach to measure and analyze the content of media products, including films. Looking at media content ranging from key words used, visual or textual metaphors and dominant frames is a popular approach in studying traditional media content, however, existing framing research on film is quite limited. Most framing research used in film studies refer to either the technological term of film frame (Buckland, 2011) or exclude the use

of framing theory (Safran, 2001). Thus, there is a theoretical gap in applying framing theory to film studies.

Although political films have recently gained popularity in China, this tendency would have seemed unlikely just decades ago. This begs the question: How do present-day Chinese political films frame their content to meet the needs of contemporary audiences? To answer this question, this research conducts a qualitative content analysis examining how Chinese political films framed the national image of China in 1980s and in 2010s. Politically significant, the concept of national image has received growing attention by Chinese authorities who use soft power to enhance people's confidence in the nation and support of the government (Kipnis, 2012). Thus, it is both academically and practically important for this research to take a deep look into national image-building in political films.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

National Image

The earliest studies on national image can be traced back to the late 1950s. Boulding (1959), who wrote one of the fundamental articles in this field, considered national image as a concept that "must be thought of as the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavior unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe" (p. 121). There are at least four relevant arguments in Boulding's article that deserve attention. First, the dominant factor that results in a political decision is the perceived national image rather than objective facts, while the national image "is basically a lie, or at least a perspective distortion of the truth" (Boulding, 1959, p. 122). Second, to study national image one needs to analyze the images of two characters in this state: the powerful people and, on contrast, the ordinary ones. Third, the impression of nationality usually forms through family culture, and political messages reinforce it. Fourth, the shared meaning of national image is based on the shared experience, such as the historical memory within a nation.

Later, researchers tended to relate national image to economic concerns. On the marketing perspective, Nagashima (1970) mentioned the concept of national image when he analyzed the attitudes toward foreign merchandises in Japan and the US. According to his definition, national image was "the picture, the reputation, and the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country" (1970, p. 68), which was composed of "representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history, and traditions" (p. 68). Then Bannister, Saunders, Desborde, Allred, Chakraborty, and Miller extended this

definition that the "generalized images created not only by representative products but also by the degree of economic and political maturity, historical events and relationships, culture and traditions, and the degree of technological virtuosity and industrialization" (taken from Zhou, Chen, & Wu, 2012, p. 677). In all, marketing scholars studied the national image as a powerful variable that it can influence consumers on purchasing foreign merchandises.

In recent decades national image seems to resume its popularity in its original domain of politics and international relations, and to emphasize its importance within the field of media studies. Kunczik's (2000) believed that a national image is shaped and affected by a complicated process of international communications, which was dominated by the media coverage on foreign affairs. Researchers from journalism and communication field are concerned with to what extent the message framing is able to change the public beliefs on a given nation. Thus, in political communications, it is more common to study the national image of a given country in an international relations sense.

There is no doubt that national image can be branded, and such branding activities can be accomplished by at least the following three groups: people, society, and the government (Chen, 2012). When analyzing Chinese self-description articles and reports during 1954 to 2002, Wang (2003) found that the most frequently used words were peace-loving, victim, socialist, revolution, anti-hegemonic, developing, major, cooperator, and autonomous. China has made great effort on building its national image in the global arena, which is gaining continuing attention internationally (Chen, 2012).

However, it is also important to consider how a given state implements its national image building inside the country. Kipnis (2012) connects Chinese domestic control with another concept: nation-building, which is defined as any intended or unintended activities that enhance

the commonality among citizens. The structure of the Chinese education system, which reinforces party-loving, patriotism, and normalization, is one of the three societal arenas Kipnis applied to analyze Chinese nation-building. To this extent, nation-building is ideologically similar to domestic national image-building.

This study uses political films as material to analyze national image, focusing on how Chinese political films, as influential media products and propaganda tools, portray Chinese national image. It takes a qualitative approach to the analysis of film content, as described below.

Political Films

Film, as a visual form of art, is an important cultural product of contemporary society. Film is not merely a product of scriptwriter's imagination, but more importantly the reflection of society. Film and society are deeply intertwined in that they influence each other.

The editor of a Scribner Research Anthology published in 1964, "Film and Society", asked the question whether film reflects or influences society. Irving Thalberg's article (1964) in that anthology answers that it is necessary for films to reflect society, because the content must correspond to current thinking in order to attract audiences. However, at the same time, Leo Rosten's article (1947) in the anthology named "Movies and Propaganda" claims that films can influence society, as they are made in order to change attitudes. In this way, film is a way to reflect national image and also to create national image for the audience.

According to Zi (2010), "political film" was first mentioned at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival, where the French film industry thought it should be "a film contains, to a greater or lesser extent, political ideas that can turn the film into a propaganda tool for political dissidents" (p. 51). Soon after the new term was used, film festivals all around the world tried their best to

avoid political film to keep the purity of film art. Nevertheless, in the following years the human-right campaign gradually gained its popularity in the Western world, making the film festivals more influenced by political ideologies; thus, political films officially enter into the perspective of film festivals (Zi, 2010).

It is common for researchers to discuss the political films through propaganda views: for instance, during World War I and II massive research was conducted on analyzing the influence of film propaganda, which generated people's patriotism and encouraged them to join the army (Hafsteinsson & Grétarsdóttir, 2011). According to the researchers, political film could be a powerful tool for the government in the special period. Compared to those in the wartime, now in peacetime political films preferred to present the historical events and build a specific national image.

Analyzing national image through film study becomes prevalent in China recently. Bao (2012) chose Chinese Kung Fu movies, and found that national image construction in the contemporary Chinese Kung Fu movies has experienced the change from political crisis of identity, material pursuit of modernity to renewal of cultural confidence. Chen and Lin (2014) analyzed Chinese films produced from 1949 to 2014 to show the social change in China. During 1949 to 1966, Chinese films focus more on farmers and workers, presenting their great contributions to the whole society, and criticizing capitalists as greedy and exploitative. From 1966 to 1976, ideal image of farmers and workers became clearer as the fighter of the Cultural Revolution. They are faithful followers of Chairman Mao with solid political beliefs. While after 1977, characteristics in Chinese films became more diversity including government officers, scholars, company leaders, and so forth. Guo (2011) took globalization into consideration, figuring out some international Chinese films do not actually build a positive national image of

China worldwide. However, those studies face with a big problem that there is no unified dimension to measure national image in film, so that all the findings are dispersive, fragmentary, and lack of proper organization.

Also, in current Chinese society, more people tend to use films to perceive themselves, the environments, and the relations of these two (Liu, 2005). Correspondently, the authorities show more interest in using film to accomplish their propaganda goals. This seems be a successful strategy, at least judging by the extent of the audiences' response and the market popularity of the films.

Framing Analysis

In order to study national image in political film, framing analysis serves as a theoretical background to explain how the message framing is used in political film to define and maintain national image, and further to influence public perception of national image. Though there is a blank space between framing researches and film studies, more researchers are trying to make contributions in bridging the gap of visual framing: Coleman (2010), for instance, demonstrated the significance of the effects on visual framing, and some scholars have made effort on methodologies of visual-framing measurements (e.g., Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

Sociology scholar Goffman (1974) first introduced the framing theory: as he believed, even facing the same condition, different people will have distinct perception because all individuals view things through their own framework. As for sociology scholars, when studying given content, framing theory works as an underlying technology since it provides some deep meanings other than the very obvious surface. Such idea soon gained its popularity and was applied to other fields.

However, it is more influential for the media channel that disseminating information than the information itself, and the producer who controlling the information is central than the content of a particular topic. Media, a bridge connecting the reality and individual's perception, have received great attention; and the mass characteristic of media turns the individual-level content analysis to a macro-level consideration where the public join the elaboration. Gitlin (1980) mentioned that mass media also provide cultural meaning as spreading the information, which makes the upgraded content no longer the pure reflection of the reality. According to him, the cultural meanings disseminated by the mass media possess the possibility to change the audiences' perceptive frames, and then the realistic society.

Therefore, framing theory can be used to clarify the possible influence of media performance on audience perceptions and even behavior. As a dynamic process, media frames provide the underlying meaning along with the message to the public, and further shape the public opinion.
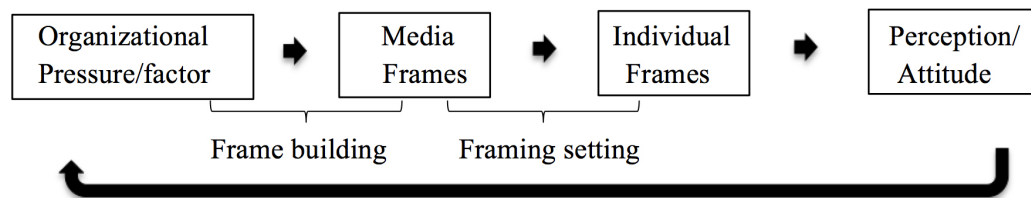
Figure 1. Framing theory in media studies, based on Scheufele (1999).

As shown in Figure 1, the traditional framing process begins with the organizational pressures or factors influencing the creation of media frames, a process also called framing building. It is followed by another process of framing setting, in which individual frames are shaped and public perceptions as well as attitudes are established based on the media frames. The

individual frames will eventually be transferred into factors that effect media frames in the first place, as the figure demonstrates.

Based on this model, Gamson and Mofigliani defined media frame as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (1987, p. 143). "Framing is a process that is only partially conscious on the part of the person who creates a message" (Van Gorp & Vercruysse, 2012, p. 1275). To learn about existing media frames, they must be studied as dependent variables (Scheufele, 1999), that is, media frames as shaped by some external factors. Gamson and Mofigliani see media frames as the product of the interaction between journalists' norms and practices and the influence of interest groups. Scholars as Van Dijk added social and professional routines to the factors (1985), while Edelman pointed out media frames are dependent on ideology and prejudice (1993). Based on the foundation of previous research, Scheufele (1999) concluded five main factors that have an influence on media frames: (a) social norms and values, the beliefs that the majority follow; (b) organizational pressures and constraints, where media is actually profitable organization in society; (c) pressures of interest groups as the sponsors' inclination; (d) journalistic routines as reporting event timely; and (e) the ideological or political orientation of journalists, referring to the ideal situation that media is supposed to reach.

In this way, film as a special media form is expected to similarly be influenced these impacts. When we examine political films in particualr they have to meet the requirements of (a) social values that the public accepts; (b) rules and laws of film production; (c) interests of the movie-maker; (d) routines of film industry; (e) and ideal political orientation. Concentrating on

the process of frame building, this study investigates the question of how political films portray the national image of China at two different points in time.

In contrast to the extensive research on textual framing, there is a gap between framing theory and visual studies, although more researchers have made contributions on filling the blank. Until the late 1990s the academic world lacked social-scientific studies on images (Coleman, 2010); now the combination of framing theory and visual studies builds more confidence in researchers due to its ability to explain and predict the visual content as well as its effects, which has been touted as "one of the notable new favorites" and "an important new direction" of research (Coleman, 2010, p. 233). It is widely accepted by framing scholars that visual framing plays a significant role in expanding the theory's scope and contributions (Coleman, 2010). Some believe that the special characteristics of visuals "make them very effective tools for framing" (Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2001, P. 220). Further, when there is a disaccord between verbal information and visuals, the audiences tend to be more influenced by the visuals, which is called the picture superiority effect (Gibson & Zillmann, 2000).

