

THESIS ADVISOR ASSESSMENT REVIEW
DOCTORAL DISSERTATION BY
BANU RAMAZANOVA KUANDYKOVNA
«TRANSFORMATION OF DOCUMENTARY FILM PRODUCTION IN
THE DIGITAL AGE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN
EMERGING PRACTICES AND DISTRIBUTION MODELS»
submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree (PhD) in the specialty
8D02184 Directing Film and TV

In the context of Central Asian cinematic traditions, documentary film has often been perceived through the prism of television journalism, constrained by conventional production models and thematic limitations. This perception has historically curtailed the genre's evolution and its capacity to engage with contemporary socio-cultural discourses. Contrastingly, in regions such as North America, Europe, and parts of Asia, documentary cinema has undergone significant transformation, emerging as a dynamic and influential medium that competes alongside fiction films in major festivals and contributes meaningfully to public discourse.

The dissertation authored by Banu Ramazanova represents a substantial and timely contribution to the field of documentary film studies, with particular emphasis on the evolving intersection of nonfiction cinema, technological innovation, and industrial transformation in the digital age. This work demonstrates a thoughtful, well-researched, and interdisciplinary approach, fully meeting the requirements for the award of the PhD degree. The relevance of the dissertation lies in its dual approach: it situates Kazakhstan's documentary production within the broader global evolution of nonfiction practices, while also addressing the specific structural challenges and opportunities unique to the national context. The author meticulously frames documentary cinema not only as an aesthetic practice but as a systemic industrial phenomenon shaped by historical, technological, financial, and cultural forces.

A key strength of the dissertation is its historical perspective. Unlike many contemporary studies that frame digital transformation as a recent disruption, the author correctly identifies the gradual evolution of documentary cinema from the Lumière brothers' actuality films, through the codification of documentary norms in the twentieth century, to the profound accelerations brought by the World Wide Web

and digital streaming platforms. This historical approach not only enriches the dissertation's theoretical grounding but also resonates with Kazakhstan's own cinematic trajectory: a field historically shaped by Soviet models, now challenged to redefine itself within new global configurations. The dissertation's critical analysis of production and distribution models significantly enhances its impact. The author identifies the transformation of traditional production infrastructures—from state-backed and broadcast-centered models to platform-driven, decentralized ecosystems—and explores the corresponding reconfiguration of distribution pathways through streaming platforms, festival circuits, and virtual exhibitions. The detailed comparison between the United States, Europe, Asia, and Kazakhstan highlights structural divergences and convergences, offering an incisive account of global nonfiction market dynamics.

An important aspect of this dissertation's originality lies in the fact that it is rooted not only in scholarly inquiry but also in the author's extensive professional experience as a documentary producer. Drawing upon firsthand industry knowledge, the author bridges the divide between theoretical analysis and the practical realities of documentary production and distribution. This dual perspective allows for a more nuanced and grounded understanding of systemic challenges, creative negotiations, and technological adaptations in the nonfiction sector—insights that purely theoretical studies often risk overlooking. The dissertation thus embodies the increasingly valuable model of the practitioner-scholar, offering findings that are both intellectually robust and practically applicable to the evolving documentary landscape. Moreover, the dissertation provides a compelling critique of Kazakhstan's institutional frameworks. It argues convincingly that while government support for documentary cinema exists, it is predominantly modeled on outdated production logics that fail to accommodate the rapid shifts toward creative experimentation, international co-productions, and digital-native distribution. The recommendations for policy innovation—including multi-stage funding schemes, cross-border partnerships, and algorithm-conscious distribution strategies—are grounded in careful comparative research and present a practical roadmap for sectoral revitalization.

Furthermore, the findings of this research hold significant practical value for the broader film industry and cultural policy makers. By outlining strategic recommendations for adapting Kazakhstan's documentary sector to global transformations, the dissertation offers actionable insights that could be implemented by government bodies and cultural institutions to foster a more dynamic, internationally competitive documentary environment. The emphasis on modernizing funding mechanisms, embracing technological innovation, and rethinking distribution pathways aligns directly with the goals of national cultural development programs. Another important contribution is the dissertation's

engagement with questions of audience transformation and trust erosion in the post-truth era. By demonstrating how algorithm-driven visibility and participatory forms reshape documentary reception, the work captures a critical shift that has immediate implications for Kazakhstani producers seeking to reach both domestic and international audiences.

While the dissertation achieves a comprehensive synthesis of theoretical, historical, and industrial analysis, certain areas offer potential for future expansion. Notably, a more extensive empirical component—such as interviews with Kazakhstani documentary practitioners and policymakers—could further substantiate the institutional critique. Additionally, the integration of audience reception studies, particularly in relation to platform algorithms, would enhance the understanding of how documentaries circulate and resonate within contemporary digital ecosystems. Given the originality, depth, and practical relevance of the research, the dissertation lays a strong foundation for a future monograph. Expanding the work to include comparative Central Asian case studies, detailed analysis of emerging distribution technologies, and forecasting chapters on the future trajectories of documentary cinema would significantly enhance its contribution to international scholarship.

Banu Kuandykovna Ramazanova's dissertation, *"Transformation of Documentary Film Production in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities in Emerging Practices and Distribution Models"*, meets the rigorous standards required for the award of the Doctor (PhD) degree in the specialty 8D02184 – *Directing (Film and TV)*. The research is characterized by its analytical depth, methodological rigor, and practical significance. I confidently recommend the dissertation for public defense and support the conferral of the PhD degree upon Ms. Ramazanova.

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