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ARTICLE

FROM FESTIVAL AND COMMERCIAL TO PEOPLE'S CINEMA: THE TRANSFORMATION OF KAZAKHSTANI CINEMA AS A REFLECTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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KEYWORDS

Kazakhstani cinema, national identity, people's cinema, cultural code, arthouse cinema, commercial cinema, imagined community, nation.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this work, the author utilized ChatGPT (version 5.0) for language translation of the manuscript into English and the abstract into Kazakh, as well as for identifying secondary theoretical literature regarding arthouse and commercial cinema. The core idea, theoretical framework, article structure, film analysis, and conclusions are based on author's own research and original thinking. All outputs were reviewed, edited, and verified by the author, who takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

ABSTRACT. This article examines the transformation of Kazakhstani cinema from the festival films of the first decades of independence, through the rapid development of commercial production after 2015, to the emergence in the post-pandemic period of a new phenomenon defined as "people's cinema." The research problem lies in the existing division of the country's film industry into arthouse cinema, oriented toward international festivals, and commercial films designed for mass domestic distribution. The purpose of the study is to identify the principal characteristics of people's cinema and explain the significance of this phenomenon for the formation of contemporary national identity. The study employs historical-cultural, comparative, and film studies methods, making it possible to trace changes in the systems of film production and distribution and to analyze the themes, dramaturgy, and cultural codes of recent films. The empirical basis of the study includes *Qash (Run, 2022)* directed by Aisultan Seitov, *Dos-Muqasan* (2021) and *Bolmagan Balalyq Shaq (The Lost Childhood, 2025)* directed by Aidyn Sakhaman, as well as other works of contemporary Kazakhstan cinema. The analysis shows that people's cinema combines the artistic techniques of auteur cinema with an orientation towards a broad audience. It draws upon collective historical memory, the national language, traditions and rituals, family relationships, music, religion, and heroic figures that evoke a shared emotional response. The scholarly novelty of the study lies in conceptualizing the notion of "people's cinema" in the context of contemporary Kazakhstan. The article concludes that such cinema not only reflects an already existing national identity but also actively participates in its formation, creating a space of collective recognition and strengthening Kazakhstan's "imagined community." The proposed approach may be used in further studies of national cinema, cultural policy, and contemporary nation-building processes.

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МАҚАЛА

ФЕСТИВАЛЬДІК ЖӘНЕ КОММЕРЦИЯЛЫҚ КИНОДАН ХАЛЫҚ КИНОСЫНА ДЕЙІН: ҰЛТТЫҚ БІРЕГЕЙЛІКТІҢ КӨРІНІСІ РЕТІНДЕГІ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ КИНЕМАТОГРАФТЫҢ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯСЫ

Автор қолжазбаның соңғы нұсқасын оқып, мақұлдады және мүдделер қақтығысы жоқ деп мәлімдейді.

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Дәйексөз үшін

Абикеева, Гульнара. «Фестивальдік және коммерциялық кинодан халық киносына дейін: ұлттық бірегейліктің көрінісі ретіндегі қазақстандық кинематографтың трансформациясы». *Saryn*, т. 14, № 3, 2026, 93–106 б., DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59850/SARYN.3.14.2026.381>. (Ағылшынша)

Тірек сөздер

Қазақстандық кинематограф, ұлттық бірегейлік, халық киносы, мәдени код, артхаус киносы, коммерциялық кино, қиялдағы қауымдастық, ұлт.

Жасанды интеллект құралдарын пайдалану туралы мәлімдеме

Осы жұмысты дайындау барысында автор ChatGPT (5.0 нұсқасын) мақаланың мәтінін ағылшын тіліне және аннотациясын қазақ тіліне аудару, сондай-ақ артхаус және коммерциялық кинематографияға қатысты қосымша теориялық әдебиеттерді іздеу мақсатында пайдаланды. Алынған барлық материалдар автор тарапынан тексеріліп, редакцияланды. Жарияланымның мазмұнына толық жауапкершілікті автор өз мойнына алады.

