

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA**

This thesis project is submitted to fulfill partial requirements for Bachelor of Arts degree at the  
department of Journalism and Mass Communication

**SINGULARITIES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF KYRGYZ CINEMATOGRAPHY**

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**List of abbreviations**

Doc-documentary

B&W- Black & White

TV – television

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

AUCA – American University of Central Asia

JMC – Journalism and Mass Communications

### **Abstract**

Final Project named “Singularities of the development of Kyrgyz cinematography” is a video which includes interviews with film directors, film editors, and cinema critics. The video is performed as a 20 minutes long documentary. The movie is directed to inform people about the situation with cinematography in Kyrgyzstan and to show that there are several directions of development of cinematography in our country. The Kyrgyz cinema is in the period of rebirth. Despite the fact many things changed since the time of *Kyrgyz Wonder*, singularities of development of cinematography in our country left the same. In contrast to the cinema production in other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyz cinema is more democratic and less regulated one. But the main problem is that there are such factors as lack of financing from the government and lack of professionals that disturb the development of local cinema at the international arena. But namely these problems cause important singularity of local cinema production: hyper enthusiasm of cinema sphere’s workers.

Keywords: *cinematography, cinema, singularities, Kyrgyzstan, documentary*

## Introduction

### Cinematography definition

Well, the name comes from combining two Greek words: *kinema*, which means movement, and *graphein*, which means to record. In film, cinematography refers to the photographing of the movie itself. The person in charge of this is the cinematographer, also known as the director or photography or the DP (Penzin, 2001).

### Cinematography in Kyrgyzstan

The industry of cinema production in Kyrgyzstan is not deeply investigated field. There are no many books or scholar articles about the singularities of cinematography's development in Kyrgyzstan. But despite this, the theme is very important and interesting for me as a journalist, because cinema industry is also a tool of mass media.

I chose this theme for my project, because it is something new and something that is really interesting for me. As we see, now Kyrgyz cinematography is going through the period of *burst*(R. Akun, personal communication, February 22, 2013). We have new movies directed by local cinema people and amateurs almost every 1, 5 months. My aim is to clarify is it a certain singularity of our cinematography that can be determined as an “island of democracy searching for its own unique way in cinema production culture”(Abikeeva, 2009, para. 33), or it's just a new temporary trend.

### Literature review

Cinematography provides the best possibilities for people to get acquainted with the world of art. At the same time it is the only art with the help of which different types of works of artistic creativities can be reproduced. Moreover, it is a most available type of art. Cinema, in contrast to books, for example, is understandable to illiterate audience as well. Speaking about the periods in cinematography, they can be conditionally divided into two periods: the first one – period of mass commercial movies and the second one – period when authors' movies for selective audience appeared. (Penzin, 2001)

Another important thing about cinematography is that it is a powerful tool of mass media. And as cinematography is available and understandable not only for literate but also for illiterate people, it can easily propagandize certain perception of some events, feelings and even make people think in certain way. As the result analyzing what people watch we can define how and whether they are affected and if they are, than how it affects the situation with the culture in the country (Kolodkin, 2008).

Despite the fact people are getting informed about manipulations that means of mass media do to their minds, watching cinemas hasn't become less popular neither for illiterate, nor for intelligent audience. As PhD Glotov Mikhail says, it is very important to consider attitude of students as representatives of young generation towards cinematography (Glotov, 1996).

However, the affection of cinematography on people's minds would not be possible without well-constructed system, which is described by Joseph V. Mascelli in his article *The five C's of Cinematography*. The main problem in the system is that people stop appreciating work and skills of humans and rely more on equipment. But as Mascelli stated "camera doesn't tell stories. People do" (Mascelli, 2011).



For Kyrgyzstan this issue is very topical, as the main problem of local cinematography is lack of professionals in the sphere. In most of the cases development of cinematography in Kyrgyzstan is pushed by bright talented individuals but not by prepared and well-educated team (Dönmez-Colin, 2006).

Undoubtedly, it differs Kyrgyz cinematography from the cinematography of other Central Asian countries. It is more about individuals and as the result – more specific. Unlike Kazakh cinema that gravitates to the model of Russian cinematography, Kyrgyz cinema is still undefined and searches for its own unique way. Unlike Uzbek movies, local ones are not going through censorship (Abikeeva, 2009).