In an attempt for methodological clarity, some film researchers (e.g., Ma, 2014) presented three dimensions from the perspective of aesthetics and artistic value including story line, filming way, and intrinsic value. According to Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011), there are four levels in visual framing: visuals as denotative systems, visuals as stylistic systems, visuals as connotative systems, and visuals as ideological representations. To be more specific, when visuals, both still pictures and moving images, sends information to the brain to form a specific combination of the visual content, it is playing the denotative role. Shooting techniques in visuals, such as social distance and visual modality, can enforce the expression, falling into the second level of stylistic system. As for connotative system, symbols and the relations of symbols

will convey metaphorical meanings, through which the analysis of frames is implemented. All the above systems synthetically lead to the forth level of ideological representations, which reveals individual's basic attitude and also helps to explain the symbols as well as stylistic features.

Combining the literature summarized above, this thesis attempts to answer the following overarching research question:

Research Question: How do Chinese political films frame the national image of China in the 1980s and the 2000s?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

Aiming to find how do Chinese government frame the national image through political films, this research conducts a qualitative content analysis. There are three main methodologies to social science research: positivist, interpretive, and critical (Neuman, 2014; Blaikie, 1993). The second category falls into qualitative realm, which attempts to "understand how people in everyday natural settings create meaning and interpret the events of their world" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010, p. 117). Though there is no generally accepted definition of the term *qualitative*, there are several clear characteristics of qualitative research: (1) Qualitative research strives for depth instead of breadth of the study object; (2) It appeals to unique explanation from the interpretive researchers; (3) It implements a flexible research method and uses an evolving or reiterative research process, which allows for change as the research progresses.

Content analysis also can be divided into a quantitative or qualitative research paradigm. Holding the opinion that the content of documents are cultural objects, qualitative researchers attempt to analyze the entire documents from a constructionist perspective, and emphasize the communicating social meaning (Neuman, 2014). Qualitative content analysis not only views the verbal and visuals as the base, it also believes that the meanings their interplay produces has a fundamental role. Accordingly, the characteristics of both qualitative research and qualitative content analysis are in line with the purpose of this study, which is to examine national image through political films in two different time periods.

In terms of process, the following three steps will be followed. First, the researcher will take an in-depth look at the selected films, which are examined in their entirety. Next, the researcher

will include her own interpretations on several key dimensions, and these interpretations will be uniquely based on the researcher's background and perceptions and her active involvement with the film content. Third, in line with the qualitative paradigm, the researcher may adjust some of the key concepts as the study develops; so in a way, data analysis is revisited for the duration of the research project.

Sample

This study selects two films for in-depth examination: one film produced in the 1980s and the other created after the millennium. It may seem more reasonable to focus on the early time period, 1960s to 1970s, to represent the old Chinese political films. However, because of the Cultural Revolution during that time period, political films were generally considered as means of propaganda only; they turned out to possess little or no artistic value. Comparing political films in 1980s with those after the millennium instead makes more sense for several reasons. First, the film creators have attempted to create films that meet contemporary audience needs and expectations. Second, contemporary political films include more diversified themes, making it possible to compare similar-theme films directly (Peng, 2013).

Based on the criteria of (1) being representative of the time period, (2) being significant or successful in terms of marketing, and (3) being comparable as whole, these two films have been selected for analysis:

The Founding of A Republic

Released in September 2009, this film was produced to commemorate the 60th birthday of People's Republic of China, picturing stories around the founding of new China. It focuses on

Mao's relations with several other political parties, revealing their friendship in the revolution years. Besides being a huge box office success with 430 million RMB in revenue, it also obtained a number of awards in various Chinese film festivals (Mtime, 2015).

Wang Xingdong (2009), the major writer of the film, stated that as a wartime film one of the goals was to present the history of the people who had sacrificed themselves for the future of China. "We found an entry point that focused on the major of political figures of the representative parties", said Wang, "we used the relations between those major political figures to build the frame of the film" (as interviewed by Sohobook, 2009).

The Birth of New China

Released in 1989, this film portrays how Mao associated with Kuomintang's left-wing public figures and other parties to organize the ceremony of the birth of new China. It also focuses on the lives of important Chinese political leaders such as Mao, Zhou, Liu, and Zhu. In 1990 this film acquired the Best Film Award of the tenth Gold Rooster Award (Mtime, 2015).

A couple, Li Qiankuan and Xiao Guiyun, directed this film. "It is never easy to present the birth of the new republic," Xiao mentioned, "*The Birth of New China* has to show 138 characters, with each worth a film themselves, so that requires us to provide highly condensed content" (as interviewed by Xinhuanet, 2015). To represent the history with both realism and expressionism, the couple combined documentary style with the new cinematic techniques, which resulted in a new film style at that time (Yang, 2013).

Weakland (1966) found that political themes in Chinese films were in line with stages of Chinese historical development: (1) the old Chinese society and its evils, (2) transitional

struggles for social change, (3) the new Chinese society and its virtues, and (4) continuing social improvements and future goals. The two films selected here are both compatible with the second theme -- transitional struggles for social change; and they focus on the same historical event that how the CCP seized power from Kuomintang government and established the new China. Films with the same theme at different time period provide this research more compatible observations and reasonable analysis.

Key Concepts

When it comes to academic studies of national image several multifaceted analytical methods have been used, but they seem inconsistent and fragmented (e.g., Liu, 2011; Tang, 2011; Tan, 2012). Li and Chitty (2009) tried to generalize a methodology for the study of national image, but their dimensions seem too broad. To measure national image in political films, this research develops a framework that focuses on two general aspects: the political image and the cultural image of Chinese society; each of them includes several dimensions and specific concepts/ indicators (see Figure 2).

Political image

When looking for an encompassing definitions of politics, Alexander (2014) found that the key concepts of politics are ruling and being ruled, though he admitted that politics is a complicated concept involving all the functions of state, all the cooperative and conflicting activities within and between societies, and so forth. Nevertheless, the first dimension in political image needs to focus on the players who participate in ruling-and-being-ruled activities, that is, (A) *major political figures*.
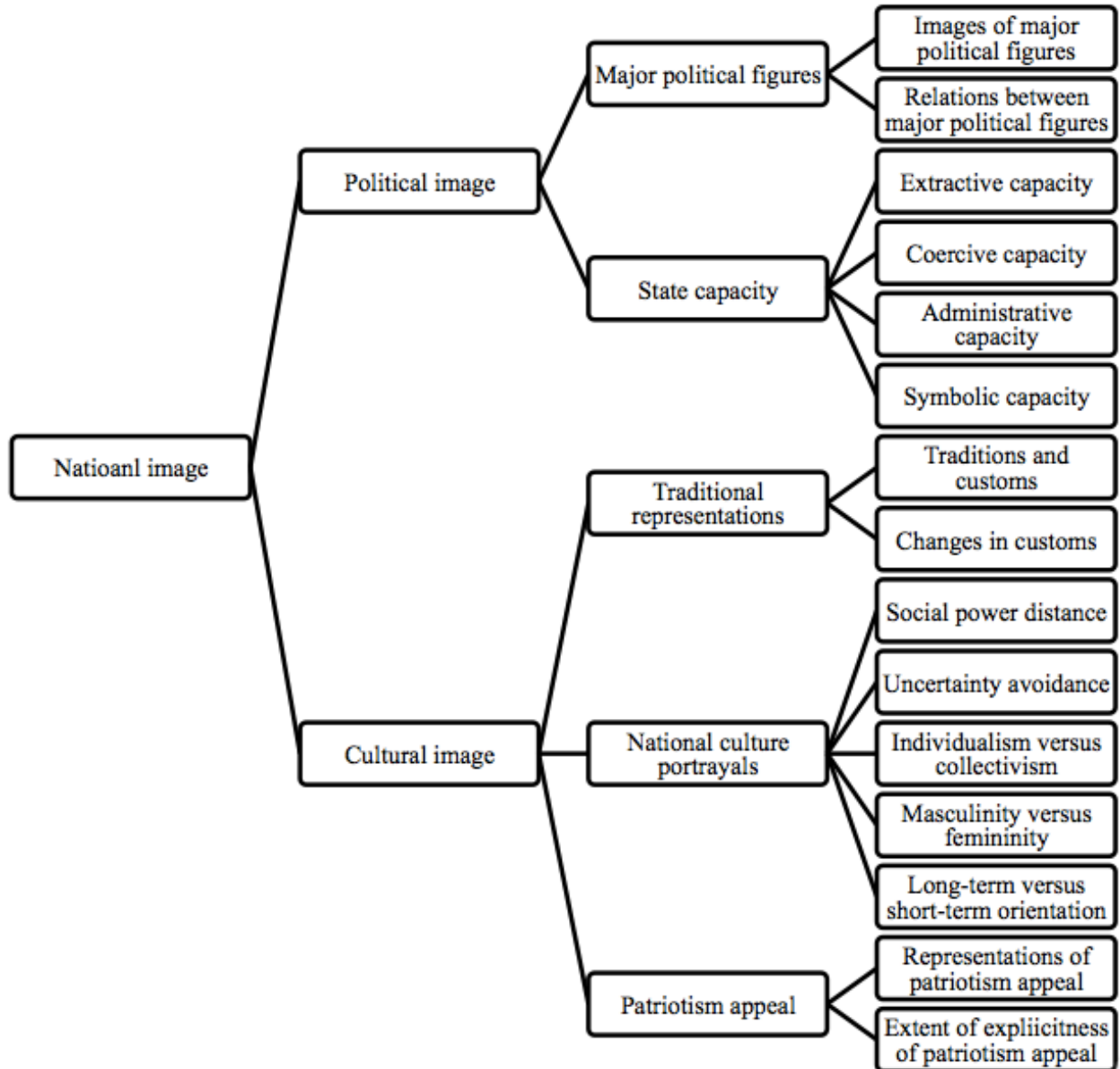
Figure 2. Framing China's national image: Key variables

Characters in old Chinese political films were highly antitheses opposite; in other words, the "good" characters were always perfectly good while the "bad" were dramatically bad. There are some classic categories in the films' themes: (1) the feudalistic family, (2) the liberation of women, (3) the liberation of youth, (4) reactionary figures, which usually referred to officials and landlords, (5) revolutionary figures, (6) anti-individualism, (7) education and training, (8)

minority peoples, and (9) invaders (Weakland, 1966). These classifications still remain applicable since the political films, which focus on historical evens, do not change much on themes, although they have changed a lot in the artistic expression. In Chinese political films, the image of government is actually in a dualistic presentation: the image of main revolutionary figures, which would often be the stepping government, plus the image of the opponent, which were the established government at that time. Moreover, the role of ordinary people always presents one aspect of the established government and revolutionary figures; so besides those two opposite parts, it is important to look at the base of the regime: the people.