Аңдатпа. Мақалада қазақстандық кинематографтың тәуелсіздіктің алғашқы онжылдықтарындағы фестивальдік кинодан 2015 жылдан кейінгі коммерциялық өндірістің қарқынды дамуы арқылы постпандемиялық кезеңде «халық киносы» деп айқындалатын жаңа құбылыстың пайда болуына дейінгі трансформациясы қарастырылады. Зерттеу мәселесі отандық кинематографтың негізінен халықаралық фестивальдерге бағытталған артхаус киносына және ішкі нарықтағы бұқаралық прокатқа арналған коммерциялық фильмдерге бөлінуімен байланысты. Зерттеудің мақсаты – халық киносының негізгі сипаттарын айқындап, бұл құбылыстың қазіргі ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудағы маңызын ашу. Жұмыста кино өндірісі мен прокат жүйесіндегі өзгерістерді анықтауға, сондай-ақ соңғы жылдардағы фильмдердің тақырыптарын, драматургиясын және мәдени кодтарын талдауға мүмкіндік беретін тарихи-мәдени, салыстырмалы және кинотану әдістері қолданылады. Зерттеу материалы ретінде режиссер Айсұлтан Сейітовтің «Қаш» (2022), «Дос-Мұқасан» (2022), режиссер Айдын Сахаманның «Болмаған балалық шақ» (2025) және қазіргі қазақстандық киноның басқа да туындылары алынды. Нәтижесінде халық киносы авторлық кинематографияның көркемдік тәсілдерін кең аудиторияға бағдарланумен ұштастыратыны анықталды. Ол ұжымдық тарихи жадқа, ұлттық тілге, дәстүрлер мен рәсімдерге, отбасылық қарым-қатынастарға, музыкаға, дінге және көрермендерде ортақ эмоционалдық әсер тудыратын кейіпкерлер бейнесіне жүгінеді. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы «халық киносы» ұғымын қазіргі Қазақстан жағдайында тұжырымдамалық тұрғыдан негіздеуде жатыр. Қорытындылай келе, мұндай кино қалыптасқан ұлттық бірегейлікті бейнелеп қана қоймай, ұжымдық тану кеңістігін құру және қазақстандық «қиялдағы қауымдастықты» нығайту арқылы оның орнығуына белсенді ықпал ететіні анықталды. Ұсынылған тәсіл ұлттық кинематографты, мәдени саясатты және қазіргі ұлт қалыптастыру үдерістерін одан әрі зерттеуде қолданылуы мүмкін.

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СТАТЬЯ

ОТ ФЕСТИВАЛЬНОГО И КОММЕРЧЕСКОГО – К НАРОДНОМУ КИНО: ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ КАЗАХСТАНСКОГО КИНЕМАТОГРАФА КАК ПРОЯВЛЕНИЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

*Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи и заявляет об отсутствии
конфликта интересов.*

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Ключевые слова

Казахстанский кинематограф, национальная идентичность, народное кино, культурный код, артхаусное кино, коммерческое кино, воображаемое сообщество, нация.

Заявление об использовании инструментов искусственного интеллекта

При подготовке данной работы автор использовал ChatGPT (версия 5.0) для перевода текста статьи на английский язык и аннотации – на казахский, а также для поиска дополнительной теоретической литературы, посвященной артхаусному и коммерческому кинематографу. Основная идея, теоретическая база, структура статьи, анализ фильмов и выводы опираются на собственные исследования и оригинальные идеи автора. Все полученные материалы были проверены и отредактированы автором, который несет полную ответственность за содержание публикации.

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается трансформация казахстанского кинематографа от фестивального кино первых десятилетий независимости через стремительное развитие коммерческого производства после 2015 года к появлению в постпандемийный период нового феномена, который предлагается определить как «народное кино». Постановка проблемы связана с существующим разделением отечественного кинематографа на артхаусное кино, ориентированное преимущественно на международные фестивали, и коммерческие фильмы, рассчитанные на массовый внутренний прокат. Цель исследования – определить основные характеристики народного кино и раскрыть значение этого явления для формирования современной национальной идентичности. В работе применяются историко-культурный, сравнительный и киноведческий методы, позволяющие проследить изменения в системе кинопроизводства и проката, а также проанализировать тематику, драматургию и культурные коды фильмов последних лет. Материалом исследования стали картины «Қаш» (2022) режиссера Айсултана Сеитова, «Дос-Мұқасан» (2022), «Болмаған балалық шақ» (2025) режиссера Айдына Сахамана и другие произведения современного казахстанского кино. В результате выявлено, что народное кино соединяет художественные приемы авторского кинематографа с ориентацией на широкую аудиторию. Оно обращается к коллективной исторической памяти, национальному языку, традициям и ритуалам, семейным отношениям, музыке, религии и образам героев, вызывающим общее эмоциональное переживание. Научная новизна исследования заключается в концептуализации понятия «народное кино» применительно к современному Казахстану. Делается вывод, что такое кино не только отражает уже существующую национальную идентичность, но и активно участвует в ее формировании, создавая пространство коллективного узнавания и укрепляя казахстанское «воображаемое сообщество». Предложенный подход может быть использован при дальнейшем изучении национального кинематографа, культурной политики и современных процессов нациостроительства.

