

1 Cinematography of «Children of Independence»

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6 **Abstract**

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

14

15 **Index terms**— cinema of independence, social and societal problems, new generation, free from censorship,
16 film industry.

17 **1 Introduction**

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

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

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

41 2 II.

42 3 Commercial Cinema

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

50 According to the data provided by cinema theater chains in Kazakhstan (1), total box-office collection of
51 Kazakh made films amounts to 30% of the market share. This means that 10% of the market share occupied
52 by Kazakh films released in cinemas, brings 30% of total box-office from all 370 films released in Kazakhstan in
53 2019. proving that Kazakh made films can earn box-office compared to American films box-office collection, in
54 Kazakhstan. First movie of «Business in a Kazakh Way» sequel told a story of managing a hotel and the main
55 character with his kin relatives. Second part of the sequel is also about them, but the action takes place in the
56 USA, third movie in Africa, fourth part of the sequel takes place in South Korea. In 2019-2020 these movies'
57 sequel has beaten up records in Kazakh cinema market, having earned 1 billion Kazakh tenge (USD 2,8 mln)
58 box-office. The entertaining deck is the biggest of «Kazakh cinema ship», where money is earned.

59 If we continue the metaphor with the ship, then one of the decks is also -historic and patriotic films. In such a
60 way, in 2012 the grand film project ordered by the government was «Zhauzhurek Mynbala» (English «Thousand
61 Warriors against Dzungars») directed by Akhan Satayev, to which 12 million USD were spent on production.
62 The film was proposed from American Oscar Academy in 2013. In total, there were six movies made on the life of
63 our first president of the Republic of Kazakhstan -Nursultan Nazarbayev, which has a general title «Kazakhskoe
64 Khanstvo» (English «Kazakh Territories of Reign») directed by Rustem Abdrashov, and in 2019, there was a
65 two parts sequel of films released with the title "Tomiris" directed by Akhan Satayev. These films are made
66 on the government money because this is expensive, hard to mimic historical periods of time films. Stylistically
67 «Tomiris» two parts sequel is similar to «300 Spartans». Budget of two billion tenge, or 5 million US Dollars, has
68 been able to collect only 25% in cinema theatres release box-office collection. During the Soviet Times, this genre
69 was called historic-revolutionary movie that means those films were limited by the historical period starting from
70 1917. This is the year when the Soviet Power and USSR came into place. Historical films that were made after
71 1991, when Kazakhstan gained independence served the purpose of having an ancient history of our country. That
72 is the reason why brand film projects were created such as «Nomad», «Zhauzhurek Mynbala» (English «Thousand
73 Warriors»), «Kazakhskoe Khanstvo» («Kazakh Territories of Reign») and «Tomiris». Today, I think, we can
74 revert back to our recent history with other genres of movies made in Kazakhstan.

75 The decade of 2010, is the time of the massive creation of genre cinema in Kazakhstan. Comedies, dramas,
76 thrillers, action movies, blockbusters, fantasy films and musicals were produced. At the same time, 2010 was the
77 time when the independent studios started their work separate from the Kazakhfilm National Films Studio and
78 this was ground breaking emergence of the producers created cinema, independent from the state censorship.
79 Dramas: There are not many of them which is surprising. However, there is a number of films that can be
80 called the successes of love-story genre: «On i Ona» (2013) directed by Saken Zholdas (English «He and She»),
81 «Virtual Love» (2012) directed by Amir Karakulov, «Tent» (2015) directed by Kenzhebek Shaikakov, «16 girls»
82 (2016) directed by Kanagat Mustafin. We can say that female producer Bayan Alaguzova has been mastering this
83 genre with movies «Ostrozno, korova» (2014) (English «Beware, a cow»), TV-Drama «Lyubov traktorista»
84 (2015) (English «Love of a Tractor Driver»), «Stantsiya Liubvi» (2019) (English «Love Stop»). Actress and film
85 producer Assel Sadvakasova started to have acted in this genre with the movies «Adele» (2015), «Zamuzh v 30
86 let» (2016) (English «Married at the age of 30»), «Kalinka tozhe chelovek» (2018) (English «Daughter-in-Law is
87 also a Human»), «Semyanin» (2019) (English «Family Man»).

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

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

103 not developing at all. Musicals: This genre is very rare. In 2012, one movie directed by Yesbolat Bedelhan
104 «Zapreschennie tantsi» (English «Forbidden Dance»), showed the young underground movement of dancers in
105 Kazakhstan. In 2017, Askar Uzabayev made a movie «Ninety One» to support the music group with the same
106 title that emerged in Kazakhstan. In 2018, first Kazakh musical movie «Cicitay» did not collect any box-office.
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109 Overall, Kazakh cinema ship is full of comedies, historical films as well as patriotic movies, dramas, action movies,
110 a bit of horror and musicals.

111 **5 III.**

112 **6 Art House Cinema**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

155 In the film «Construction Workers» of 2011, two brothers -the older is 20 and the younger one is 16, they also
156 have a sister who is seven and they are left on their own. Their mother passes away and their father was long
157 gone. All they have is a piece of land, where others have summer houses, but they will also lose that piece of land
158 because of the new legislation according to which the land with no owner and no construction on it will be taken
159 by the state. Brothers do not want to have their younger sister to be taken to the orphanage and they themselves
160 do not want to become homeless people. So, in order to keep that piece of land they are ought to build a house on
161 that territory. The problem is that they have no support -they don't have friends, no relatives and they neither
162 have money nor construction materials. But they managed to build it -it's small, plain and yet it's their own.

163 The film is very reserved, in black and white imagery and this style transmits their fear (fearing construction site
164 guards, fearing police, fearing other construction workers) because at night they steal construction materials and
165 they don't stop stealing and house on it is stronger than their fears. The older brother realizes that this will not
166 go unnoticed. And he is ready to take up the responsibility for these acts and the construction site guards are
167 beating him up, at the end the police takes him away. But he says to his younger brother: «Finish building it,
168 make it yours on legal paper, once it would be taken down, you will get an apartment with our younger sister».
169 Of course, it is clear that it is a dream, but their will is unbreakable, they are very strong in spirit to go against
170 the system and the circumstances.

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

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

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

189 IV.

190 7 Conclusion

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

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