In such considerations, this research develops the dimension of major political figures with two indicators:

(a) portrayals of main revolutionary figures (such as Mao and Sun), the opponent (such as Jiang and Qing government), and the people (including ordinary people as well as other democratic parties and Sun's fellow revolutionaries); and

(b) the portrayed relationships between each group of players.

When measuring the performance of a nation in empirical studies, many researchers (e.g., Wang & Hu, 2001; Hamm, King, & Stuckler, 2012; Hiilamo & Glantz, 2015) tend to apply one popular political concept, which would be the second dimension in the political image in Chinese political films: (B) *state capacity*. There are various definitions of *state capacity*, while Skocpol's (1985) explanation seems to develop wide agreement, which explores the state capacity "to implement official goals, especially over the actual or potential opposition of powerful social groups or in the face of recalcitrant socioeconomic circumstances" (p. 9).

Hanson and Sigman (2013) divide state capacity into three categories: (1) extractive capacity, (2) coercive capacity, and (3) administrative capacity. The extractive capacity means

the ability to increase the state's revenue, including to what extent the state can reach its people, manage information, and formulate relevant policies. The coercive capacity relates to the state's power in defending the border as well as enforcing domestic regulations. The administrative capacity occupies a wide range of activities that include various policy implementations, public services, economic regulations, corruption management, and so forth. These three aspects are not running in isolation; instead, they support each other and work interactively (Hanson & Sigman, 2013). However, Hassid (2014) argues that there is a fourth capacity: the symbolic capacity. In Hassid's view, it is crucial to analyze "the degree to which the central state holds the monopoly on symbolic resources" (p. 2); he also mentioned that such state capacity is often invisible and happens over everyday life. Accordingly, this research develops the dimension of state capacity with four indicators:

(B. a) the framed extractive capacity of China in the Chinese political films;

(B. b) the framed coercive capacity of China in the Chinese political films;

(B. c) the framed administrative capacity of China in the Chinese political films; and

(B. d) the framed symbolic capacity of China in the Chinese political films.

Cultural image

There is a famous definition of *culture*, a quite abstract concept, that it "consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts" (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86). In Kluckhohn's explanation on culture, he also emphasized that the core of culture consists of tradition. Thus here comes the first dimension in cultural image: (C) *traditional representations*. It is important to take an analysis on how the political films frame

the historical aspects of China. On one hand, it presents the nation's self-perception; on the other hand, it provides the underlying explanations of the ongoing phenomena. The selected Chinese political films all present historical stories when the nation was experiencing enormous social change, so the traditional representations are also set as reference object of the cultural transitions. Thus, this research develops the dimension of traditional representations with two indicators:

(C. a) the traditions and customs depicted in the Chinese political films; and

(C. b) the portrayed changes in customs.

In term of culture in a given nation, it seems inevitable to mention Hofstede's (1980 & 2001) national culture dimensions. It has been thousands of invoked empirical studies in these three decades since Hofstede (1980) wrote his original version of *Culture's Consequences*; and the number of researches is experiencing exponential growth in the recent ten years (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). Thus it is necessary to look into the second dimension in cultural image: (D) *national culture dimensions*. Measuring the differences in social value systems across more than 50 countries, Hofstede (1980) found four fundamental differences in different cultures: (1) power distance, referring to the attitudes towards human inequality; (2) uncertainty avoidance, referring to the intension level towards the unknown future; (3) individualism versus collectivism, referring to the perceived relations between individuals and their groups; (4) masculinity versus femininity, referring to the different emotions and social roles by the gender difference, which can be presented in different states. In his updated book, Hofstede (2001), inspired by Chinese scholars, added a fifth aspect of cultural differences: (5) long-term versus short-term orientation, referring to the effort focus on the future or the present. Accordingly, this research develops the dimension of national culture dimensions with five indicators:

(D. a) the framed culture of power distance in the Chinese political films;

(D. b) the framed culture of uncertainty avoidance in the Chinese political films;

(D. c) the framed culture of individualism versus collectivism in the Chinese political films;

(D. d) the framed culture of masculinity versus femininity in the Chinese political films; and

(D. e) the framed culture of long-term versus short-term orientation in the Chinese political films.

Political films inevitably involve ideology and patriotic appeal. Therefore, the third dimension in national image examined here would be: (E) *patriotism appeal*. As Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) argued, in visual framing, ideological representation is an integrated combination of denotative, stylistic, and connotative systems, and it makes possible to explain the reason why specific stylistic and connotative expressions are used. Building on these ideas, this study attempts to analyze the underlying ideology when interpreting all the indicators above; and patriotism is the central common ideology of the Chinese political films. For this last dimension, this research develops two indicators:

(E. a) the representations of patriotism appeal in the Chinese political films; and

(E. b) the extent of explicitness for such patriotism appeal in the Chinese political films.

It should be noted that when prescreening the selected films the researcher noticed some differences in artistic style and technical expression. Film styles and techniques possess extraordinary ability to provoke emotion, thus playing an influential role on audience's perceptions. Hence, beyond the storyline, this research may note the film's stylistic choices such as close-up or long shot, camera angles, and colors used.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Both movies--*The Founding of A Republic* and *The Birth of New China*--focused on the same historical event, namely the period when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power from Kuomintang and in 1949 established the People's Republic of China to replace the previous Chinese regime. Both films aimed to present key moments of Chinese history with some fictional details, but notably they had different emphases. *The Birth of New China*, released in 1989, attempted to depict the distinct circumstances facing the Kuomintang and the CCP: Kuomintang was experiencing infighting inside the party, having to face the fact of losing power, while the CCP was blessed with victory in the civil war as well as the harmonious atmosphere that was created by the virtuous party leaders. *The Founding of A Republic*, released in 2009, introduced an important third party to the story: political leaders of other democratic parties. The film presented the history through the lens that the CCP made great efforts to achieve peace through negotiations with the Kuomintang and form a coalition government, including theses two major parties and other democratic parties, but negotiations were refused by the Kuomintang; thus leaders from other democratic parties chose to support the CCP, helping them build the new regime together. There were also depictions of how the Kuomintang lost their power due to internal failures.

In sum, *The Birth of New China* focused on the opposing portrayals of the CCP and Kuomintang, presenting the tragic image of China at that time, while *The Founding of A Republic* emphasized the theme of peace, providing a more nuanced image of the Kuomintang as well as a more insightful perception of that historical period.

Political Image

Major political figures

A major theme in *The Birth of New China* was to present the distinctive images of the Kuomintang and the CCP, and such portrayal was clearly stereotypical: Kuomintang leaders were hierarchical and depressed, while CCP leaders were kind and full of solidary. *The Founding of A Republic* also put the two parties in opposing sides, but its representation was not so absolute; additionally, the more recent film introduced leaders of other democratic parties as intermediaries to illuminate the complicated relations at that time.

Image of major political figures

For both films, an essential part of the content fell on the portrayals of major political figures: in *The Birth of New China*, it was the CCP and their opponent Chiang Kai-shek, the top leader of Kuomintang, and in *The Founding of A Republic*, there was one more category added-- the leaders of other Chinese parties. Their images constructed the core content throughout the film, so general summaries with some examples are provided in this section while detailed explanations of other dimensions are provided in the following sections.

In general, CCP's portrayal in *The Birth of New China* included kindness, solidarity, wisdom, confidence, and personal charm of party leaders. Most of the time the leaders of the CCP were smiling: whenever they discussed current plans, imagined the future, talked to ordinary people, or made jokes, they kept a smile on their faces. They showed respect treated their subordinates as equals, got along well with the general public, and were always presented as working together as a group. Also, CCP party leaders were depicted as frugal and disciplined, concerned about the long-term future, and staying optimistic during tough times. The CCP

demonstrated their excellent military capacity as they won the civil war. Furthermore, they provided appropriate administrative plans for the new regime and they showed their ability to win people's support. *The Founding of A Republic* similarly portrayed the CCP in a very positive light, but with different emphases: as a whole, CCP was portrayed as a group that treasured and sought peace, treated others fairly and respectfully, and survived in difficult circumstance with no complaint. They severely criticized Kuomintang's autocratic behaviors, attempted to build a coalition government, and rallied for the democratic unification of China. In the film, however, the Kuomintang refused their requests for peace and started the civil war; then the CCP had no choice but to enter the war. There was a detailed scene describing how joyful the CCP were when they received a critical victory in the war indicating there would be peace in China: they joined a dancing parade to celebrate the triumph; they got drunk and sang martial songs -- the only time being when party members are portrayed as wild in the film; and Mao Zedong smiled with full satisfaction and happiness. Also, the CCP always took into consideration important political figures from other democratic parties and even from the Kuomintang, and treated them as true friends, which is demonstrated in more detail in the following dimension. Moreover, the CCP led a very hard life during the wartime and the film used several examples to emphasize that. First, one night when the Party leaders held a conference and some said that there was a shortage of supplies, Mao Zedong blew out the candle in order to save it to write a report in the late evening and he thought that the candle was not necessary for the meeting. Second, there was a conversation between cooks and Mao Zedong, which revealed that did not care about what to eat as long as there were chilies; also, Mao made a joke that it would perfect if he could have some stewed meat twice a month. The party leaders were shown living in rural areas and eating very simple food. Third, there was one scene in which two important leaders of the CCP shared one

cigarette when they were making military arrangements in a very humble room. In all, their lives were portrayed as poor, but they seemed enjoy it and could always find a way to survive.

Mao Zedong was the major character in *The Birth of New China*, although other important Party leaders were also given detailed portrayals. There were three scenes that vividly described Mao Zedong's character, but did not fit other dimensions; therefore, only these three examples are provided here. First, when the American Ambassador asked his secretary whether Mao Zedong was more a Communist or a Chinese peasant, the secretary replied that he had no idea but he heard that Mao "is very gentle, just like a village teacher". Second, Mao Zedong took a private conversation with an official from the Kuomintang government and invited him to join them. When the official said that he had helped Chiang throughout his life but now Chiang would not accept other voices any more, Mao replied that not all rulers would be like that, and he mentioned that he always insisted that "before we can be teachers, we must be the students first." Then this official proposed that China should keep political neutrality instead of leaning to the United States or the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong strongly disagreed him, but he said that his opinion was not the absolute truth and people needed to debate this topic, "even if we argue about it for a hundred years". The third example here is Mao Zedong attending the foundation-laying ceremony of the Monument to the People's Heroes, where he made a speech about eternal glory to all the heroes sacrificed for China. He left with a heavy heart to go home, and was shown crying for the numerous fighters who sacrificed their lives in the revolution.

Unlike *The Birth of New China,* which provided detailed portrayals of several significant figures of the CCP, *The Founding of A Republic* only focused on Mao Zedong as a distinctive individual. Besides all the characteristics typical for the CCP, Mao Zedong was depicted as a friendly, humorous, optimistic, and charming leader who was always welcomed by the people.