Introduction

The transformation of Kazakhstani cinema from festival and commercial film towards people's cinema has a longer history than might appear at first glance. In the mid-1980s, the preconditions for arthouse cinema emerged in Kazakh film. This development resulted from a consistent transformation of the intellectual and artistic environment at the *Qazaqfilm* studio.

Prominent film industry figures, including *Goskino* Chairman Olzhas Suleimenov and *Qazaqfilm* Editor-in-Chief Murat Auezov alongside other intellectuals, sought to create an environment distinct from the Soviet ideological model of filmmaking. The "godfather" of the *Kazakh New Wave*, Murat Auezov said, "When a general movement begins, when a culture sets about addressing its tasks, an atmosphere emerges that elevates talented people, independently of anyone's organized efforts" (qtd. in Abikeyeva 33).

At the time, this objective was not formulated as the creation of arthouse cinema, yet something far more substantial was achieved: young, progressive directors and screenwriters were invited to Alma-Ata for co-productions. Irakli Kvirikadze made *Vozvrashchenie Ol'mesa* (*The Return of Olmes*) together with Malik Yakshimbetov; Aleksei German Sr. wrote the screenplay for *Gibel' Otrara* (*The Fall of Otrar*) for Ardak Amirkulov; the writer Anatoly Kim worked in close collaboration with Yermek Shinarbayev; and Sergei Bodrov Sr. recruited an entire "Kazakh Directing Workshop" at VGIK.

Over the course of just five years (1982–1987), the aesthetic paradigm of Kazakh cinema was fundamentally transformed, expanding its boundaries and laying the foundations for a new national cinema.

The cinema of independent Kazakhstan, specifically the *Kazakh New Wave*, became known throughout the world through film festivals. This was arthouse cinema, which dominated the 1990s and remained predominant until 2005, when the country's cinema network was restored.

It is important to understand that the *Kazakh New Wave* did not create Kazakhstan's arthouse cinema from nothing; rather, it was the most striking outcome of the artistic and institutional restructuring that began at *Qazaqfilm* around 1982–1985. The *Wave* took shape through the simultaneous emergence of a generation of young directors trained in Sergei Solovyov's workshop. Their films emerged concurrently with the collapse of the USSR, which opened the doors to international film festivals. As a result, the *Kazakh New Wave* films circulated at festivals for an entire decade while domestic distribution within Kazakhstan lay in ruins.

The situation began to shift as the cinema network recovered. Akan Satayev's *Reketir* (*Racketeer*, 2007) was the first commercial film, followed by Farhat Sharipov's *Skaz o rozovom zaitse* (*Tale of a Pink Hare*, 2010) and Askar Uzabayev's *Gashyq Jurek* (*Cocktail for a Star*, 2010). Yet the truly rapid rise of commercial cinema in Kazakhstan began in 2015 with the release of *Kelinka Sabina* (*Daughter-in-law Sabina*) and *Qazaqsha biznes* (*Business in Kazakh*). Over a five-year period (2015–2020), the box-office share of domestic cinema in Kazakhstan surged remarkably from 3 per cent to half of the market. This growth was primarily driven by commercial-sector initiatives led by screenwriters, directors, producers, and alumni of the popular television

comedy show KVN¹. Most of the content produced consisted of comedies. By the early 2020s, Kazakhstan's film industry had become clearly divided between arthouse (festival) cinema and commercial sector for the domestic market.

In the post-pandemic period, films began to appear between these two poles that could not be fully assigned to either established model. They employ the artistic language of auteur cinema or address complex historical and social subjects, yet they are made for wide national distribution. These films turn to collective memory, the Kazakh language, music, family relationships, traditions, and rituals — to a cultural experience that audiences can recognize and experience as shared. To describe this phenomenon, the article proposes the concept of "people's cinema."

