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Cinematography of «Children of Independence»

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Cinematography of «Children of Independence»

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Abstract- **Within the period from 2010 - 2020 there were two changes that happened in Kazakhstani cinema: first is the activity of generation of «Children of Independence», filmmakers who are not afraid of censorship and can freely express societal most acute problems. Their films won prizes in the most prestigious world film festivals. Second change is appearance of other filmmakers who made a movie a product. We can speak about the birth of new film industry. Both of these aspects is a generational question, when young filmmakers stopped waiting for the government support and started to do films for festivals and for making money.**

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I. Introduction

All started in 2010, when first entertaining movie was released in the cinemas with the title «Story of a Pink Rabbit» directed by Farkhat Sharipov. This movie was not only popular, it became an icon of the glamourous life of «Golden Youth» in Almaty as well as showed social layers in the society, so it had a strong social aspect as well.

Main character, besides his studies, works as an animated character of «Pink Rabbit» and ends up with the posh youth community. At first, he likes the parties, but then he realizes that behind the «easy to get» money stands absence of values and crimes.

During the years of independence, the system of film distribution started to change because the old one was obsolete. The new system was introduced in 2005 and it was Otau cinema chain. The same year a national blockbuster «Kochevnik» or «Nomad» in English, directed by Sergey Bodrov and Talgat Temenov was released in cinema theatres nationally. This event has made a Kazakh viewer to believe that national movie can be and will be shown on the big screen. In 2010, Kazakh movies started to be released in cinemas theatres systematically. There were 20 films produced and the portion of films produced in Kazakhstan that were released in cinemas theatres amounted to 0.3% which is not even one percent, but the process of national films being released on big screens started. There were total of 66 cinema theatres in Kazakhstan at the time, and most of them were located in Almaty and Astana and those were interconnected; while cinema theatres in other parts of Kazakhstan worked independently. So in order to have the distribution of produced by Kazakhfilmstudio movies such as «Story of a Pink Rabbit»; Darya Belkina, Head of Centre for Film Projects Development at Kazakhfilm had to visit 20 towns of Kazakhstan and sign contracts for Kazahfilm movies distribution with each cinema theatre and each cinema chain in Kazakhstan. Moreover, she was able to establish a system of cinema halls attendance control, so that finance and accounting department of Kazakhfilm could receive their portion of box-office collections from their own films distribution for the first time since the establishment of independence of Kazakhstan on 16 of December, 1991.

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II. Commercial Cinema

Kazakhstan cinema can be compared to a ship. Where the upper deck is arthouse, films and lower decks are commercially released films. The ship is quite big, and it will grow with the years to come. To contrast 2010 with 2019, there were 44 films produced and 37 were released in cinemas theatres which amounts to the portion of 10% of the market share in 2019. This can be calculated easily, for example, there were 370 films released in Kazakhstan cinema chains and 37 of those films where Kazakh thus amounting to 10%. However, there is no reliable data on the box-office collections because there is no unified system of electronic ticket sales, however, there is information that is given by cinema theatre chains themselves on box-office collections.

According to the data provided by cinema theater chains in Kazakhstan (1), total box-office collection of Kazakh made films amounts to 30% of the market share. This means that 10% of the market share occupied by Kazakh films released in cinemas, brings 30% of total box-office from all 370 films released in Kazakhstan in 2019.

There are three leaders of box-office collections from Kazakh producers:

1) «Biznes po-Kazakhski v Koree» (English title «Business in a Kazakh way in South Korea») directed by Alen Nyazbekov - 1 billion Kazakh tenge box-office (USD 2,8 mln);
2) «Akim» directed by Nurtas Adambayev (English title «The Mayor») - 577 million Kazakh tenge box-office (USD 1,6 mln);
3) «Tomiris» directed by Akan Satayev - 508 million Kazakh tenge box-office (USD 1.4 mln).