There were several scenes showing how nicely Mao Zedong treated others and making jokes. For example, once Mao Zedong met a commander that just won the war, making a joke that even eating one million soldiers of the Kuomintang failed to make him less skinny. Mao Zedong was portrayed as very optimistic even in tough situation. When the civil war began, the CCP got attacked and then evacuated Yan'an, their base area; some said it marked a setback of the Chinese revolution, but Mao Zedong disagreed with such opinion and mentioned that the party had survived from countless so-called "setbacks", saying, "You keep the land and lose the people, you finally lose both; while you keep the people and lose the land, you will eventually have both. I will trade Yan'an for the whole China." Another example could be an air raid from Kuomintang: the attack was sudden and severe, and everyone else got very nervous and hurried to leave; however, Mao Zedong did not seem anxious and instructed the soldiers to "Calm down! ... Even if they start bombing, that does not mean they will hit me. … I am very lucky." Then the bomb exploded right behind them as the soldiers carried Mao running away. In addition to all the characteristics mentioned above, Mao Zedong was presented as a leader that really cared about his army. Just as *The Birth of New China*, in this film there was one scene depicting Mao with tears for the soldiers that had sacrificed themselves for the country.

On the other hand, *The Birth of New China* portrayed the Kuomintang as a party hierarchical and full of pessimism for the future since they had to face the failure of the civil war and the loss of regime. They were portrayed as doing a poor job of managing the country, and they failed to win the war as well as people's hearts. Chiang Kai-shek was the highest authority in the Kuomintang and their regime; he held the authentic power even after abdication. He was a powerful leader and all his subordinates showed their respect as well as fear; he distrusted his followers; and he would prepare plan B for the future. As an individual, he was a stressed old

man who realized his inevitable failure but insisted on fighting, facing the possibility of leaving his homeland. In this film, Chiang Kai-shek's scenes were depressing and dreary. There were also several scenes that reinforced Chiang Kai-shek's personality but did not fit in other dimensions. For example, Chiang Kai-shek received a letter from his wife informing him that the US decided to withdraw their aid to Kuomintang government after worshiping the ancestral hall with his followers; but he lied to his followers that he had heard good news and encouraged them to hold on one more year. Second, the continuous losses in the war made Chiang Kai-shek have nightmares, insomnia, and other health issues; he told his son that Kuomintang was actually beaten by the party itself, and he insisted on solving problems on his own even though he was ill and abdicated, "I will hold on till my last breath because I have chosen this tough road". Third, on the day Chiang Kai-shek left his homeland to Taiwan, he looked miserable. When his grandson asked him whether they would come back, he answered: "Even if grandpa cannot come back, you still have to." Fourth, Chiang Kai-shek named the day when Mao Zedong officially announced the founding of People's Republic of China as the National Humiliation Day, and set a rule that on that day everyone in his family could not eat anything. However, seeing his grandson hungry and crying, Chiang changed his mind and led his little grandson to some cookies. The grandson said: "Grandpa, you are so nice." And Chiang replied: "Grandpa is not nice. If grandpa is nice, he will not take you here."

Other important characters were introduced in *The Birth of New China*, but no one was depicted in as much details as Chiang Kai-shek. Li Tsung-jen, Chiang's fellow, was selected as the so-called acting president. With barely any authentic power in his hands, Li Tsung-jen still daydreamed and made futile efforts to increase his own political power. Zhang Zhizhong, a general of the Kuomintang government, believed in the peace negotiations and met with the CCP

as the representative of Kuomintang; but the negotiations failed due to Chiang's personal will, which made Zhang Zhizhong disappointed and frustrated. In all, all other leaders in the Kuomintang must listen to Chiang Kai-shek, and their personal opinions would not change the ongoing situation.

The Founding of A Republic and *The Birth of New China* share some similarities in portraying the image of Kuomintang, the ruling party at that time: there were divisions and complicated, strained relationships within the party; their failure in the civil war and subsequent loss of power was portrayed in a negative light; and the Kuomintang was shown as failing in their ability to run the country. Unlike the CCP which was depicted as having harmonious relations within the party, the Kuomintang had many internal disagreements and infighting: when Chiang Kai-shek agreed to peace negotiations to form a coalition government at first, some other Kuomintang leaders were strongly opposed to it and held secret meetings since they did not want to share their power with other parties; there was a scene describing the discussions among leaders from other = parties that some founding members of Kuomintang had indicated their intention to break away from Chiang Kai-shek; Chiang Kai-shek and Li Tsung-jen, the vice-president and then the acting president of Republic of China, had a strained relationship; Li Tsung-jen even attempted to replace Chiang as the top leader; eventually Chiang Kai-shek decided to abdicate and said: "It is not my choice. But someone within our Party wants me out." Second, in the face of losing the civil war as well as their role as the ruling party, there were a number of scenes referring to Kuomintang as sad and pitiful. When Chiang Kai-shek was elected as president of the Republic of China and everyone present celebrated his election, he was told that Kuomintang had lost a significant region in the civil war, so he had to keep the smile on his face with his heart in shock; there were several times that Chiang Kai-shek talked in an almost

helpless way to his son about the future; near the end of the film, Chiang Kai-shek had to cancel the air raid that was planned to stop the CCP's new regime since they were not allowed for refuel, Chiang imagined the victory of his opponents with deeply felt disappointment, saying that "it is fate that Kuomintang is ruined with our own hands", standing as a lonely figure. The film presented the Kuomintang as having many problems with their administration, including a fiscal crisis and failing to get loans from the United States; they also failed to implement a successful economic reform despite trying; Chiang Kai-shek also told his son that "the corruption of Kuomintang is in the bones". The film has some heavy parts showing the Kuomintang conducting assassinations of people against their will, which reinforced the merciless image of the Kuomintang as a whole.

However, there were a number of notable changes in the image of the Kuomintang depicted in the more recent film. And even portraying similarities in terms of historical events, *The Founding of A Republic* selected different angles of storytelling regarding the Kuomintang. To be more specific, *The Founding of A Republic* implicitly introduced a key character in the Kuomintang, Sun Yat-sen, who did not appear in the film in person, to add to the complexity of the party. Sun Yat-sen was the founder of the Kuomintang as well as Republic of China, a significant leader credited with ending the long imperial rule in China, and an important symbol of democracy in Chinese history; Chiang Kai-shek worked as the party's chairman after his death. By bringing him into the story the film seems to imply that the original Kuomintang was good, but there were many problems in its next generation of political leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek, and they should feel regret for Sun Yat-sen. The portrait of Sun Yat-sen, along with the national flag of the Republic of China and the party flag of the Kuomintang as important symbols, appeared frequently throughout the film, and functioned as a metaphor that Sun Yat-sen

had witnessed all the problematic behaviors of the current Kuomintang. There was a noteworthy scene of a conversation between Li Tsung-jen, the acting president of the Republic of China at that time, and Soong Ching-ling, wife of Sun Yat-sen. Facing the failure of the civil war and the fact that the Kuomintang would have to step down, Li Tsung-jen visited Soong Ching-ling for help, but he refused. When Li Tsung-jen said "Dr. Sun founded Kuomintang; you cannot sit back and watch it go to ruin", Soong Ching-ling did not reply but only smiled, implying that it was you people who actually ruined Kuomintang.

Also, *The Founding of A Republic* portrayed a more diversified image of Kuomintang: it included Chiang Kai-shek but introduced other important figures in the Kuomintang, while *The Birth of New China* only focused on the single image of Chiang Kai-shek. There were three characters that were introduced in this film besides Chiang Kai-shek: Feng Yuxiang, a general in the Republic of China as well as a founding member of the Kuomintang who was against Chiang Kai-shek; Fu Zuoyi, an important general in control of Beijing who was in hesitation and finally stood along with the CCP; and Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son who made great efforts to improve economic regulations but failed. Feng Yuxiang was portrayed as a powerful general with a strong sense of justice who disagreed with some of Chiang Kai-shek's decisions; he argued that if Chiang Kai-shek was had his way the Kuomintang would end soon. He became an ally of the CCP, but got assassinated in the end. What is interesting about Fu Zuoyi is that *The Birth of New China* also mentioned him, but in a relatively negative light: in *The Birth of New China*, the CCP wanted Fu Zuoyi, the general that guarded Beijing, to surrender so that they could take over Beijing peacefully, and they were unsatisfied with Fu's hesitant attitude; but in *The Founding of A Republic*, Fu was portrayed as a great helper of the CCP. Chiang Ching-kuo was also not a new character in the film, but his role changed to a great extent: in *The Birth of*

New China, Chiang Ching-kuo was described merely nobody, a compliant son of Chiang Kai-shek; however, *The Founding of A Republic* portrayed Chiang Ching-kuo as a promising young leader who tried hard to implement economic regulations in order to save the regime and stood for justice when his reform challenged his relatives.

As for Chiang Kai-shek, he was not as authoritarian in this film as compared with *The Birth of New China*; in some scenes, he was shown as a kind father and a gentle leader. When Chiang Kai-shek talked to his son Chiang Ching-kuo after turning down his attempts of economic regulations, he used a very soft tone and expressed admiration for Chiang Ching-kuo's efforts. Similarly, when he wanted to shift the army to Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek wrote a very polite letter to a general, referring to him as a brother and asking kindly for his help.

Finally, leaders of other political parties were also introduced in this film and portrayed gradually choosing to align with the CCP and oppose the Kuomintang. An interesting point was that they presented high social-economic figures in a traditional way: they seemed to have a relatively high living standard, and they would speak and behave in an old-fashioned way, which is discussed in detail in the custom section. The next section offers more information about the leaders of other political parties and their roles in relation to the Kuomintang and the CCP.

Relations between major political figures/ parties

The two major parties at that time were the Kuomintang, which was the ruling party, and the CCP, which tried to start peace negotiations and form a coalition government, but instead ended up in a civil was initiated by the Kuomintang. The CCP won the war and built their new regime, while Kuomintang had to retreat to Taiwan. *The Founding of A Republic* provided lots of depictions of the confrontational relations between the two major parties. Take the two chairmen'

words from these two parties, for example: when the CCP and the other political parties refused to submit to Kuomintang's dictatorship, Chiang Kai-shek expressed this strategy: "Coax and fight the CCP at the same time"; after the Kuomintang started the civil war, Mao Zedong gave a speech to his followers and said: "We surrendered our arms for peace. What happened? We got a massacre in return, not peace. We learn from our mistakes. For peace, for our future and to eliminate war, in this war imposed on us by our enemies, we must retaliate."

These two parties still stood on opposite sides in *The Founding of A Republic*; however, their relations were not so strained as in *The Birth of New China*. First, right at the beginning of *The Founding of A Republic*, there was a scene in which Mao Zedong expressed his opinion that the CCP and the Kuomintang shared the same origin. Second, the CCP would draw several major political figures from the Kuomintang over to their side, as long as they had the same belief to end the authoritarian regime: Feng Yuxiang and Fu Zuoyi, as mentioned earlier, are some examples.

The next dimension involves the relationship between the CCP and ordinary people. While there was no direct scene describing this relationship in *The Founding of A Republic*, the film implied that ordinary people strongly supported the CCP and would be happy to see them govern the nation. In *The Birth of New China*, besides showing strong supports from the masses, there were scenes showing how the CCP cared for ordinary people and lived in harmony with them. When it comes to relations between the Kuomintang and ordinary people, there were no direct scenes to depict those in either film, although it was implied that the public was dissatisfied with the Kuomintang since they were happy to see the CCP in power.