In this context, "people's" is neither a judgement of a film's quality, nor a genre designation, nor a synonym for commercial success or patriotic subject matter. People's cinema refers to films that combine an auteur or socially significant statement with an orientation towards a broad domestic audience and create a space of collective cultural and emotional recognition.

The article asks the following research question: what changes in subject matter, artistic language, and forms of communication with the audience allow us to speak of the emergence of people's cinema, and how does it differ from festival and commercial cinema? The hypothesis is that people's cinema arises at the intersection of two previously separate models: it inherits from auteur cinema the ambition to make an artistic and social statement, and from commercial one an orientation towards wide distribution. Its distinguishing feature lies in transforming national history, language, music, family experience, and cultural rituals into a shared emotional event.

To test this hypothesis, the article examines Aisultan Seitov's *Qash* (*Run*, 2022), and Aidyn Sakhaman's *Dos-Muqasan* (2022) and *Bolmagan Balalyq Shaq* (*The Lost Childhood*, 2025). These films make it possible to explore three mechanisms of collective recognition: engagement with historical trauma, the uniting of generations through music and language, and the reproduction of traditional models of family responsibility.

Theoretical Approaches to Auteur, National, and People's Cinema

The concept of auteur cinema emerged in André Bazin's writings during the rise of the *French New Wave* (97). For Bazin, the director is not merely the technical executor of a screenplay, but the film's central creative figure, whose artistic vision determines the work's form and meaning. Following the *French New Wave*, the concept of arthouse cinema spread throughout the world. In Soviet cinema, it emerged during the Thaw. Marlen Khutsiyev's films *Mne dvadtsat' let* (*I Am Twenty*, 1965) and *Iyul'skii dozhd'* (*July Rain*, 1967) resonated with the explorations of the *French New Wave*. Neya Zorkaya wrote about the importance of arthouse cinema's emergence in Soviet filmmaking, noting that its form served as a means of resisting Soviet ideology (Zorkaya).

Whereas André Bazin viewed directorial authorship as the consistent expression

of an individual worldview manifested through the choice of subjects and artistic form (96), David Bordwell defines art cinema as a distinctive mode of film

1 KVN (*Club of the Funny and Inventive*) is a popular televised competition where teams representing various universities, institutions, and cities compete in humorous sketches, improvisations, and witty responses to predetermined themes.

narration characterized by loosened causal links, psychological ambiguity, an open ending, and the emphatic presence of an authorial position (58).

Steve Neale supplements the aesthetic understanding of arthouse cinema with an institutional one: such cinema exists within a particular system of production, distribution, and recognition that includes international festivals, specialized criticism, and limited theatrical release (35). This approach is especially important for Kazakhstan, where, after the collapse of the Soviet film-distribution system, festivals became auteur cinema's principal channel for reaching audiences.

Another body of scholarship concerns the concept of national cinema. Andrew Higson proposes defining it not only by the place of production, but also at the level of consumption —by the ways in which a national audience receives films and uses them to interpret its own experience (36). Stephen Crofts, in turn, demonstrates the plurality of national-cinema models, which depend on their industrial, cultural, and political relationships with Hollywood, the state, and the international market (50).

Benedict Anderson's concept, developed in *Imagined Communities*, is crucial to understanding the phenomenon of people's cinema (30). According to Anderson, the nation is not an objectively existing unity but an "imagined community": its members will never know most of their fellow citizens personally, yet they feel that they belong to the same community. People's cinema becomes not merely a form of entertainment or artistic expression, but a space of collective recognition in which viewers encounter familiar patterns of behavior, historical memory, cultural codes, language, humor, and values on screen. If arthouse cinema primarily articulates an authorial vision, and commercial cinema is oriented towards market success, people's cinema functions as a mechanism for the symbolic unification of society, contributing to the formation and strengthening of contemporary Kazakhstan's "imagined community."

National identity, moreover, is not a fixed set of attributes established once and for all. Stuart Hall proposes understanding cultural identity as an ongoing process through which a society forms representation of itself (222). Cinema, therefore, does not simply reflect a ready-made national identity; it participates in producing it. In his analysis of post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Rico Isaacs shows how images of the nomad, warrior, and statesman are used to construct different versions of national identity (399). However, the prevailing focus on state-sponsored historical projects does not fully explain the situation of recent years, when private producers and directors have increasingly taken the initiative and domestic audiences have become crucial participants in the production of a film's meaning.