The most popular genre in Kazakh Cinema is a comedy. Out of to 48 films produced in 2019 (2), 17 are comedies which is 39%. Producer and actor Nurlan Koyanbayev has been releasing his sequel of "Businesses in a Kazakh Way" every New Year's Eve

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proving that Kazakh made films can earn box-office compared to American films box-office collection, in Kazakhstan. First movie of «Business in a Kazakh Way» sequel told a story of managing a hotel and the main character with his kin relatives. Second part of the sequel is also about them, but the action takes place in the USA, third movie in Africa, fourth part of the sequel takes place in South Korea. In 2019-2020 these movies' sequel has beaten up records in Kazakh cinema market, having earned 1 billion Kazakh tenge (USD 2,8 mln) box-office. The entertaining deck is the biggest of «Kazakh cinema ship», where money is earned.

If we continue the metaphor with the ship, then one of the decks is also – historic and patriotic films. In such a way, in 2012 the grand film project ordered by the government was «Zhauzhurek Mynbala» (English «Thousand Warriors against Dzhungars») directed by Akhan Satayev, to which 12 million USD were spent on production. The film was proposed from Kazakhstan to American Oscar Academy in 2013. In total, there were six movies made on the life of our first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Nursultan Nazarbayev, which has a general title «Kazakhskoe Khanstvo» (English «Kazakh Territories of Reign») directed by Rustem Abdrashov, and in 2019, there was a two parts sequel of films released with the title "Tomiris" directed by Akhan Satayev. These films are made on the government money because this is expensive, hard to mimic historical periods of time films. Stylistically «Tomiris» two parts sequel is similar to «300 Spartans». Budget of two billion tenge, or 5 million US Dollars, has been able to collect only 25% in cinema theatres release box-office collection. During the Soviet Times, this genre was called historic-revolutionary movie that means those films were limited by the historical period starting from 1917. This is the year when the Soviet Power and USSR came into place. Historical films that were made after 1991, when Kazakhstan gained independence served the purpose of having an ancient history of our country. That is the reason why brand film projects were created such as «Nomad», «Zhauzhurek Mynbala» (English «Thousand Warriors»), «Kazakhskoe Khanstvo» («Kazakh Territories of Reign») and «Tomiris». Today, I think, we can revert back to our recent history with other genres of movies made in Kazakhstan.

The decade of 2010, is the time of the massive creation of genre cinema in Kazakhstan. Comedies, dramas, thrillers, action movies, blockbusters, fantasy films and musicals were produced. At the same time, 2010 was the time when the independent studios started their work separate from the Kazakhfilm National Films Studio and this was ground breaking emergence of the producers created cinema, independent from the state censorship.

Dramas: There are not many of them which is surprising. However, there is a number of films that can be called the successes of love-story genre: «On i Ona» (2013) directed by Saken Zholdas (English «He and She»), «Virtual Love» (2012) directed by Amir Karakulov, «Tent» (2015) directed by Kenzhebek Shaikakov, «16 girls» (2016) directed by Kanagat Mustafin. We can say that female producer Bayan Alaguzova has been mastering this genre with movies «Ostorozhno, korova» (2014) (English «Beware, a cow»), TV-Drama «Lyubov traktorista» (2015) (English «Love of a Tractor Driver»), «Stantsiya Liubvi» (2019) (English «Love Stop»). Actress and film producer Assel Sadvakasova started to have acted in this genre with the movies «Adele» (2015), «Zamuzh v 30 let» (2016) (English «Married at the age of 30»), «Kelinka tozhe chelovek» (2018) (English «Daughter-in-Law is also a Human»), «Semyanin» (2019) (English «Family Man»).

Action movies: Film director who is most prominent working in the genre of action movies is Akhan Satayev. Starting with the movie «Racketeer» (2007) (English «Racketeer»), he filmed «The Liquidator» (2011), «Racketeer-2» movie (2015), «Rayony» movie (2016) (English «Districts»). Relatively ambitious in this genre is a movie made by the film director Marina Kunarova, «Okhota za prizrakom» (2014) (English «Ghost Hunt»); she is a Kazakh female film director who invited American actors: Armand Assante and Kristanna Sommer Loken to take part in her action movie.

