**Abstract**

**to the text of doctoral dissertation by Erzhan Fazylovich Dzhumabekov**

**on the topic “Film Discourse in the Works of Abdulla Karsakbaev: Visual Language and Representation of Artistic Images”,**

**submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the specialty**

**6D041600 – Art Studies**

**Relevance of the Research Topic**

The specific nature of cinema as an art form necessitates a profound analysis of its foundational principles, which is essential for establishing a solid knowledge base among future professionals in the field. Like other forms of art, cinema broadens cognitive horizons and calls for comprehensive theoretical comprehension.

At the 4th meeting of the National Kurultai, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, addressed pressing issues within the national film industry. Cinema is a powerful tool for shaping national ideology. The transformation of epochs and historical periods requires a renewed perspective on artistic processes, including the history and theory of cinema. Contemporary film scholars are thus faced with the challenge of rethinking the history of Kazakh cinema, evaluating it from a scientific perspective, and developing new research methodologies.

The development and formation of Kazakh cinema historically progressed through various stages. However, there is now an urgent need to revisit the past through the lens of contemporary scholarly discourse. This is largely due to the fact that, during the Soviet era, communist ideology subordinated art and historical knowledge to a unified Soviet narrative.

Over the past thirty years, structural and systemic changes have had a profound impact on Kazakh society. Kazakhstan’s declaration of independence and its choice of a new path for economic and social development have served as a powerful impetus for political, cultural, and spiritual renewal. In this context, the Soviet period of Kazakh cinema demands reinterpretation through the framework of postcolonial comparative-analytical approaches.

This dissertation focuses on the work of prominent Kazakh film director Abdulla Karsakbaev, aiming to analyze the visual language and representation of imagery in his films, as well as to determine their artistic and aesthetic significance within the global and national cinematic processes. Particular attention is given to the study of the genre-specific features of the director’s visual language in children's and historical films. The research seeks to uncover the relevance of Karsakbaev’s creative output not only within the context of Kazakh cinema but also within the broader framework of world cinema, emphasizing the aesthetic, cultural, and ideological value of his cinematic legacy.

The dissertation titled “Film Discourse in the Works of Abdulla Karsakbaev: Visual Language and Representation of Artistic Images” addresses the following key aspects of scholarly relevance:

- By defining the concept of visual language within film theory, the study allows for its understanding not merely as a technical tool but as a system of artistic and aesthetic communication of a film’s central idea and theme. This highlights the role of visual language as a bridge between the director and the viewer.

- The analysis of the artistic level of screen images — their content and form — helps to determine the ideological and aesthetic value of a film. Karsakbaev’s works demonstrate how artistic images are interwoven with national worldviews, thereby granting them deeper meaning and serving as a model for contemporary Kazakh filmmakers.

- The classification of artistic images in the director’s films and the identification of their typological characteristics elevate the study to a new level of analysis, shedding light on the individual authorial style and unique aesthetics of his expressive means.

- A psychological typology of characters provides insight into their inner world, personal motivations, and logic of actions, while also revealing the director’s artistic methods. This analysis helps determine the extent to which these characters reflect Kazakh culture and historical consciousness.

- A genre-based analysis of Karsakbaev’s children's and historical films reveals common artistic traits and interrelations that define his cinematic oeuvre.

- Identifying the characteristics of the artistic-aesthetic discourse in the director’s films enables an understanding of the formation of a national cinematic language, the transformation of its artistic direction and aesthetic paradigms, and offers a reassessment of Karsakbaev’s place in the history of Kazakh cinema.

Despite the continued admiration for Karsakbaev’s films produced between 1963 and 1983, they have yet to undergo a comprehensive analysis from the standpoint of contemporary political and cultural independence. In this regard, the present dissertation makes a significant contribution to understanding the trajectory of Kazakh cinema’s development and articulating new scholarly approaches to its study.

**Object of the Research**

Interpretation of visual language and artistic imagery in cinema.

**Subject of the Research**

The artistic structure of film discourse, visual language, and representation of artistic images in the films of director Abdulla Karsakbaev.

**Aim of the Research**

To conduct a systematic analysis of the features of the author’s visual language and the process of representing artistic images in the films of Abdulla Karsakbaev.

**Research Objectives**

- To define the significance of visual language within the context of film theory by systematizing its key concepts;

- To analyze visual techniques through the interpretative potential of artistic images in cinema;

- To systematize the character images in Karsakbaev’s films, identifying their typological features and artistic significance;

- To study the representational structure of characters within a psychoanalytic context, clarifying their internal psychology and mechanisms of viewer impact;

- To identify genre-specific features of the director’s children’s and historical films, revealing formal and artistic innovations in his work;

- To examine the artistic and aesthetic level of Karsakbaev’s films in the context of both global and Kazakh cinematic processes through the lens of postcolonial discourse, and to determine the role of his directorial individuality in the development of the national film school.