It is precisely at the intersection of scholarship on arthouse, national, and commercial cinema that a theoretical gap emerges. Existing concepts do not adequately describe films that retain an auteur or socially significant statement, enter wide national distribution, and produce an effect of collective cultural recognition. In this study, people's cinema is understood not as a genre or a state ideological model, but as a mode of interaction between cinema and a national audience. It is defined by a combination of three factors: artistic significance, an address to a broad audience, and the capacity to create collective recognition.

Main Section: People's Cinema as a Space of Collective Recognition

The films under consideration differ substantially in genre and style: *Qash* engages with a national historical trauma; *Dos-Muqasan* adopts the form of a musical biopic; and *Bolmagan Balalyq Shaq* combines social drama with elements of magical realism. In all three films, however, an individual story becomes a means of interpreting collective experience. It is precisely this movement from the private to the shared that allows them to be considered different manifestations of people's cinema.

Qash: Collective Trauma

One of the first examples of people's cinema was Aisultan Seitov's *Qash* (2023). The director made the film not so much for festivals as to deliver an important civic statement: an attempt to comprehend a tragic chapter in Kazakh history — the *Asharshylyq* (famine) of the 1930s. Artistically, it is an auteur work, yet its distribution strategy was oriented towards wide theatrical release. Seitov made a film intended to articulate, and thereby help process, one of the most devastating collective traumas experienced by the people. Rather than attempting to recreate the full scale of the tragedy, the director focuses on a local story dominated by an existential fear for a child's life. In essence, this is the first large-scale story about the famine to appear in contemporary cinema. In 1991, the director Damir Manabai made an important film about the era, *Surzhekei – angel smerti* (*Surzhekei: Angel of Death*, 1991) but the crisis of the film-distribution system left it largely inaccessible to a broad audience. Three decades later, the subject demanded a new interpretation. *Qash* combines the artistic language of auteur cinema with an orientation towards a broad national audience. The film brings family memories of the *Asharshylyq* into the public sphere and transforms historical trauma into a collectively experienced emotion (See Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Film still from *Qash (Run)*. Directed by Aisultan Seitov. 2022.

Dos-Muqasan: Language, Music, and Intergenerational Unity

Another clear example of people's cinema is Aidyn Sakhaman's *Dos-Muqasan* (2022). The film brought to the fore the audience's demand for works capable of generating a collective emotional response. Choosing the story of the vocal-instrumental ensemble *Dos-Muqasan* as the narrative basis makes the film particularly revealing for the study of how different generations remember the past. Yefrat Sharipov's screenplay is structured so that the older generation relives its era, while younger viewers discover specific Soviet realities that appear contradictory from today's perspective — most notably, the restrictions imposed upon, and lack of support for songs performed in Kazakh. Had a film about *Dos-Muqasan* been made by the ensemble's contemporaries, it would inevitably have taken the form of nostalgic reflection. The involvement of young filmmakers makes it possible to view the period from a distance, through the prism of a new generation's perception. It is a film about preserving the Kazakh language and national song culture in forms appropriate to that era, under the pressure of Soviet ideology (See Fig. 2).

The film foregrounds a linguistic opposition: Russian represents official institutions, whereas Kazakh functions as a marker of ethno-cultural consolidation and the ensemble members' creative self-realization. Russian becomes the language of Soviet power, while Kazakh is the language of friendship, music, and national consciousness. By adapting folk songs to a contemporary popular sound, *Dos-Muqasan* made Kazakh culture part of modern youth culture. The accusation of "nationalism" levelled against the group is therefore not an incidental detail, but an expression of the film's central conflict.

The "people's" character of *Dos-Muqasan* is determined less by the popularity of the musical group itself than by the socio-cultural context in which it is represented. The film demonstrates how music in the Kazakh language evolved from an instrument for preserving national identity into the people's shared emotional memory.



Figure 2. Film still from *Dos-Muqasan* (2021). Directed by Aidyn Sakhaman. 2021.

Bolmagan balalyq shaq: Kinship and Responsibility

Aidyn Sakhaman's next film, *Bolmagan Balalyq Shaq* (2025), based on Akberen Yelgezek's autobiographical novella, transfers an individual writer's memory into the realm of collective audience experience. In it, the director reveals one of Kazakh society's fundamental cultural codes: if a child is deprived of proper parental care — in this case, the father has died and the mother has married a man who rejects the boy — an older male relative assumes responsibility for him. Although the film depicts the imperfect living conditions in this family and a lack of parental affection, the protagonist receives essential care, grows up among his cousins, benefits from their protection, and ultimately develops into his own person (See Fig. 3).

