

REVIEW

**to the doctoral dissertation by Ramazanova Banu Kuandykovna
on the topic “Transformation of documentary film production in the digital
age: challenges and opportunities in emerging practices and distribution models”
submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in the education program «8D02184 - Directing film and TV»**

Banu Ramazanova's dissertation presents a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous investigation into the transformation of documentary filmmaking under the pressures and possibilities of the digital age. Beginning with an erudite historical survey, the work traces the lineage of nonfiction cinema from the Lumière brothers actuality vignettes—whose unembellished glimpses of quotidian life demonstrated film's power as a record of reality—to Dziga Vertov's avant-garde montage experiments, which posited the camera and editor as active agents in the construction of cinematic truth. By situating these early innovations alongside television's subsequent embrace of the expository mode and the emergence of observational paradigms such as Direct Cinema and *cinéma vérité*, the dissertation establishes a clear through-line into today's technological interventions: the incorporation of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality as both narrative tools and stylistic provocations in contemporary documentary practice.

Building on this solid foundation, Chapter II offers a comparative analysis of documentary ecosystems in Europe and Asia, revealing how institutional and cultural contexts yield divergent production and distribution models. In Europe, long-standing public-service broadcasting mandates, robust co-production networks, and prestigious festival circuits collectively sustain a tradition of auteur-driven nonfiction that privileges artistic experimentation and socio-political engagement. By contrast, Asian documentary cultures negotiate a more heterogeneous terrain: state-commissioned projects—often aligned with official commemorations or development agendas—sit alongside vibrant independent movements empowered by accessible digital technologies and online distribution platforms. This juxtaposition not only highlights the adaptability of documentary as a form but also underscores how regulatory frameworks, funding imperatives, and audience expectations shape the contours of nonfiction storytelling in distinct regional milieus.

The dissertation's most original contribution emerges in Chapter III, which delves deeply into the post-Soviet evolution of Kazakhstan's documentary sector. Through meticulous archival research, Dr. Ramazanova reconstructs production patterns at the Shaken Aimanov Kazakhfilm Studio during the tumultuous 1990s, converting historical tenge budgets into inflation-adjusted US dollars to reveal the real-term scale of state investment. These quantitative insights are artfully complemented by close readings of key films—from early industrial chronicles to recent memory-oriented essays—that illuminate the shifting priorities of filmmakers and policymakers alike. In particular, the author demonstrates how the first decade of independence saw a prevalence of “calendar-driven” documentaries—projects commissioned to mark anniversaries or national milestones—

whereas the past fifteen years have witnessed a marked turn toward personal narratives and mnemonic interventions. By weaving together economic data, policy analysis, and formal critique, this chapter charts a trajectory of both constraint and creative resilience that has defined Kazakhstan's documentary Renaissance.

Throughout all three chapters, the dissertation excels in integrating theoretical reflection with empirical evidence. Ramazanova's engagement with foundational scholars—Barnouw, Nichols, Aufderheide, Elsaesser, Hirsch, and Boym—is commendable, and her commitment to interweaving global and local perspectives imbues the work with a rare depth and breadth. At the same time, the study remains keenly attentive to methodological transparency, acknowledging the limitations of archival gaps and offering clear rationales for interpretive choices.

To refine and elevate this already distinguished dissertation, I offer two interrelated recommendations:

1. Deepen the Cross-Regional Synthesis: While Chapter II provides rich descriptive accounts of European and Asian documentary systems, a dedicated synthesis section that explicitly compares these regions across shared dimensions—such as funding structures, regulatory environments, audience engagement strategies, and the influence of streaming platforms—would sharpen the work's analytical focus. By distilling common trends and points of divergence, this synthesis would reinforce the dissertation's contribution to our understanding of documentary's global circulation in the digital era, highlighting how ostensibly disparate contexts nonetheless grapple with similar questions of sustainability, innovation, and cultural representation.

2. Refine Stylistic Coherence and Structural Integrity: Though the dissertation's substance is impressively polished, a systematic review of formatting conventions, terminology, and language precision will ensure that form matches content. Standardizing headings and subheadings, aligning citation and footnote formats, and eliminating residual inconsistencies in phrasing will enhance readability and underscore the scholarly rigor of the argument. In particular, ensuring that key terms—such as “creative treatment of actuality,” “docutainment,” and “postmemory”—are defined once and employed consistently will aid readers in following complex theoretical strands across chapters.

The dissertation entitled *Transformation of Documentary Film Production in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities in Emerging Practices and Distribution Models* embodies scholarly rigor, methodological transparency, and original contribution to the field of documentary studies. It fully meets the criteria for doctoral-level research in both theoretical depth and empirical substantiation. I therefore recommend it without reservation for public defense and approval.

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