

## REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by Banu Kuandykovna Ramazanova

*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

It is with great pleasure that I submit this formal evaluation of the doctoral dissertation authored by Ms. Banu Ramazanova. Her thesis, entitled *Transformation of Documentary Film Production in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities in Emerging Practices and Distribution Models*, constitutes a profound and methodologically robust inquiry into the contemporary evolution of the documentary genre under the impact of technological innovation and shifting institutional frameworks.

Ms. Ramazanova's initial academic engagement with our institution began during her internship at Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film State University in October–November 2022. At that stage, her research bore the working title *Documentary Films in the Context of Festivals, Film Markets, Film Funds and Digital Technologies: New Trends, Development Directions and Forecasting Pent-Up Consumer Demand*. Although intellectually promising, this preliminary focus did not yet fully engage with the structural transformations and pressing theoretical challenges currently facing the field of documentary cinema. Over time, however, her work has evolved substantially. The current dissertation articulates clearly defined problems within the contemporary documentary landscape and offers a rigorous exploration of the pathways for its transformation. This progression evidences a notable enhancement in academic focus, analytical depth, and responsiveness to real-world dynamics within the discipline.

The dissertation illustrates Ms. Ramazanova's capacity to traverse a wide range of interdisciplinary domains, blending critical media theory with empirical data and case-based inquiry. Her engagement with complex phenomena—such as algorithmically driven curation, the political economy of streaming platforms, hybridized modes of production, and evolving audience behaviors—is handled with intellectual precision and critical insight. Of particular merit is her deft navigation of regional production landscapes, which are often underrepresented in global discourse yet central to understanding the differentiated impact of digital transformation.



Ms. Ramazanova's scholarly rigor is further exemplified by her ability to communicate complex theoretical and empirical findings with clarity and depth. Her engagement with contemporary debates and her commitment to academic excellence position her as a thoughtful and competent researcher within the field of documentary cinema studies.

The structure of the dissertation is exemplary in its clarity and coherence, reflecting careful planning and methodological transparency. Of particular significance is Chapter I, entitled *Reframing Reality — Historical Foundations and Digital Disruptions in Nonfiction Cinema*. This chapter comprises several critically engaging sub-sections, including an exploration of the decline and transformation of traditional documentary cinema, and the role of technological innovations—such as AI, VR, and AR—in reshaping documentary storytelling. It also examines genre hybridity and ethical complexities within contemporary discourse. This section stands out for its sophisticated analysis of how emerging technologies not only alter production practices but also unlock new avenues for creative narrative expression. The relevance of these innovations is underscored by curatorial selections at major international festivals, where works incorporating AI, VR, and AR have increasingly become central to contemporary documentary programming. Such global practices affirm that the future of nonfiction storytelling is being actively reshaped through these tools, reinforcing the timeliness and pertinence of Ms. Ramazanova's research. As such, it forms one of the most compelling and forward-looking parts of the dissertation, effectively bridging historical inquiry with the dynamics of innovation and artistic reinvention. Notably,

Chapter III, entitled *The Landscape of Documentary Cinema in Kazakhstan: Historical Trajectories, Structural Developments, Contemporary Narratives, and Emerging Challenges*, emerges as a pivotal section within the study. This chapter not only delves deeply into the specificities of Kazakhstan's documentary film evolution, but also articulates issues that resonate far beyond national borders. The challenges identified therein are emblematic of broader systemic concerns affecting the entire Central Asian and Caucasus regions, thus underscoring the wider relevance and scholarly utility of Ms. Ramazanova's research. The argumentation is underpinned by an extensive and critically selected bibliography, and the work is attentive to both global developments and local particularities. It not only expands the theoretical corpus of documentary film studies but also provides practical insights for producers, curators, and policy-makers operating within rapidly shifting media ecosystems.

In conclusion, Ms. Banu Ramazanova's dissertation is a substantial and original contribution to the field of documentary cinema studies and media scholarship at large. Particularly commendable is the dissertation's orientation toward not only theoretical advancement but also the formulation of practical



pathways for transforming documentary film production. Her research highlights the need for sustained collaboration between creative practitioners and institutional infrastructures—especially in regions like Central Asia, where state-supported funding mechanisms continue to serve as primary drivers of film development. The thesis implicitly invites further dialogue between filmmakers, cultural policy-makers, and government agencies, advocating for more agile, innovation-driven support structures that can respond to the rapidly evolving dynamics of the digital age. It demonstrates a high degree of academic maturity, analytical depth, and scholarly independence. I unequivocally recommend the thesis for public defense and endorse its recognition as meeting, and indeed exceeding, the standards expected of doctoral-level research.

The dissertation entitled *Transformation of Documentary Film Production in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities in Emerging Practices and Distribution Models* is, therefore, fully compliant with established academic standards and is hereby recommended for public defense and approval.

**Associate Professor, Doctor of Arts Maia Levanidze**

Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film State University

Tbilisi, Georgia



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Maia Levanidze', written over the official stamp.