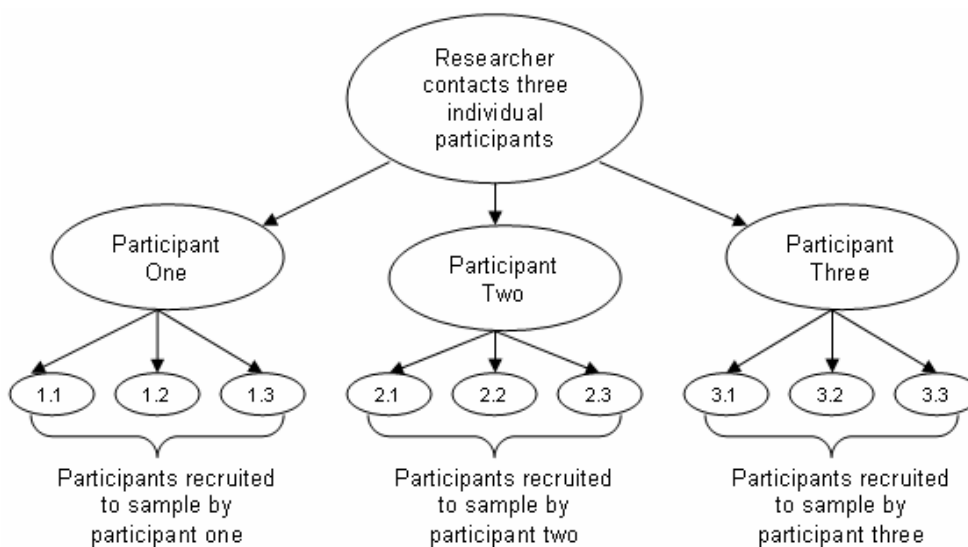
There is an opinion that the uniqueness of Kyrgyz cinematography has started to come out since 90's. But even before, when Kyrgyzstan was a part of Soviet Union, there was such term as *Kyrgyz wonder*. This term explained singularities referring to Kyrgyz cinema passing through its own unique way (Mikhailov, 2007).

Basing on these singularities and description of the aspects of cinematography on the whole a research for doc about Kyrgyz cinema was made. In a process of production the doc a lot of interviews were shot. Interviewees were found by snowball sampling research method. Using this approach to sampling, a researcher contacts with a person who is relevant to the research topic and then this person helps the researcher to establish a contact with other people from the same field. Basically it means that the researcher uses one appropriate person to find another. Mostly snowball sampling is used when it is difficult to find people needed for research by any other method (Bryman, 2012).

## Research methodology

While searching for interviewees for my documentary, I used a method of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability sampling focuses on techniques that are based on the judgment of the researcher (Bryman, 2012). To create a snowball sample one should find a person or a unit in the desired population and then use them to find others and so on until the sample size is met. Snowball sampling is a good choice of sampling strategy when the population you are interested in is hard-to-reach.

In my case it was hard to find local directors, because I had never been involved in cinema sphere. That's why for the doc I used snowball sampling research method and took contacts of future interviewees from those I had already interviewed. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) say that as a rule snowball sampling is not the best choice for quantitative interviews.



**Figure 1. Snowball sampling scheme**

**Figure 1. The scheme explaining a technique of snowball sampling**

But as for the qualitative research this method is appropriate and its main advantages are that it is cheap and easy to provide (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

Besides snowball sampling I had to use some method of interviewing people I shot. The decision was to use qualitative interviews. There are several categories of qualitative interview design. I used General interview guide approach. It is structured but at the same time flexible. General interview guide approach includes prepared set of questions, but the set of questions is not mandatory alike for all interviewees. It can differ (Turner, 2010). According to McNamara (2009), the strength of the general interview guide approach is the ability of the researcher "...to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee" (Turner, 2010, p. 755).

Shooting my documentary I applied the method of qualitative interviewing, because the aim of the project was to investigate the field of cinematography, to reveal problems and singularities of its development. Considering these facts qualitative interviews suited best.

The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996).