In terms of relations between the CCP and the Kuomintang and other parties and individuals, one can observe the following: In *The Founding of A Republic* the other parties and

individuals clearly stood in line with the CCP and opposed to Kuomintang. In contrast, *The Birth of New China* only briefly mentioned the relations with each of the two parties. In *The Founding of A Republic*, there were many scenes presenting the views of other political parties and individuals towards the two major parties. First, they appealed the CCP to proceed with peace negotiation with Kuomintang, even if the CCP would have to make some concessions since peace was their first priority. Second, when they found that Chiang Kai-shek, chairman of Kuomintang, ignored the peace negotiation and maintained the dictatorship, they claimed, "It is his one-man show". Third, they held a conference and clarified their positions: though they hated to give up the peace negotiation, the Kuomintang would not respect them without showing military capacity, so they decided to end their role as middle party and to side with the CCP for a coalition government. Fourth, there were other major political figures that initially hesitated, but were persuaded by the CCP's position in the end. Fifth, after declaring support for the CCP, a major leader of the other democratic parties reinforced his views a number of times, noting that "the CCP cared for the people, which explains their achievements today"; when the Kuomintang tried to draw him over to their side, he replied sarcastically that his party had been clamped down by the Kuomintang government and it was an illegal organization, and he was in the same party as the Communists.

As for the attitudes displayed by the Kuomintang and the CCP, they were quite opposite. The CCP was trying hard to invite important political figures of other parties to join their regime. Mao Zedong respected those political leaders and treated them as true friends. In the end, the CCP kept their promise to build a coalition government with those parties. On the contrary, Kuomintang seemed to not truly respect the other parties: they seized their headquarters and ordered assassinations for those who opposed them.

State capacity

Both films strongly suggested that the Kuomintang, as the governing party at that time, showed poor extractive and administrative capacity; *The Founding of A Republic* however depicted the efforts that Kuomintang made to save the nation. The CCP was described as possessing a better coercive and administrative capacity. Also, both films emphasized national symbols to present China at that time.

Extractive capacity

There was a clear financial crisis for the Kuomintang government in both *The Birth of New China* and *The Founding of A Republic*. In both films, the Kuomintang government was described as a regime highly dependent on the United States: Chiang Kai-shek's wife went to Washington to negotiate with U.S. officials and Li Tsung-jen, the acting president of Republic of China, came to the U.S. Ambassador for help; but consequently both of them got rejected.

However, *The Founding of A Republic* also provided a detailed story on how Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son, was determined to implement economic regulations in order to save the regime, although he eventually failed. As the film described, during there was a shortage of goods at that time, so goods entered the black market; the top brass in the military and political circles supported the fictitious transaction, which made the government lack fiscal revenue. Chiang Ching-kuo left for Shanghai to enforce economic regulations and closed down an influential firm that was owned by a relative. Unfortunately, his achievement failed to earn support: Chiang Kai-shek's wife chose to take the family as priority, and Chiang Kai-shek believed that to fight against corruption was not an urgent issue since the country was facing a civil war. As Chiang Kai-shek stated: "The corruption of the Kuomintang is in the bones". Rather

than merely describing the Kuomintang government's financial dependence and economic crisis as *The Birth of New China* did, *The Founding of A Republic* also provided an insightful explanation to expose the Kuomintang's poor extractive capacity as a state facing a financial disaster stemming from the ruling party itself; it also emphasized how Kuomintang's members made great efforts to solve the crisis, but failed.

Coercive capacity

Both films aimed to present a powerful CCP who had a much higher coercive capacity than the Kuomintang, and such coercive capacity finally led their victory in the civil war. *The Birth of New China* contained many military scenes: there were more than ten scenes depicting the war directly, more than ten scenes of how cheerful and confident the CCP were when discussing their future success, and more than ten scenes of how gloomy and stressed the Kuomintang were when they faced defeat. *The Founding of A Republic* did not provide so many war scenes as *The Birth of New China* did, but it similarly emphasized how the CCP used their strong military capacity to win the civil war; for instance, there were several times when people mentioned the CCP did not possess weapons as powerful as Kuomintang's, but it turned out that the CCP gradually won the war. One interesting example shows Chiang Kai-shek planning to conduct an air raid on the day Mao Zedong announced the new regime, but the U.S. turned down their request to refuel their combat aircraft so they could not come back after takeoff; Chiang Kai-shek had no choice but to cancel the mission. Both films described the CCP as possessing a higher coercive capacity than the Kuomintang, and this coercive capacity was directly related to CCP's success in taking over the regime.

The Founding of A Republic provided one more theme related to coercive capacity: how the Kuomintang assassinated their opponents in order to maintain their power. Wen Yiduo, president of *Democracy Weekly* and member of the Chinese Democratic League, made an emotional speech to criticize Kuomintang's behavior of killing people who were against them and to appeal for peace as well as democracy; soon the secret agents of the Kuomintang murdered him. Chiang Kai-shek arranged his subordinates to stake out influential political figures and had his fellow officer eliminate those who would stand in line with the CCP, including leaders of democratic parties and top generals inside the Kuomintang. After Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan, his secret agents killed thirteen pro-democracy activists in Shanghai. The assassinations revealed Kuomintang's coercion to maintain their power, but their coercive capacity failed to ensure the survival of their regime.

Administrative capacity

The Birth of New China and *The Founding of A Republic* provided different angles on the administrative capacity of Kuomintang government. As *The Birth of New China* implied, the Kuomintang government seemed to do a poor job of administrating the country: it depicted the chaos in the city and mentioned the terrible situation of the major departments as well as the government in the capital city. On the contrary, as discussed in the previous part, *The Founding of A Republic* described how Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son, made great effort in implementing economic regulations, which, eventually failed because of the special situation at that time. This story not only referred to the fiscal revenue of the government, but also reflected the government's administrative activities. Chiang Ching-kuo valued the economy and was determined to enforce economic reform even though his administration would damage his

relatives' interests. This is a significant change in *The Founding of A Republic* compared to *The Birth of New China*: the old film did not mention Kuomintang's efforts in managing the state, while the new one provided a detailed story on how they have tried to implement economic reforms.

At the same time, both films described CCP's success in Land Reform and their future plans after establishing the new regime. For example, in *The Birth of New China* Mao Zedong clarified his plans to prioritize heavy industry as well as his belief on accelerating the national development; in *The Founding of A Republic* the CCP realized that they could not eliminate capitalists since party leaders were not good at economic development so perhaps those capitalists could be their assistants. In other words, both of the films implied that the CCP had made some successful managerial experiments and kept trying to improve their administrative capacity as the new regime.

Symbolic capacity

Both films paid attention to the presentations of symbols of the Kuomintang government and the new China governed by the CCP. In *The Birth of New China*, the Kuomintang's flag as well as the national flag of their regime appeared when the CCP's army captured Kuomintang's presidential palace, and when Chiang Kai-shek held a meeting with his subordinates to make military arrangements after retreating to Taiwan. It also presented national symbols on the day when Mao announced the founding of the People's Republic of China and proclaimed the birth of a promising new regime: the army raised the national flag and played the national anthem as the Tiananmen Square, the symbol of new China, was shot from different angles, and Huabiao,

the ornamental column carrying deep Chinese cultural significance, was shown at least nine times.

The Founding of A Republic included symbolic images in an even more noticeable way. Kuomintang's symbols, including the national flag of Republic of China, the party flag of Kuomintang, and the portrait of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of Kuomintang, were all shown frequently throughout the film. In other words, the symbolic representation of the Republic of China was much stronger in this film than in *The Birth of New China*; and more importantly, the highlighting of Sun Yat-sen's image implied a higher acceptance of the Kuomintang in present day China. As for the CCP, besides the representations of national symbols at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the day when Mao Zedong announced the founding of the People's Republic of China, the film set a series of interesting scenes to describe how the new national flag and the new national anthem were selected. The film provided unique background on selecting the Five-Starred Red Flag as the national flag and the martial lyrics for the new national anthem, which evoked the audience's awareness and strengthened the role of national symbols.

Actually in *The Birth of New China*, Mao Zedong himself became an important symbol: along the streets of Beijing, Mao's slogan appeared on the wall, and ordinary people were talking about Mao in a restaurant; there was Mao's picture in the Tiananmen Square, witnessing the founding of new China and becoming a historical record itself. Mao Zedong was portrayed as an even more significant representation of China than anything else.

Cultural Image

Traditional representations

    The Birth of New China included the most traditional representations of Chiang Kai-shek; in contrast, it presented Mao Zedong as an open-minded leader, and focused such content as the major part of changes in customs. *The Founding of A Republic* provided a more comprehensive representation of Chinese traditions; and it emphasized the value of females at that time as propellers of social change.

Traditions and customs

    In *The Birth of New China*, Chiang Kai-shek was portrayed as a conservative Chinese male, who always wore traditional Chinese gowns whenever met his subordinates or spent time his family. There were two times that Chiang Kai-shek led his subordinates to the ancestral hall for worship. Also, Chiang Kai-shek once went to a temple deep in the mountains to pray and draw fortune-telling sticks; after getting an unlucky result, his son comforted him that this draw might not be accurate, but Chiang Kai-shek insisted to respect the will of god. The way that Chiang Kai-shek educated his little grandson was very traditional, and Chiang treasured traditional values. Before leaving his hometown for Taiwan, Chiang led the family to worship by his mother's tomb, and even made his Western daughter-in-law kowtow. This film used sad music and nostalgic language to present Chiang's love and concern for his hometown, as part of Chinese traditional culture. In *The Founding of A Republic*, Chiang Kai-shek still would wear traditional Chinese gowns and sometimes spoke and acted in a traditional way, but the film did not put a strong emphasis on this.

Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek shared some underlying conventional characteristics in *The Birth of New China*, which were not present in *The Founding of A Republic*. For one thing, the film emphasized the relations between father and son since Chinese customs value such relations. Mao Zedong also told his son that a man should throw himself into the career instead of marriage. For another, this film showed the loving of mothers for both characters: Chiang Kai-shek worshipped his mother's tomb before leaving while Mao Zedong once let his son return to their hometown to visit his mother and told her that he would be her son forever.

Different from *The Birth of New China*, in *The Founding of A Republic* many major political figures, especially those who were in a high social-economic status from Kuomintang and other parties, were depicted as the old-styled Chinese but with progressive minds. Those characters wore traditional Chinese clothing, spoke old-styled language, and engaged in traditional activities such as playing Chinese chess and drinking tea. In real Chinese society, there were always discussions of social classes since the birth of the CCP; it seemed a stereotype to view the poor working class as an advanced group and to consider the high SES social group as reactionary and privileged. To present those important political leaders in a more traditional, elegant, and complex way actually suggested an open and inclusive attitude towards different classes as well as the renewed attention to the Chinese traditional culture.