The film's central cultural code is the extended family's responsibility for a child. It does not idealize this tradition: Akosh works hard and suffers from a lack of love, while the title itself emphasizes the irreparable loss of childhood. Nevertheless, kinship ties save him from complete isolation. In this respect, the film enters into dialogue with Askhat Kuchinchirekov's *Bauryna salu* (2024), which likewise depicts both the traumatic and the protective dimensions of a child being raised by older relatives.

In the finale, the adult Akosh reconciles two feuding families. The protagonist does not reproduce the violence he has experienced; he breaks its cycle. This scene shifts a private biography onto a shared moral plane: family grievances and broken kinship ties are familiar to many viewers, and the reconciliation is therefore perceived as a moral imperative addressed to them.



Figure 3. Film still from *Bolmagan Balalyq Shaq* (*The Lost Childhood*). Directed by Aidyn Sakhaman. 2025.

Research Findings

The analysis identifies the principal elements of people's cinema that help unite a national audience and form an "imagined community" in Benedict Anderson's sense. Key thematic directions represented in films of recent years include:

- films about historical events that matter to the entire nation and seek to unite it (*Qash (Run)*, *Oyan*, *Qazaq! (Rise, Kazakh!)*, *Zhel toqtagan zher (The Land with No Wind)*, *Zhambyl: zhana dauir (Zhambyl: A New Era)*, and others);

- films depicting Kazakh rituals and traditions (*Bauryna salu, Papa umer v subbotu* (*Dad Died on Saturday*), *Bolmagan Balalyq Shaq* (*The Lost Childhood*));
- films reflecting the everyday life of the Kazakh people: family dramas (*Ystyq Uia* (*Family Nest*), *Ot* (*Fire*), comedies about weddings and celebrations (*toi*), and relationships with in-laws (*qudalar*), and so on;
- films that evoke shared emotions through beloved songs and portrayals of musicians and composers (the musical films *Dos-Muqasan, Stop, noch'* (*Soldier of Love*), *Baqyt Qushagynda* (*In the Embrace of Happiness*));
- films that convey heroism not only through history, but also through everyday trials, sport, and action (*Paralimpiets* (*The Paralympian*), *Vremya patriotov* (*Time of Patriots*), *Qazhymuqan*);
- films that unite viewers through an engagement with Islam — *Peiish. Jumaq ananyn tabanynyn astynda* (*Peiish: Heaven Is Beneath a Mother's Feet*), *Dastur* (*Tradition*), and others.

As this list shows, contemporary Kazakhstan cinema already includes a substantial number of people's films. The defining quality of people's cinema, however, is that it must be seen by a broad national audience rather than existing only on the festival circuit. Its development therefore depends not only on filmmakers, but also on distributors and state cultural policy.

From 2019 to 2022, the State Center for the Support of National Cinema funded socially significant projects. At present, priority is increasingly given to commercially viable films. Commercial genre cinema such as comedies, horror films, melodramas, and disaster films can, however, find its audience independently. State support is especially necessary for films whose authors have something to say to society but which cannot exist solely according to the laws of the market. This does not mean ideological commissioning, but trust in artists and directors capable of independently addressing profound and socially significant subjects. The essential thing is to listen to them.

Conclusion

Contemporary Kazakhstani cinema may be regarded as one of the key instruments of nation-building, in which the nation is formed not through declarations, but through repeated cultural practices and collectively experienced events.

Mass commercial cinema produced today in the Kazakh language forms a shared symbolic field in which, following Benedict Anderson's logic, an "imagined community" arises and is experienced as real. People's films like *Dos-Muqasan*, *Qash*, and others engage with collective and communicative memory, uniting generations. Films about history or everyday heroism expand the pantheon of heroes and translate patriotism into the realm of everyday responsibility; films that engage with religion restore an ethical and spiritual sphere to cinema, bringing together ethnic, civic, regional, and religious identities. Films about musicians and composers unite audiences emotionally and culturally.

In this sense, contemporary Kazakhstani cinema does not so much reflect an already constituted nation as continually reproduce it — through language, heroes, emotions,

and rituals — making nation-building a living and continuous cultural process. Nation-building in cinema is not a myth, but a repeated practice. It can be expressed succinctly in the following formula: cinema = language + memory + heroism + emotion + ritual → the nation as lived experience.

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