**Degree of Study of the Research Topic**

Since the inception of cinema as an art form, its visual language, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches have remained subjects of enduring scholarly interest and continuous evolution – from the early film theorists to contemporary researchers. This dissertation builds upon a wide array of foundational and contemporary studies in film theory, visual culture, philosophy, art history, and psychology. Particular emphasis is placed on the theoretical contributions that have shaped the understanding of visual language and the artistic image in cinema.

The international theoretical foundation includes seminal works such as Marcel Martin’s *The Language of Cinema*, Béla Balázs’s *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Guido Aristarco’s *History of Film Theories*, Siegfried Kracauer’s *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Alexandre Astruc’s *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo*, and André Bazin’s *What is Cinema?.* The corpus is further enriched by contemporary perspectives such as Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener’s *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, Emanuel Levy’s *Citizen Sarris: American Film Critic*, Steve Neale’s *Art Cinema as Institution*, Stephen Noll’s *Cultural Revolutions*, and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s *Film Art: An Introduction*.

Among Soviet and Russian theorists, the works of Sergei Eisenstein, such as – *Selected Works*, *Montage*, *Non-Indifferent Nature* – provide a critical foundation for understanding cinematic language as a system of dynamic visual expression. Also notable are Semyon Freilikh’s *Film Theory: From Eisenstein to Tarkovsky*, Sergey Filippov’s *Film Language and History*, and Andrei Tarkovsky’s influential treatise *Sculpting in Time*.

In addition to film-specific literature, substantial insights into the visual and symbolic dimensions of cinema derive from the broader fields of psychoanalysis and semiotics. Sigmund Freud’s *The Ego and the Id*, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, and *The Family Romance of the Neurotic*, alongside Carl Jung’s *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* and *The Structure of the Psyche*, are instrumental in understanding the archetypal and subconscious layers of cinematic imagery. These are complemented by Christian Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* and *Language and Cinema*, Barbara Creed’s *Film and Psychoanalysis*, and Jean Mitry’s *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*.

Particular attention is given to the works of Yuri Lotman, especially *Semiotics of Cinema* and *Dialogue with the Screen* (co-authored with Yury Tsivian), which offer a systematic framework for analyzing the semiotic structures of film – including point of view, gaze, framing, spatial construction, mise-en-scène, and montage – all of which are closely related to human perception and cognitive reception.

Throughout cinematic history, visual imagery has been shaped by distinct cultural and aesthetic paradigms. Interpreting the evolution and significance of these visual forms remains a central task of film scholarship. This research contributes to this ongoing discourse by focusing on the visual language, stylistic devices, and artistic imagery in the films of Abdolla Karsakbayev.

Within Kazakh film studies, several key figures have laid the groundwork for the analysis of national cinema. Kabysh Siranov’s works – *Cinema. Years. Reflections*, *Conversations about Cinema*, and *The Art of Soviet Kazakhstan’s Cinema* and Kamal Smailov’s *This is How a Film Is Born* and *A History of Kazakh Cinema* offer foundational insights into genre classification and stylistic tendencies. Rosa Abdulakhatova’s *The People’s Hero on Screen*, Raushan Ospanova’s *Kazakh Cinematic Art of the 1960s*, and the collective volume by K. Aynagulova and K. Alimbayeva, *Trends in the Development of Kazakh Cinema*, analyze representations of national identity and heroism in Kazakh cinema.

The works of Baurzhan Nogerbek – including *Cinema of Kazakhstan*, *On the Screen of Kazakhfilm*, *Screen-Folklore Traditions in Kazakh Feature Films*, and *Film Scholar Baurzhan Nogerbek* – are especially important for their theoretical contextualization of film production under the conditions of the Soviet totalitarian system. Gulnara Abikeyeva’s *Nation-Building in Kazakhstan and Other Central Asian Countries and Its Reflection in Cinema* provides a genre-oriented analysis of national cinema and includes discussion of Karsakbayev’s films. Nazira Mukusheva, in *Kazakh Cinema: Yesterday and Today*, offers a comprehensive examination of the director’s key works. Gulnara Mursalimova, in her monograph *Stages in the Development of Kazakh Feature Children’s Cinema (1950-2010)*, identifies Abdolla Karsakbayev as the founding figure of Kazakh children's feature film.

International academic attention to Karsakbayev’s oeuvre is also growing. Brian Kilgour, PhD researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, explores the symbolic imagery and national representation in *Shaken Aimanov and Abdolla Karsakbayev’s Foundations of Kazakh National Cinema*. Professor Peter Rollberg of Georgetown University includes analytical references to Karsakbayev’s filmography in the *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Cinema*.

Building upon this diverse scholarly tradition, the present dissertation *Film Discourse in the Works of Abdolla Karsakbayev: Visual Language and Representation of Artistic Imagery* – aims to provide a systematic analysis of the director’s creative legacy. Through the study of his visual language, stylistic approach, and cinematic imagery, the dissertation seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on Kazakh national cinema and to the advancement of contemporary film theory.