Female portrayals in *The Founding of A Republic* revealed the customs at that time, although there was a huge change of women's status that will be discussed in the following section. Shortly after the film started, a theatrical troupe was performing in the open air to show the current Chinese society and its evils: a feudalistic father was selling his daughter, declaring that "She is my girl and you have no say. Whoever feeds her owns her." Another example could be the daughter of a major military figure washed this officer's feet and tried to convince him to

stand in line with the CCP. Washing the parents' feet, especially for daughters, was considered as "filial piety" in traditional Chinese society. Moreover, when Chiang Ching-kuo started economic reforms and damaged his relatives' economic interests, Chiang Kai-shek's wife, also known as Chiang Ching-kuo's stepmother, did not choose to stand by Chiang Ching-kuo's side even though she knew exactly how much the economy mattered for the regime. It was because she saw family relations as priority, which was a traditional choice for women at that time.

Moreover, in the era of tremendous social change, people were experiencing conflicts between the traditional Chinese world and the new China, sometimes adhering to old customs without awareness. In *The Birth of New China*, after Mao Zedong was elected as the president of People's Republic of China, his fellow villagers came to Beijing to seek refuge with him. In their minds, the new China was still the ancient state, in which the president was the emperor and they would be like imperial household, receiving titles from the reigning dynasty. They also held the conventional opinion that the president should practice nepotism since that would ensure his power. In the founding ceremony of the People's Republic of China, thousands of people were shouting loudly "Long live, Chairman Mao!" and Mao replied "Long live, you people!" However, such slogans were typical in imperial China for subjects to show their respect to the emperor. A similar event happened in *The Founding of A Republic*: Mao Zedong made a sarcastic remark about Chiang Kai-shek, who was just elected as the president, because he believed that Chiang Kai-shek still viewed himself as the emperor of ancient China; and Mao Zedong proposed to delete "long live" in their slogan since he would never consider himself an emperor like Chiang Kai-shek did. However, the sentence of "Long live, Chairman Mao!" was mentioned and repeated by the troops as Mao Zedong reviewed the dress parade, which was highlighted in the film.

There were other scenes presenting traditional culture. In *The Founding of A Republic*, one Kuomintang's officer who actually helped the CCP succeed in transferring the leader of a democratic party that supposed to be assassinated; and the reason for this success was that the guard chose not to check their car since the guard and the officer were friends. It was a custom to run things for friends rather for principles because China as a society valued personal relationships. In *The Birth of New China*, there was a scene about traditional Beijing society, in which old-style streets and food were present, and citizens discussed physiognomy and traditional Chinese opera. This short scene provided a good description of civil culture back then.

Changes in customs

The two films focused on quite different themes to present the changes in customs. *The Birth of New China*, in line with the contrasting representations of the CCP and Kuomintang, most traditional portrayals reflected Chiang Kai-shek's character. Mao Zedong was generally described as an open-minded leader that had the courage to challenge the establishment. When his son told Mao Zedong that he had a girlfriend and was ready to marry her, Mao opposed the idea since the girl was under eighteen and was too young for marriage according to the recent law they adopted, even though in traditional Chinese society it was rather common for female teenagers to get married. Also, when the CCP discussed urban construction in Beijing, Mao Zedong objected to the idea that buildings in Beijing were historical sites that could not be rebuilt; instead, he said that though he liked those historical buildings, the new regime should not live in houses of emperors. Additionally, Mao Zedong explained to his fellow villagers who came to seek refuge with him that it was no longer imperial China, so the state would use Western calendar other than reigning dynasty and he would appoint important people from other

parties instead of practicing nepotism. In this film, people also found the changes in social status: a rickshaw driver told others that he received more respect in the recent society and a soldier once saluted him.

The most noticeable change in customs in *The Founding of A Republic* would be the improvement of women's status, especially for females engaging in politics. In *The Birth of New China*, portrayals of female participants were missing. On the contrary, *The Founding of A Republic* seemed to try to emphasize the female's roles, which was a new social developments since previously women were considered inferior to men and should never engage in important events. First, female leaders appeared in the shot as a part of leading political groups for several times: two times when the democratic parties held meetings, important female figures showed up; and several female political leaders made speeches as well as participated in voting during the important Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Second, it was the female representatives that eventually made the Five-Starred Red Flag as the national flag as described in the previous part; in addition, a female also expressed her opinion at the meeting for choosing the national anthem. Third, although Soong Ching-ling, wife of Sun Yat-sen and leader of significant Chinese revolutions, was also presented in *The Birth of New China*, there is no doubt that *The Founding of A Republic* made much more emphases on her as a female character. Take one scene for example: after the CCP succeeded in taking over Shanghai overnight, the next morning Soong Ching-ling went out for a walk and saw hundreds of soldiers sleeping on the ground; she expressed deep sympathy for their plight in a scene that provided a very feminine angle to the war. Also, Chiang Kai-shek's wife Soong May-ling appeared in several scenes. Soong May-ling's name was only mentioned once in *The Birth of New China* when Chiang Kai-shek received a letter from her saying that she failed to borrow loans from the U.S., with no

actual image shown in the shot, but providing a detailed story on how Soong May-ling went to Washington to attempt to fulfill her mission. Fifth, there was a notable decrease in the time showing father and son and instead, an increase in scenes dedicated to father and daughter as well as husband and wife. *The Birth of New China* emphasized the relations between father and son for both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong, while *The Founding of A Republic* did not provide any scenes on Mao Zedong's son with Chiang Kai-shek's son, Chiang Ching-kuo, portrayed as an important political figure other than merely a son. In contrast, Mao Zedong's little daughter did show up as an ingenuous and delighted child, who enjoyed her father's love and care in the second film.

National culture portrayals

The two films had a lot in common in terms of portraying Chinese culture during that time: both indicated a tendency toward high power distance, collectivism, femininity, and long-term orientation, which is basically in line with the previous studies (Hofstede, 1980 & 2001). *The Birth of New China* showed a fairly high level of uncertainty avoidance, while *The Founding of A Republic* did not directly reflect that dimension. Also, though generally leaning toward collectivism, *The Founding of A Republic* gave a clear rise to individual portrayals.

Social power distance

Portrayals of social power distance took up a great portion in *The Birth of New China*. As might be expected, the Kuomintang leader always enjoyed privilege, while the CCP shared internal equality. *The Founding of A Republic* revealed a fairly high level of social power distance for both Kuomintang and the CCP.

In *The Birth of New China*, Chiang Kai-shek, the top authority figure in the Kuomintang, was always talking down to his subordinates and even to his son; he was always followed by a bunch of people whenever going to his ancestral hall to worship or attending a banquet for lunch. When it was rainy, his followers would carry the umbrella for him. There were several scenes of Kuomintang's meetings in this film; although the meeting places changed, their seats were strictly arranged and Chiang Kai-shek always occupied the central seat, or in other words, the seat of honor. Moreover, Chiang Kai-shek seemed to plan to keep all the power in his own hands and distrusted his subordinates. There were several classic examples of Chiang's absolute power and the attitude of Chiang's followers when facing Chiang Kai-shek: they respected him, and they were truly afraid of him. In all, the Kuomintang leader possessed strong power and his subordinates viewed such inequality as common and expected.

As for *The Founding of A Republic*, there were still scenes portraying Chiang Kai-shek as a privileged leader, but those representations were much less hierarchical than in *The Birth of New China*, and were not so absolute. Similarly, Chiang Kai-shek was portrayed as a powerful leader that was highly respected by his subordinates; there was also a rainy scene in which Chiang Kai-shek's followers carried the umbrella for him and his wife, and he would monitor the conferences of his subordinates. Chiang Kai-shek's role as a disciplined military leader was emphasized in this film, but he did not seem so frightening as in *The Birth of New China*. This film slightly changed the relations between Chiang Kai-shek and his fellow Li Tsung-jen, who was first elected as the vice-president and then the acting president of Republic of China: in *The Birth of New China*, Li Tsung-jen performed as a puppet of Chiang Kai-shek; while in *The Founding of A Republic*, they shared a fairly intense relationship, which suggested that Chiang's subordinates are not as obedient as presented in *The Birth of New China*. Moreover, as mentioned before, the

representations that portrayed Chiang Kai-shek as a privileged leader were not so absolute. Most scenes implied that he held the highest power and all his subordinated obeyed his order, but there were exceptions. For example, after the CCP achieved a critical victory in the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek planned to retreat to Taiwan and wrote a letter to Fu Zuoyi, the general who surrendered Beijing to the CCP, to ask for help to transfer?? some officers. Chiang Kai-shek did not blame the general or make direct demands; instead, Chiang that he understood the general's choice and even begged for help.

On the CCP side, the two films again presented social power distance through different lens. In *The Birth of New China*, the CCP leaders seemed to be warmhearted and friendly, showing equal respects to their fellows and the ordinary people. There were several scenes that described how the Party's leaders got along well with the villagers; and in contrast to the fixed seats in the official meeting rooms of Kuomintang's conference, leaders of the CCP sat quite randomly in the villagers' house. Another apparent contrast is that Chiang Kai-shek possessed the absolute authority in Kuomintang while Mao Zedong's fellows, who were also important leaders, always surrounded Mao and shared power with him. When other leaders reminded Mao about possible problems, Mao Zedong seemed be open and accepting. Not only Mao, but also other CCP leaders were portrayed as the opposite of arrogant and privileged. These characters include Chen Yi, a famous marshal in the nation and Liu Bocheng, the new appointed mayor of Nanjing City. However, there were also some scenes that potentially implied a high-level power distance among the CCP. For one thing, the way the film creators emphasized the friendliness and equality characteristics that the CCP leader possessed oppositely, in fact, revealed the preset value in their minds that it was common to experience inequality between different social levels; thus the highlighting equality of the CCP made them appear to be good leaders. For another,

since people sometimes unconsciously adhered to old customs, the natural reactions from people could reflect their real attitudes towards power and inequality. When Mao Zedong's fellow-villagers came to Beijing to seek refuge with him, they viewed Mao as an emperor and were about to kneel down to him. Also, in the founding ceremony of People's Republic of China, thousands of people were shouting loudly "Long live, Chairman Mao!" Such slogans typical of imperial China actually show people's notion that the leader ought to be superior.

As for *The Founding of A Republic*, Mao Zedong was still portrayed as warm, friendly, and funny; however, this film seemed to focus more on his personal charisma as a powerful leader instead of an ordinary person showing equality to others. In *The Birth of New China*, Mao Zedong's fellows, who were also important leaders, always surrounded Mao and shared equal power with him. On the contrary, in *The Founding of A Republic*, Mao Zedong was almost the only leader of the CCP that was described with distinctive personality. Also, all the scenes that contained Mao Zedong would focus solely on him rather than other political leaders. There was a vivid story about a cook who admired Mao Zedong and finally sacrificed himself for Mao; admittedly, this story was also supposed to show Mao Zedong's kindness and friendliness since he was so nice to the cook; he even buried the cook himself. At the same time, this example clearly shows a high level of social power distance where the leader was naturally perceived to be superior to ordinary people. In other scenes, Mao Zedong was always strongly welcomed by others; people were excited to see him and shake hands with him; and such scenes implied a high level of social power distance as well.