### **Goals and objectives**

A main goal of my work was to investigate a field of cinematography in Kyrgyzstan, do define its problems, singularities and possible perspectives.

The work is important because there are almost no works on the development of Kyrgyz cinema for the period from 1990s to our time. And as a journalist I would like to provide the information to people the can get from nowhere.

As for the audience, the documentary has a chance to be interesting for it, because this is something new and contains useful information, which is necessary for the explanation of different aspects of Kyrgyz cinema nowadays.

Another aim of mine was to wake patriotic feelings in hearts of the people watching this documentary. I wanted people to know that we do have talented cinematographers, directors, and scriptwriters in our country. And they work hard in order to raise the level of cinemas' quality in our country.

### **Important facts from the history of cinematography in Kyrgyzstan**

- Kyrgyz cinematography has its history,officially starting from 1941. This year all governmental documents, necessary for the organization of the cinematography base in the Republic were created and signed. It was the first step in developing Kyrgyz cinematography. But first seeds were planted long before 40s. It happened that in 1920s when Russian residents started coming to Kyrgyzstan to shoot movies the idea of cinematography already took roots (Mikhailov, 2007).
- Through Soviet period Kyrgyz cinematography developed evenly. In 1942 studios' furnishings in *National Philharmonic's* basement started (Mikhailov, 2007).
- As Mikhailov writes in his book *Film of Memory* in 1942-1943 enthusiasts gathered at Frunze (now Bishkek) film studio to create a regularly issued newsreel called *Soviet Kirgiziya*. And already in October 1944 it was the first time when the newsreel *Soviet Kirgiziya* was issued in both: Kyrgyz and Russian languages (2007).
- On 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 1945 government issues a decree about the creation of the first national movie *Semetey, son of Manas*, based on the epos *Manas*. The movie was timed to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kyrgyz republic (Mikhailov, 2007).
- There are no archives of the magazine for the period between 1946 and 1950. Mikhailov explained that they were destroyed in order to implement the plan concerning delivery of silver. And the fact of destroying these films (both positives and negatives) is tragic because there were priceless shootings of the post-war time (2007).
- In the year 1949 after the order of the USSR's Minister of Cinematography production of dubbed tapes started in Kyrgyzstan. And some of the dubbed works were sent to Moscow (Mikhailov, 2007).

- Color at Frunze cinema studio appeared in 1953. That year first colored documentary *Peak of Friendship* was shot there (Mikhailov, 2007).
- In 1960 *Kyrgyzfilm* directors started to film new pictures based on Aitmatov's works. Gennadiy Bazarov filmed one of the biggest novels of Chingiz Aitmatov *Mother Field* in 1967 (Mikhailov, 2007).
- In Kyrgyz cinematography a period from 70's to 80's was concerned with a stable production of new movies (Mikhailov, 2007).
- In 1989 new faces started to appear at *Kyrgyzfilm*. Young directors shot movies with the purpose to make them as special and individual as possible. But all the movies of younger generation were provoking the feeling of aesthetic discomfort at the audience. Although movies contained stories of different people, which happened in different places, they were united by the genre of drama with its canons. It could be one of the reasons why the audience perceived the movies of young directors as similar ones (Mikhailov, 2007).
- The period of 90s was called as a crisis of Kyrgyz cinematography. There was an absolute stagnation (E. Saliev, personal communication, February 27, 2013).
- In late 90s a new period in Kyrgyz cinematography started, so-called period of *Rebirth*. And nowadays Kyrgyz cinema is still living through this period of searching for the unique way of development (Abikeeva, 2009).

### **Problems of Kyrgyz cinematography**

As Kyrgyz cinema is young comparing to the cinema industries of Russia or Western countries, now it faces problems, which have been already overcome by developed states. It is a usual fact.

The main problem of the modern Kyrgyz cinematography is funding. It is difficult for young people coming to the industry to find money to shoot a good qualified movie. And this is a reason why so many pictures of a bad quality appear. People have a desire to shoot a full-length film of a good quality, but they don't have enough possibilities (A. Usenaliev, personal communication March 5, 2013).

As A. Usenaliev has explained in the interview, another problem connected to the lack of funding is that local commercial movies can't be shown in Western countries. It happens because of incongruity of formats. In order to buy a right to use the specific format, which is demanded by foreign cinemas a lot of money is needed (personal communication, March 5, 2013).