Fantasy movies: First movie in genre of fantasy was filmed in 2012, directed by Akhat Ibrayev. Movie with the title «Kniga Legend: Tayinstevnniy Les» (2012) (English «Book of Legends: Mystery Forest»). A graduate of the Chicago Film School, Akhat wanted to create an accent in the style of «The Chronicles of Narnia», but the heroes were Kazakh boys and some mystical characters such as Swan, Bear, Centiped were made with the help of computer graphics. Undoubtedly, this is a breakthrough in Kazakh cinema, but further development of fantasy genre has not been supported by our national studio Kazakhfilm. Another computer graphics experiment was the movie - «Joker» (2013) directed by Talgad Zhanibekov first Kazakh comics movie that was fully filmed on the green background. It's a story of a super hero as in the «Matrix» movie. Unfortunately because of the technical difficulties, complexity of creation, costs of creating and editing this genre of films in Kazakhstan is not developing at all.

Musicals: This genre is very rare. In 2012, one movie directed by Yesbolat Bedelkhan «Zapreschennie tantsi» (English «Forbidden Dance»), showed the young underground movement of dancers in Kazakhstan. In 2017, Askar Uzabayev made a movie «Ninety One» to support the music group with the same title that emerged in Kazakhstan. In 2018, first Kazakh musical movie «Cicitay» did not collect any box-office.

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Overall, Kazakh cinema ship is full of comedies, historical films as well as patriotic movies, dramas, action movies, a bit of horror and musicals.

III. Art House Cinema

The very top of this ship is the art-house deck with the films that are known worldwide from Kazakhstan, that take part in the international film festivals and that accounts for only 7% of all films produced in Kazakhstan.

In 2010, young film directors were called as a movement of «Children of Independence» not only because they grew up during the independence time, but also because they are not scared when it comes to the censorship from the government, moreover, they do not have inner censorship of their works either.

When the film by Emir Baigazin «Harmony Lessons» was awared «Silver Bear» in 2013 Berlinale Film Festival, he turned 28 years old. This means that when he turned five, the Soviet Union collapsed and he doesn't remember and doesn't know what Soviet censorship is. But there were difficulties of his generation and himself when there were years of shortage of food, clothes and so on, during the 1990s when Kazakhstan just became a sovereign state.

It seems at first, that the topic of the film is an ordinary one – school life of toddlers in the province of Kazakhstan. However, we see a cruel school of survival, where the elderly and the ones that are stronger rob the younger and weaker ones. If you don't have money, you will be beaten up! Only parents and teachers know nothing of this system at school, in the life of teenagers and those fights and money collections. First part of the film is school, the second part of the film is the police department. And here we see the same exact picture, but it's not teenagers who are beating up the younger ones, it's the grown up men who represent power apparatus in Kazakhstan are beating up teenagers. It hurts for real, professionals are working on finding out the truth through 48 hours of torturing teenagers. What *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote about «Harmony Lessons»: «That the director is not yet 30 makes it all the more exciting to see a work with such clarity of vision and precise command of film as both a visual and emotional storytelling medium. As oblique as the fragmented narrative sometimes gets – particularly when interludes of light and dark fantasy begin calling into question how much of what's happening is taking place inside the young protagonist's head – this is penetrating drama. It's stark and surreal, strange and beautiful, and while perhaps overstretched in the final act, it's entirely riveting» (3).

The film was shown at Berlinale, but in Kazakhstan it was not shown. No, officially no one forbid it from the shows, but there was no theatrical release of the movie. Next film by Emir Baigazin was «The Wounded Angel» in 2016, where he showed a generation of the teenager who is lost at the beginning of 1990s. This movie consists of four short novels, four classmates, whose career and adult life is broken while they were all very successful during the school years. Third film is directed by Emir Baigazin «Reka» (English «The River») was awarded with the Best Film Director Prize in Venice, in 2018. It is made in the style of Pier Paolo Pasolini and it is about five brothers, who are living in the village away from others because their father doesn't want them to learn the contemporary civilized world worrying that it will only do them harm. The river with the strong current to which father also doesn't let his sons to bathe is a metaphor of the «civilized» life. But there comes a moment when the river itself or «civilization» enters their house and his sons are ought to make their own choice and not to follow their father's choice. Narrative film which is a philosophic thought, in some way recalling the Italian movie of the same year of 2018, directed by female film director Alice Rohrwacher with the title «Lazzaro Felice». Kazakh art-house movie that is really located on the very top deck not only of the Kazakh cinema ship, but also of the world cinema ship, «Reka» by Emir Baigazin makes you think.