Uncertainty avoidance

During *The Birth of New China*, a relatively high level of uncertainty avoidance was implied, although not made explicit. *The Founding of A Republic* did not focus on people's attitudes towards the unknown future at all. In *The Birth of New China*, Kuomintang members were facing adverse circumstances, so they were presented as anxious and frustrated with the future. The CCP leaders were about to take the charge of the new regime and they felt optimistic about the future, but they were concerned about the future nation-building as well. Close to the end of the film, Mao remarked to his son: "Of course I am happy…. But I never feel so heavy before." By conveying his worry about the new regime, Mao actually revealed a fairly high level of uneasiness about the unknown future. There was another example about ordinary people. The fellow villagers of Mao that came to Beijing to seek refuge mentioned that Mao should appoint them instead of people from other parties, because only the relatives were able to ensure Mao's power and avoid future uncertainties.

Individualism versus collectivism

Collectivism was typical for Chinese society and the foundation of Eastern culture, so the general ideas of both films were related to collectivism, but to a different extent: *The Birth of New China* presented an obvious tendency to collectivism over individualism when depicting the nation image of China as well as the value orientation of Chinese people, while *The Founding of A Republic* supported the idea of collectivism but also gave a clear rise to individualistic representations.

In *The Birth of New China*, the CCP were always shown around ordinary people: the leaders happily sat around bonfire watching the villagers dance and play drums, hugged and kissed little

kids from the village as loving fathers; they lived in harmony with the farmers and their livestock, and chatted happily with people. Also, the CCP leaders appeared in the scenes together most of the time, implying that they always worked as a group; and there were detailed introductions and descriptions of several important leaders of the CCP, not only Mao Zedong. When discussing new appointments, some leaders would suggest good positions for others that they believed were more worthy than themselves. Also, when talking about future plans, leaders from both Kuomintang and the CCP would convey their opinions about the nation as a whole or the big picture instead of mentioning their work or a certain title. On the day when Mao Zedong announced the founding of the republic, the new leaders, which were included representatives from both the CCP and other parties, appeared in the scenes together: there was a noteworthy scene with all the representatives led by Mao Zedong walking up the long stairs of Tiananmen; and in the following scenes, the moment when Mao Zedong announced the founding of the republic and the celebrations after that, the leaders were all standing around Mao, enjoying the moment collectively as a group. These scenes strongly suggest that the highest leader of the new republic would share power and honor other people, and they would work together as a group to build the country.

The ordinary people in *The Birth of New China* also appeared in the film as a group. For example, when the CCP army came into Nanjing City, people gathered on the road, playing drums to welcome them. Ordinary people were shown as a group; individual portrayals were missing from the film.

Admittedly, *The Founding of A Republic* also conveys a general tendency to collectivism: the leader of a certain party would always take the party as priority; individuals would sacrifice themselves for the nation; and the CCP would gather influential political figures to create a

diversified leading group. To some extent, this film aimed to present a Chinese society in which all people were attempting to use their own abilities to build a better China. Here is an example: when Mao Zedong's arrived in Beijing, a number of important political figures from other parties gathered around and one of them opened the car door for Mao; then Mao said "Do not hold the door for me. Please help me open the door for a new China."

However, *The Founding of A Republic* also emphasized the individual roles for both the major political figures and the ordinary people. As mentioned in the previous parts, the film chose to focus on Mao Zedong's personal charms and abilities instead of presenting the whole CCP group. There were also richer descriptions on the personalities and capabilities of major political figures in the Kuomintang as well as other political parties. More importantly, the film provided portrayals of ordinary people and valued their roles in Chinese society at that time. The cook that sacrificed himself could be an appropriate example. There was an impressive soldier who mistakenly recognized the city wall of Beijing at night as some huge wall of a landlord that they could not climb over and asks his chief for help; his image showed a simple and honest soldier, who might make some mistakes but was so responsible and hardworking. There was another soldier representative of his army to provide a report to Mao Zedong when Mao reviewed the dress parade. He shouted: "On behalf of soldiers of the Red Army, dead or alive, I salute you, Chairman Mao", and he used his words and facial expressions to demonstrate his responsibility and enthusiasm as a soldier, as well as his respect to Mao Zedong. In all, the film showed the value of the individual and such a change revealed an increased appreciation of individualism.

Masculinity versus femininity

Both films showed a tendency toward femininity over masculinity in Chinese society at that time. Both films seemed to value female traits such as relationships with partners, staying in harmony with the group, and attempting to achieve the social goals rather than individual goals. To be more specific, in *The Birth of New China*, the CCP was portrayed as a warm and friendly group of people who always worked together, treated each other with respect, and stayed engaged with people. On the contrary, Chiang Kai-shek was shown as cold, hierarchical, and clinging to power. Even though *The Birth of New China* and *The Founding of A Republic* are based on the same historical event they have different emphasis. Accordingly, *The Founding of A Republic* valued more peace and relations with others and these themes fit well with the feminine dimension of culture. Also, the notable increase of female characters in *The Founding of A Republic* contributed to more feminine depictions. For example, the film showed Soong Ching-ling's perspective about the civil war, which included compassion and sympathy.

Long-term versus short-term orientation

Both films showed a tendency toward long-term orientation as future plans were mentioned several times and even the seemingly recent efforts were made for the long run. For example, as presented in *The Birth of New China*, at the Seventh Conference of Chinese Communist Party Mao Zedong emphasized that the victory in the civil war was just the first step and that party members should never be arrogant, that what really mattered would be their future work. When CCP leaders noticed that their army had cut off the carpet from the president's office for sleep, they commanded party members to relearn how to be disciplined; Mao Zedong admired such decisions and discussed the importance of remaining disciplined in the future. Before the official

founding of the new republic, Mao Zedong admitted to his son his worry about the unknown future; and he quoted from an old friends that "a person, a family, a group, a place, or even a nation can spring up vigorously, and can be destroyed in a moment" to convey his philosophy that to keep the undertaking would be harder than to set it up it, and long-run efforts are the key to success. The same idea was presented in *The Founding of A Republic*: the CCP leaders created detailed plans for future administration of the country.

As for the Kuomintang, in both films, Chiang Kai-shek created a long-run strategy to transfer the military and retreat to Taiwan at the end of the civil war. Also, in *The Founding of A Republic*, Li Tsung-jen, the vice-president at that time, came to the Defense Minister to imply him that they could seize the regime; when the Defense Minister said "Let's get rid of Chiang", Li Tsung-jen replied that "It is still too early to say that, but it is never too early to take precautions. It is time we get started." In conclusion, it seems like the emphasis on future plans is consistent with Chinese culture.

Patriotism appeal

Both films presented strong patriotism appeal, and both did so fairly explicitly. Both films used the contributions and the goodness of the CCP, the tragedy of the civil war, and national symbols to appeal to patriotism. Also, *The Founding of A Republic* emphasized the theme of peace throughout the film to generate audience compassion.

Representations of patriotism appeal

As political propaganda films, the two movies aimed to generate patriotic feelings. They shared the same basic premise that the CCP had made marvelous contributions to leading

Chinese people to a brighter future. During the two films, the CCP was depictured as kind, humorous, and great, which conveyed that Chinese people ought to love the Party. There was an implied unity between loving the CCP and loving the nation. Besides using portrayals on the CCP to arouse patriotism, both films presented tragic war scenes including dead soldiers to convince the audience that it was their sacrifice that made the current Chinese people reach peace and harmony. Even for patriotic appeals, *The Founding of A Republic* focused more on the individual level. For instance, Soong Ching-ling provided a feminine angle to the war by showing her sympathy for those sleeping soldiers. Also, the representative soldier of the dress parade used his words and facial expression to affect the audience with the sacrifice made by Chinese soldiers.

More importantly, *The Founding of A Republic* emphasized the importance of peace to give rise to the audience's patriotism. As mentioned before, this film provided a detailed scene describing how joyful the CCP were when they achieved a critical victory in the war and thought there would be peace in China: they joined a dancing parade to celebrate their triumph and celebrated without restraint to Mao Zedong's satisfaction. The parade and celebration scene was the most modern and sophisticated from the perspective of film aesthetics: there were black and white scenes depicting the miserable life of ordinary Chinese, contrasted the gradual transition to a color frame to depict the joy after achieving peace; the celebration scene provided the most variable shooting angles in the film to show their happiness; at first there was emotional background music, which transitioned to martial songs sung by the drunk leaders of the CCP as the only sound; following that, a very modern melody full of peace and calm replaced the original sounds, emotionally reminding the audience that peace was so hard-earned. Another noticeable representation that emphasized the importance of peace and gave rise to patriotism

was the ending song of the film: it was a modern song performed by a girl with soft voice and gentle melody to represented the desire for peace and harmony.

Additionally, both films used national symbols for patriotism appeal. In *The Founding of A Republic*, the vivid portrayals on the selection process of the Chinese national flag and national anthem evoked audience's awareness of national symbols as well as their patriotism. Also, at the end of both films Mao Zedong announced the founding of the People's Republic of China. Such historical images would always make Chinese people feel emotional and give them a sense of purpose. *The Birth of New China* re-shot the scene to provide a few more national symbols, including the rising national flag, the inspiring national anthem, the grand Tiananmen Square, and the strong military, all of which appeared to push the audience's emotions to the climax; there were hundreds of pigeons flying up to the sky, splendid fireworks everywhere, reinforcing the audience's patriotism and the notion that the founding of new China should be a joyful, history-changing event. In comparison, *The Founding of A Republic* directly used clips from the existing old documentary, the real presentations of the political leaders and the ceremony made this scene more authentic and more emotional-evoking.

Extent of explicitness of patriotism appeal

Both films showed a fairly high extent of explicitness of patriotism appeal. Although there was no direct appeal for people to love the state, the films played to people's emotions and strongly conveyed the hardship that needed to be overcome and the greatness of the CCP. *The Birth of New China* provided detailed historical scenes, reminding people of the old times, familiarizing them with the main Party leaders, and finally arousing their love to the nation. As for *The Founding of A Republic*, it used "peace" as a core idea to move the film narrative

forward as well as the appeal to patriotism, which was consistent with the goals of the CCP and the Chinese people.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Inspired by the recent popularity of political films as well as increasing importance of national image in China, this study aims to explore how Chinese political films frame national image at present and compare that portrayal with an earlier time period. This research attempts to build a bridge between framing theory and film studies and expands the concept of national image to include several key dimensions, as described above. Two films, *The Founding of A Republic* released in 2009 and *The Birth of New China* released in 1989 are selected and examined through a qualitative content analysis.

It is helpful to take a look at the different social context in 1989 and 2009. As a developing country, China experienced continuing changes during the past decades. The international trends toward globalization, integration, and openness have stimulated China to accelerate its internal reforms in almost every field. In 1989, China embraced more openness as a result of the Reform and Opening-up National Policy. It is also worth mentioning that Jiang Zemin, the nation's president at that time, showed an open attitude toward the literary and art circles. According to Yang (2013), *The Birth of New China* went through very strict censorship and even faced a possibility of being called off; but it was Jiang Zemin who viewed the film and admired it, which made it possible for the film to be released to the public in the end. However, the newly reformed society still had some unconscious stereotypes about the opposing sides between the CCP and the Kuomintang before and during the civil war, which may have been reflected in the film's storyline.