Film directors also raise a problem of unprofitable work conditions with local cinemas. Showing new movies in cinemas doesn't bring much money. Owners of cinemas are usually taking 50 percent of profit, which is too much. And taking into account, that film directors should also pay a tax, which is 15% from total 100% profit, in the end the director of movie gains approximately 30-35% from all the gatherings (K. Djumabekov, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

Lack of professionals in cinema sphere also creates some obstacles in developing Kyrgyz cinematography. And the main problem is that there is no second cast in local cinema production (E. Saliev, personal communication, February 27, 2013). "Everyone wants to be a director or producer of a movie. But nobody wants to assist," – Erkin Saliev said (personal communication, February 27, 2013).

### **Perspectives of Kyrgyz cinematography**

Kyrgyz cinema was valued a lot during the Soviet period. There even was a phenomenon called *Kyrgyz Wonder*. Quality control and competent professionals with special education made it possible. 10 years ago there was a crisis of Kyrgyz cinema and now there is a beginning of a new period in the local cinematography. Equipment for shooting movies becomes cheaper and more available. As the result more young people start making movies (R. Akun, personal communication, February 22, 2013).

Not all of them are of a good quality and contain an interesting idea, but according to practices of other states it is known that quality comes out of quantity. From 20 movies of young directors, two or three can appear really interesting and outstanding. Taking into account that more and more young people start paying their attention to cinema art, it can be supposed that Kyrgyz cinematography has promising perspectives (D. Abdykerimov, personal communication, March 12, 2013).



### **Singularities of Kyrgyz cinema**

The main singularity that makes Kyrgyz cinematography different from other post Soviet countries is a hyper enthusiasm of those who work in this sphere. (K. Djumabekov, personal communication, March 13, 2013). According to ChingizAytmatov, Kyrgyz cinema went through huge economic difficulties after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But despite this, artists still have a perspective, as there is no censorship now. The only problem is finance(Dönmez-Colin, 2006).

Another singularity of the modern Kyrgyz cinema is that there are new movies appearing almost every month, but not all of them are of a good quality. One of the reasons for that is availability of equipment. One can buy a good camera and shoot a film. But according to Joseph V. Mascelli a story can't be told by camera, person tells it. And if one doesn't have enough skills in movie production, not depending from what camera he/she has, the final product will probably be of a low quality (Mascelli, 2011).

Those who have skills in shooting movies mostly devote themselves to comedy movies production. This is one more singularity of local cinematography. There are almost no melodramas, dramas and no horror movies of Kyrgyz production. One of the reasons for this is that there are no enough professional actors in the country. Drama genre is very difficult one in terms of playing dramatic role (T. Berikov, personal communication, March 6, 2013).