Another famous film director from Kazakhstan, who is also very young – Adilkhan Yerzhanov. His movies were shown at Cannes Film Festival twice, however, he is just over 30 years old. In all of his films he asks questions of: «Who am I»?, «Where is my home»?, «Where is my land»?, «What is the society we live in stand for»?

In the very beginning, he established his own Manifesto of Partisan Cinema (4), where he announced three things: to shoot without budget, social realism and new form.

In the film «Construction Workers» of 2011, two brothers – the older is 20 and the younger one is 16, they also have a sister who is seven and they are left on their own. Their mother passes away and their father was long gone. All they have is a piece of land, where others have summer houses, but they will also lose that piece of land because of the new legislation according to which the land with no owner and no construction on it will be taken by the state. Brothers do not want to have their younger sister to be taken to the orphanage and they themselves do not want to become homeless people. So, in order to keep that piece of land they are ought to build a house on that territory. The problem is that they have no support – they don't have friends, no relatives and they neither have money nor construction materials. But they managed to build it – it's small, plain and yet it's their own. The film is very reserved, in black and white imagery and this style transmits their fear (fearing construction site guards, fearing police, fearing other construction workers) because at night they steal construction materials and they don't stop stealing

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because their will to survive and to have their own land and house on it is stronger than their fears. The older brother realizes that this will not go unnoticed. And he is ready to take up the responsibility for these acts and the construction site guards are beating him up, at the end the police takes him away. But he says to his younger brother: «Finish building it, make it yours on legal paper, once it would be taken down, you will get an apartment with our younger sister». Of course, it is clear that it is a dream, but their will is unbreakable, they are very strong in spirit to go against the system and the circumstances.

The question of having a house – this is not a question of a particular family, it is metaphor of having a home, in general, for the new generation of Kazakhstan, do they feel home in their own country? Does the government take care of the young generation? In Kazakhstan, we have a very high percentage of young people unemployed and thus young people are unable not only to buy a house, they cannot afford a small apartment in order to start an independent life of their own.

The next movie of Adilkhan Yerzhanov – «Khozayeva» (English «The Owners») in 2014 – this film took part at Cannes Film Festival in the competition section: «Un certain regards». «The Owners» is the continuation of the story of that family: they were unable to build a house in the city and so they have returned to their village, where they have a house that they got from their parents. But there, they couldn't become owners of that house of their parents either. In Cannes, the next film by Adilkhan Yerzhanov was shown «Laskovoe Bezrazlichie Mira» (English «Affectionate Indifference of the World»). And the last movie he filmed «Black Black Man» was awarded with the prize «Best Film Director in Asia» by the APSA (Asian Pacific Screen Awards) Academy.

The same generation as Adilkhan and Emir is Farkhad Sharipov with the movie «Self-Development Training», he received a Grand-Prix at the Moscow International Film Festival in 2019, «Konokrady. Dorogi Vremeni» directed by Yerlan Nurmukhambetov and Lisa Takeba (English «Horse Thieves. Roads of Time») – this film was shown at the opening of the Busan International Film Festival in 2019. Movie «Maryam» directed by female film director Sharipa Urazbayeva, the movie took part at the official competition of Locarno Film Festival and received Grand-Prix at the French Film Festival in Vesoul.

IV. Conclusion

Kazakh cinema can be proud of its young filmmakers, who are at their 30-35 years are on the top level of representing Kazakhstan at the most prestigious Film Festivals and received number of top awards. This is auteur cinema, which is also called «partisan» movies that raises problems of the nation, the questions of identity and national culture. Overall, the situation with the Kazakh cinema is that the main players are independent film studios. There are between 45-50 movies, from which 75% are produced by independent film producers. As to the artistic quality, there are six art-house films in 2019 and four of them were made in the independent production houses, which accounts for 66% of the entire volume of art-house films made in Kazakhstan in 2019. This is the real economic and social results of Independence, because even in the middle of 2000th the half of Kazakh film were produced by support of the government.

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