The Founding of A Republic was produced twenty years after *The Birth of New China*; in 2009, the People's Republic of China celebrated its sixtieth birthday, and the people reached a peak of their confidence in the nation (Huang, 2009). With the development of online news and social media, changes of social values and viewpoints were even more significant than the changes stemming from political or economic reforms. For example, there are some notable differences between the interviews of the film creators of *The Birth of New China* and *The Founding of A Republic*: the directors of the former emphasized their patriotism, like Xiao Guiyun, the female director, who said that they had a deep devotion to the People's Republic of China (as interviewed by Xinhuanet, 2015) while the directors of the latter preferred to talk about ongoing social changes (Shao, 2009). Huang Jianxin (2009), one of the directors of *The Founding of A Republic,* admitted that it was possible to find more fascinating historical moments under a looser system. "It is a natural to present the image of the CCP and the Kuomintang in less stereotypical ways, which would make the leaders more human," said Huang. "The diversity of the media lead us to more openness, and we need to follow the mainstream values in today's society" (as interviewed by Shao, 2009).

As both films reflect major historical events in Chinese history and portray the role of major political parties, it can be said that the two films provide a fairly comprehensive image of China during that historical time period, trying to promote specific ideology and generate patriotism. Thus, there are a number of similarities between these two films in their portrayal of China's national image: it was a country with poor state capacities that longed for transition; the Chinese people were ready for peace after a prolonged civil war; it was the Chinese Communist Party who lead the Chinese people into a "bright future;" and it was a society embracing typical Eastern culture and traditions. Despite these similarities, however, this analysis demonstrated

that there are clear changes in the way the more recent film portrays the historical events, particularly in the more complex depictions of the Kuomintang as well as evolving portrayals of dominant social values.

Evolving Views on Key Political Players

The Birth of New China portrayed a fairly stereotypical image of the Kuomintang and the CCP: the former were hierarchical and full of pessimism for the future, showing a poor capacity to govern the country, while the latter were kind and united, leading the Chinese people to a better life. *The Founding of A Republic* also put the two parties in opposing ends of the political spectrum, presenting a highly positive image of the CCP, but also introducing more diverse perspectives on the Kuomintang: Chiang Kai-shek, the top leader of Kuomintang, was to some extent depicted as a kind father and a gentle leader compared to his one-dimensional authoritarian portrayal in *The Birth of New China*; this film provided detailed representations of other Kuomintang members besides Chiang Kai-shek to show their distinctive personalities, such as Feng Yuxiang and Fu Zuoyi; and the film emphasized Chiang Ching-kuo's efforts to improve economic regulations and to save the Chinese nation, although he eventually failed. Also, the more recent film introduced the characters of other political leaders from other political parties to better illuminate the complex political environment at that time.

Moreover, through the repeating representation of the national symbols, *The Founding of A Republic* strengthened the national image of Republic of China and implied a higher acceptance of Kuomintang in current Chinese ideology. The national flag of the Republic of China, the party flag of the Kuomintang, and the portrait of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of Kuomintang, were all shown frequently throughout the film as national symbols; and the highlighting of Sun Yat-sen

through his portrait, people's conversations, and his wife Soong Ching-ling delivered a strong message that there were closer relations between the CCP and the Kuomintang during that time.

A Nation Ready for Change

Politically, both films described China as a nation with poor state capacity weakened by continuous wars. The Kuomintang, as the governing party, showed poor extractive and administrative capacity, resulting in widespread poverty and chaos in people's lives. Both films presented emotional and tragic war scenes including dead soldiers to highlight the national calamity caused by the civil war. Correspondingly, both films strongly implied that China longed for transition and peace at that point in time.

Culturally, both films presented several remaining old customs, such as people's patriarchal behaviors, nepotistic traditions, and thinking patterns from the imperial time such as viewing the top political leader as an emperor. Nevertheless, there were some visible changes in traditions: *The Birth of New China* portrayed Mao Zedong as an open-minded leader who had the courage to challenge the establishment, while *The Founding of A Republic* emphasized the improvement of women's status, especially for females engaging in politics, besides the representation of other changes in social mores. To compare these two films, *The Founding of A Republic* showed a more complex picture of society since it provided a more comprehensive representation on Chinese traditions and the ongoing social changes, while *The Birth of New China* included only the most traditional representations and few changes in customs in the portrayals of the major political leaders.

In all, the two films strongly implied that China was a nation that desired change in society as a whole, including its politics, economy, and culture.

Typical Eastern Culture and Distinct Patriotism

On portraying the national culture of China at that time, these two films shared a lot in common that they both indicated a tendency to high social power distance, collectivism, femininity, and long-term orientation. To be more specific, the leaders were naturally perceived to be superior to ordinary people; individuals valued the nation more than themselves and they preferred working together as a group; people emphasized female traits such as relationships with partners, staying in harmony with the group, and attempting to achieve social goals rather than individual goals; future plans were mentioned several times in both films and even the seemingly recent efforts were presented as long-term goals. Such value orientations are in line with previous studies of Eastern culture. Nevertheless, *The Founding of A Republic* gave a clear rise to individual portrayals: the film chose to focus on Mao Zedong's personal charm and abilities instead of presenting the whole CCP group, and more importantly, it provided individual portrayals of several ordinary people, valuing their roles in Chinese society at that time. Such change imply an increased appreciation of individualism in current Chinese culture.

Along with the typical Eastern culture, the patriotism appeals in the two films reflected the core values of Chinese society: the contributions and the innate goodness of the political leaders, the desire for peace, and the importance of sympathy as well as collective will. *The Founding of A Republic* did a better job at emphasizing Chinese national symbols as it provided detailed stories on the selection process of the Chinese national flag and national anthem rather than merely presented the them within the film. Through modern and sophisticated editing techniques, this film also had a more effective guidance for the audience in terms of the appeal to peace. Thus, although there was no direct appeal for people to love the state, the film played to people's emotions and gave rise to the audience's patriotism to a fairly high extent of explicitness.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study relied on framing theory to explore the portrayal of national image in Chinese political films. However, there were a number of challenges with regard to the concept of national image and the complexity of applying framing theory to films. First, as mentioned before, national image is a complicated concept that needs a systematic approach, but previous research of national image seemed inconsistent and fragmented, with no existing framework that could be easily borrowed and applied here. Accordingly, this research developed an academic framework that focused on two general aspects: (1) the political image consisting of major political figures and state capacity; (2) the cultural image formed by traditional representations, national cultural portrayals, and patriotism appeal. Future studies may use both general aspects identified here or may choose to include either of them to conduct future research on representations of national image in film. Second, applying framing theory to film studies remains a challenge, and the combination of framing theory and visual studies is still not as extensive as research on textual framing. Specifically, the framing process in films is subtler due to the narrative and visual nature of films, so it takes more energy to recognize and interpret the relevant themes in films. Moreover, political films are relatively long and contain considerable historical detail, a fact that also increases the difficulty on collecting and categorizing data. Finally, the qualitative approach used here provides a rich amount of data that can be challenging to categorize and fit under one or two overarching frames.

In terms of practical implications for filmmakers, the present study suggests that the audience may have a better experience if the film could be more nuanced and remove some unimportant details when it comes to long historical films. From the audience perspective, it may be appropriate to have them understand ahead of time that each film possesses some underlying

ideology, which was carefully selected and crafted by the film makers, who are themselves influenced by the dominant social environment at the time. As for the CCP, it may be more effective in the long run for them to accomplish their political objectives by including more diverse and nuanced portrayals that are in line with current social values rather than stereotyped one-sided propaganda messages.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

This study takes an in-depth look into two Chinese political films typical of a certain time period. As such, the study used only one film for each era as a compromise for balancing the complicated research framework with a manageable number of films to be coded by the researcher. The study also had a long list of dimensions of national image that it wanted to investigate, which made it cumbersome at certain points to execute the analysis and also may have made it less clear for the reader. In the future, it might be better if the research only focuses on one aspect of national imagine--either the political aspect or the cultural dimension—to make the study easier to implement but also easier to summarize for an outside audience. Finally, including a larger number of films with a narrower coding scheme based on the current research findings may allow scholars to increase the generalizability of the research and offer a better understanding of the representations of the national image in Chinese political films on a wider scale.

As with any qualitative study, conducting a qualitative content analysis relies on the researcher own understanding and interpretations of the media text. To complement this approach, future studies may include a more quantitative content analysis that involves a replicable coding

process. Combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches has the potential to provide a

fuller picture of the portrayals of national image in political films.

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APPENDIX A

CHINESE POLITICAL FILMS CODEBOOK

1. Coder name: Coder should put her name in the code sheet.

2. Name of film: Coder should type in the name of the film.

3. Theme of Chinese political films: Coder will indicate what is the theme for this Chinese political film by checking all that apply from the following list:
      a. The old Chinese society and its evils;
      b. Transitional struggles for social change;
      c. The new Chinese society and its virtues;
      d. Continuing social task and future goals.

4. China's political image in political films:
4.1. Major political figures:
4.1.a. Images of political figures: Coder will indicate what are the images of main revolutionary figures (such as Mao and Sun), the opponent (such as Jiang and Qing government), and the people (including ordinary people as well as other democratic parties and Sun's fellow revolutionaries).

4.1.b. Relations of political figures: Coder will indicate what are the relations between each two players of main revolutionary figures (such as Mao and Sun), the opponent (such as Jiang and Qing government), and the people (including ordinary people as well as other democratic parties and Sun's fellow revolutionaries).

4.2. State capacity:
4.2.a. Extractive capacity: Coder will indicate what is the extractive capacity of China framed in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

4.2.b. Coercive capacity: Coder will indicate what is the coercive capacity of China framed in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

4.2.c. Administrative capacity: Coder will indicate what is the administrative capacity of China framed in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

4.2.d. Symbolic capacity: Coder will indicate what is the symbolic capacity of China framed in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5. China's cultural image in political films:
5.1. Traditional representations of Chinese culture:
5.1.a. Traditions and customs: Coder will indicate what are the traditions and customs framed in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5.1.b. Changes in customs: Coder will indicate what are changes in customs framed in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5.2. National culture portrayals:
5.2.a. Social power distance: Coder will indicate what is the representation of social power distance in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5.2.b. Uncertainty avoidance: Coder will indicate what is the representation of uncertainty avoidance in the Chinese political films if there is any.

5.2.c. Individualism versus collectivism: Coder will indicate what is the representation of individualism versus collectivism in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5.2.d. Masculinity versus femininity: Coder will indicate what is the representation of masculinity versus femininity in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5.2.e. Long-term versus short-term orientation: Coder will indicate what is the representation of long-term versus short-term orientation in the Chinese political films, if there is any.

5.3. Patriotism appeal:
5.3.a. Representations of patriotism appeal: Coder will indicate what are the representations of patriotism appeal in the Chinese political films.

5.3.b. Extent of explicitness for patriotism appeal: Coder will indicate what is the extent of explicitness for patriotism appeal in the Chinese political films.

6. Effectiveness of the film: Coder will determine whether this film is effective on building a positive national image, and why.