**Methodological Framework of the Research**

The methodological framework of this dissertation, which explores the visual language and artistic imagery in global and Kazakh cinema, is grounded in the theoretical concepts advanced by Jean Mitry (*Semiotics and the Analysis of Film*), Christian Metz (*The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*), and leading Kazakh film scholars, particularly Bauyrzhan Nogerbek – notably his works *On the Screen of Kazakhfilm* and *Kazakh Feature Film: Screen-Folklore Traditions and the Image of the Hero*, co-authored with Baubek Nogerbek.

**Scientific Novelty of the Research**

This dissertation presents the first comprehensive academic examination of director Abdolla Karsakbayev’s artistic legacy through the lens of visual language within Kazakh film studies. The novelty of the research lies in the following key contributions:

* + The analysis of the evolution and interplay of visual language and artistic imagery in Karsakbayev’s films, systematizing the aesthetic and technological principles of his cinematic method;
	+ The identification and classification of interpretative strategies for analyzing cinematic imagery, and the theoretical grounding of those strategies;
	+ The typological categorization of characters in Karsakbayev’s films based on psychological and archetypal models, particularly in relation to the construction of identity, collective memory, and national consciousness;
	+ The application of psychoanalytic approaches in the interpretation of character psychology, with an emphasis on symbolic meaning and the mechanisms of audience engagement;
	+ The analysis of genre forms within Karsakbayev’s work – particularly children’s films and historical-revolutionary narratives – and their placement within the broader genre system of Kazakh cinema;
	+ The positioning of Karsakbayev’s cinema as an independent object of scholarly investigation, exploring his visual language and representational system through the lens of film theory.

**Key Provisions Subject to Defense**

* + Cinema established itself as an autonomous art form in the early 20th century, with theoretical discourse developing around cinematic language, visual expressiveness, and the structure of the artistic image. This study examines five key periods in the evolution of cinematic language: the realism of the Lumière brothers (1895-1900); the era of montage (1900-1920); the introduction of sound and color (1930-1940); the advent of widescreen formats (1950-1960); and the pursuit of acoustic and visual realism (1980-1990).
	+ Cinematic imagery is subject to multi-level interpretation: semantic, symbolic, and aesthetic. This research systematizes major interpretive approaches – psychoanalytic, mythological, semiotic, sociocultural, and aesthetic – and emphasizes the significance of Carl Jung’s archetypal theory. This theory serves as a key to analyzing traditional character archetypes (the child, the elder, the crone, and the maiden) in Kazakh dramatic literature and their cinematic adaptation, particularly in the works of playwright Shakhimarden Kusainov.
	+ The concept of the film character is treated as a dynamic category that reflects historical and cultural transformations. The dissertation analyzes the archetypal structure of characters in Karsakbayev’s dramaturgy, identifying psychological profiles, narrative functions, and ideological meanings, and offers a comparative classification of these figures.
	+ The psychoanalytic model, drawing on the theories of Freud, Jung, and Lacan, is applied to the study of heroic figures in cinema. Analytical categories include unconscious drives, internal conflict, dream logic, trauma, neurosis, frustration, and the mirror stage – all of which are employed to interpret the visual expressiveness of Karsakbayev’s characters and their broader significance in Kazakh cinema.
	+ The representation of children in Karsakbayev’s films reflects deep cultural codes embedded in traditional Kazakh society. The study highlights a contemporary crisis in Kazakh cinema, marked by the erosion of meaningful portrayals of childhood and the pedagogical function of film. In contrast, Karsakbayev’s historical films transcend genre limitations and offer a cinematic rethinking of national history and identity. His work is proposed as a model for the integration of national content with innovative genre strategies in contemporary Kazakh cinema.
	+ Karsakbayev’s directorial style is distinguished by a synthesis of auteur cinema, Eastern philosophical motifs, and Italian neorealism, with a focus on internal psychological conflict. His films demonstrate both visual authenticity and philosophical depth. The study includes a comparative analysis between Karsakbayev and François Truffaut, emphasizing thematic parallels such as moral discourse, the child’s worldview, emotional authenticity, and symbolic imagery, all within the context of national consciousness.

**Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research**

This dissertation contributes to the development of film studies as a field by offering a comprehensive analytical model for interpreting visual language and artistic imagery. The results of the research may serve as a theoretical and methodological foundation in higher education programs, particularly in courses on film history, theory, directing, art criticism, and cultural studies. The practical significance also lies in the potential for filmmakers to apply these findings in the creation of national cinema that combines traditional values with contemporary visual storytelling techniques.

**Approbation and Publication**

The dissertation was reviewed and approved at an extended meeting of the Department of Film History and Theory at the Temirbek Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts and was recommended for defense. The main results have been published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in the Scopus database, as well as in academic publications recognized by the Science and Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three main chapters, six subsections (each concluding with a summary), a general conclusion, a bibliography, and an appendix containing a filmography.