## Documentary production process

### Script

| <i>Video</i>  | <i>Audio</i>   |
|---|--|
| Chaotic set of frames: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A guy shooting a girl</li> <li>• Close up of a camera</li> <li>• <i>Kyrgyzfilmbuilding</i></li> <li>• Kyrgyz flag</li> <li>• Zooming in to the guy with camera</li> <li>• Picture becomes blur and text with the name of the doc appears</li> </ul> | Cut pieces of music  |
| Picture of Tolomusheva G.   | What is so special about Kyrgyz cinematography?  |
| Pictures from cinema catalogues, book of Mikhailov V. about cinematography.   | Short history about development of cinematography in Kyrgyzstan. Then leading to nowadays: what is situation now |
| Interview with Saliev E.  | What is Kyrgyz wonder?<br><br>Now there is a third period- crisis of Kyrgyz cinematography                       |
| Part of the movie “Princess Nazik”  | Saliev E. speaks about non-commercial cinema production in our country as the best way to develop cinematography |
| Shootings of professional equipment   | Akun R. explains reasons of cinema burst   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| (cameras, tripods)- from blur to focused;<br>Guy holding camera, smiling, shooting<br>panorama view;<br>Picture of Akun R. | (cheap equipment)<br><br>Comparing our cinematography with the<br>cinematography of other CA countries.<br><br>Akun R. speaks about what are the<br>advantages and disadvantages of modern<br>local movies. |
| Inserting frame from Kazakh movie as an<br>explanation to what Ruslan was talking<br>about                                 |   |
| Interview with Saliev E.   | Saliev E. says about differences between<br>Kyrgyz and Uzbek cinematography<br>development concerning commercial<br>movies  |
| Frames from <i>How to marry GuChjun Pe</i><br>movie by D. Abdykerimov  | Narration about starting of commercial<br>movies shooting in KG (referring to<br>words of cinema critic)  |
| Picture of Daniyar   | Daniyar speaks about movie rentals in<br>KG   |
| Pictures from his movie again  |   |
| Picture of TalgatBerikov   | Talgat saying that Kyrgyz<br>cinematography doesn't have any<br>singularities   |
| Shootings of <i>Kyrgyzfilm</i> studio (outside<br>panorama, inside panorama)   | Narration about problems film directors<br>face in work process   |
| Interview with ErkinSaliev. Then picture<br>shifts to operators at work  | Erkin speaks about the problem of<br>lacking assistants and second directors  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Picture of Rakiya (film cutter)  | Rakiya faces a problem with the lack of good scripts                                   |
| Panorama of Rakiya's class at <i>Kyrgyzfilm</i> studio   | ErkinSaliev speaking about the necessity of education of local directors abroad        |
| Picture of DaniyarAbdykerimov  | Daniyar speaks about forming of second cast in production crews in KG                  |
| Frames from "The year of restless sun"   | ErkinSaliev speaks about the changing of direction of Kyrgyz cinematography            |
| Interview with Tolomusheva G.  | Why is it important for people to know about Kyrgyz cinematography                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture of people walking</li> <li>• Picture of cinema theatre "Manas"</li> </ul> | Narration of the author about possible perspectives of development of Kyrgyz cinema    |
| Interview with Ernest Abdyjaparov  | E. Abdyjaparov says about perspectives and results of the work of modern Kyrgyz cinema |
| Darkening of the screen  |  |
| Titres   | Cut pieces od music  |

## Equipment

Here is the list of the equipment used for shooting the doc:

- Cannon 500D with two types of lenses: 50mm fixed and standard 18-55mm (personal)
- Tripod (from AUCA's JMC department)
- Additional light and white reflectors (from *Aytysh Film*)

**Shooting process**

A process of shooting the doc took a little more than 3 months. Nine people were interviewed. Most of them were directors and some of them film-cutters and critics. All of the interviews were shot indoors, because there was no possibility to shoot them outside, as I didn't have enough sound equipment. There were no any serious problems or difficulties faced while shooting the movie. The only difficulty was to get movies of local directors. Many of them didn't agree to provide a material either because they were afraid that their material would be used in inappropriate way, or because they didn't have archives.

**Editing process**

For editing the documentary I used Adobe Premier Pro program on the MacBook Pro borrowed at the Journalism and Mass Communications department.

## Conclusion

While working on the project I was able to investigate a field of cinematography in Kyrgyzstan. A lot of problems were defined. But despite this, it is developing. Now Kyrgyz cinema is in a period of rebirth. Comparing it to the cinema production of other Central Asian countries, the main noticeable difference is that Kyrgyz film directors try to capture the modern reality of the life in the country (Abikeeva, 2009).

It is obvious that one of the reasons for this is that Kyrgyz cinema is more democratic and not regulated (R. Akun, personal communication, February 22, 2013).

But the main problem is that there are such factors as lack of funding from the government aimed at development of Kyrgyz cinema, and lack of professionals in the field (E. Saliev, personal communication, February 27, 2013).

Summarizing the work I've done, I would say, that Kyrgyz cinema has a future and has perspectives of development. To make them possible governmental interest in this topic is needed. If government pays more attention to developing this cultural branch of Kyrgyz peoples' life, showing local movies at international commercial cinemas and recognition of the foreign audience will be possible (A. Usenaliev, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

In the end I would say that most of the problems Kyrgyz cinematography faces today are forming singularities of local cinema production. The easiest example to explain it is that lack of financing cinema production causes hyper enthusiasm of cinema sphere workers in Kyrgyzstan (D. Abdykerimov, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

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