

Cinematograph and Religion (Through the Example of Kazakh Films)

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to investigate the nature of the cinematograph in terms of religious values and analysis of religion role in cinema history. Characteristic feature of art based on religious action is its religious content. It is determined by those ideas and images which are characteristic of specific religion. Art based on religious themes has dual nature: religious and artistic. Religious nature is manifested in domination of natural and social forces over a man. Artistic nature shows freedom of human consciousness and spirit. These two factors have become the key ones for analysis of the pictures which were taken as example. Religion is considered in the article as bearer of spiritual-moral ideals and the keeper of cultural traditions, having high value for people.

Key words: Cinematograph • Creative work • Spiritual values • Religion • Belief • Film • Cinematic language
• Producer • Spectator

INTRODUCTION

It is long since people tried to imagine divine creatures and religious images of the other world with the use of artistic forms. In a number of religions, myths about gods have been reflected in literature, painting, sculpture [1-4]. This need has moved into the art of cinema. All great producers addressed religion in their creative work. "Cinema time and time again returned to important questions which excite society and one of these themes was religion-says Horst-Peter Koll, chief editor of the catholic magazine *Film-Dienst*. devoted to cinematograph. There is a big number of producers which successfully revealed this theme on the screen. Religious theme in cinema was always characterized by great diversity of plots and aspects. "There were attempts to depict on the screen prominent figures of religious tradition, side by side with the films about every-day problems of believers, or comedian vision of religious themes",-points out Peter Hasenberg, the Head of Cinema and Principles of mass media policy Department of the Conference of catholic bishops of Germany [5]. The most important culture-forming sign is focus of religion on a man, its essence, problems of life purpose and human existence. With the help of art religious ideas can be felt as real things because artistic language allows to depict in specific-sensual form religious concepts of divine, supernatural.

Religion is a historical phenomenon and the feeling of belief is a permanent feeling and therefore it is broader than religion. Belief is the most important mechanism of individual self-determination of a man in the process of his formation. Belief, a phenomenon of human spirituality and specific attribute of consciousness is a main source of creation purpose of personality which is able to sublime and spiritualize its psychological energy. Being on the central place in the system of values orientation of a man belief has a huge humanizing potential. Of course, the sources of the belief are mysterious, enigmatic and complicated for understanding, but we are interested first of all not in the belief itself (what it is, what is its nature) but in answering the questions about the necessity of belief for a man in the art of cinematograph and its role in modern world.

The topic of the study is phenomenon of religious values and the ways of their visualization by means of the art of cinema.

The object of the study is full-length feature films of various time periods, genres, devoted to religion and religious values.

The aim of the study is to identify on the base of philosophic-culturological analysis the ways of visualizations of religious values by means of cinema language, to show humanizing potential of religion in cinema.

The Tasks of the Study:

- To define places and roles of religious values in cinematograph;
- To find out expression means by which religious values were visualized;
- To find out specific character of the use of religious symbols in actable cinematograph;
- To identify a group of cinema films with visualization of religious values on the base of their meaning, religious and esthetic contents.

Main Part

Religion and the Art of Cinema: Cinematograph addressed religion theme since the time it was born. Lumier Brothers in 1898 shot the film "Jesus Passion". The first in Hollywood producer-director Thomas Ins who developed principle of "iron scenario" released in 1916 the film "Civilization". "It was a war film of pacifist character (in Ins' film spirit of Jesus descends onto Earth embodied in the tall soldier who was persecuted by all means for his attempts to bring peace on Earth)". [6]. The triumph of the Hollywood films with religious themes happened in 1950s. "Civilization" of Thomas Ins and other pictures shot under his supervision signalize transition from creation of fascinating cinema tricks to Art.

Art of David Griffith played especially prominent part in this transition. His film "Intolerance" (1916) consists of 4 parts 3 of which cover religious events. Cross-cutting theme of the picture was permanent opposition of love and hate, justice and violence.

Before considering the role of religion in cinema history you should understand the semantics of cinema language. A lot of scientific works were devoted to particularities of cinema language and we would like to reveal significance of cinema as some phenomenon, which is accessible to all nations of the world. Below you will find the extract from Yu. Tynyanov's article "About foundations of the cinematograph": "Invention of cinematograph was met with the same happiness as invention of gramophone. This was joy of primitive man who for the first time depicted leopard head on the blade of his weapon and simultaneously had learned to make hole in his nose with a stick. Roar of the magazines resembled savages' choir who sing a hymn for those first inventions. Soon, primitive man probably realized that a stick in the nose is not a big invention, in any case it took him more time than an European in order to submerge into despair from gramophone. The point is not a gramophone, of course, what is more important-that cinema is an art. When a man depicted the head of a beast on the blade he

not only depicted it, but knew that his totem was with him, it pierced into the chest of his enemy. In other words, his picture had 2 functions: reproductive-material and magic. Side result was appearance of leopard head on the blades of the whole tribe-and it became a sign of difference, became mnemonic sign and therefore an ideogram, a letter. What has happened? Fixing one of the results and in the same time switching of functions. This is the way of transition of technical means into means of art. Moving photograph whose main role was to provide similarity with depicted nature moved to art of cinematograph.

Here the function of all means was switched-they are not means any more, but means with a sign of art. And here "poverty" of cinema, its flatness, its colorlessness-happened to be positive means, real means of art, in the same way as imperfection and primitiveness of totem's ancient image proved to be positive means leading to writing" [7].

As we see from all said above-cinematograph has substituted former hobbies of a man and became the real art. In order to understand how it happened we must know the theory of cinema perception by spectator.

First of all the cinema is different from other kinds of art (from theater, for example) because it takes much more socio-cultural space, goes far beyond of the limits of artistic circle. If theatre, in general, is formed around art, the cinema covers by its influence almost everything-from spiritual ideals to etiquette and fashion. Cinema, as art, is "a relative" of depicting arts because its essence is the image of surrounding world. Only this can explain existence of silent cinematograph as independent and valuable form of art. Existence of cinema art creative works creates patterns of socio-psychological and cultural-historical character. Here we have the problem of relationship between cinematograph and the phenomenon of artistic culture, his place among other arts and the recognition of that function which is performed by cinematograph in the society, its ability to influence social consciousness.

"At the very early period of development of cinematograph, when its photographic essence, its ability to depict life in its own forms, repeat real pictures of the world was distinctly manifested, even then the screen tried to overcome this direct dependency on the reality, made first attempts to go beyond the limits of truthfulness. Cinema, since its very first steps, was not only big scientific discovery, technical invention but a way to surprise, astonish, entertain people. The first cinema seances provoked surprise and fear of spectators. Train which was moving onto them

frightened them by its reality and moving on the platform people seemed non-real creatures which became alive under influence of some unknown force. It is truthfulness which at the beginning was perceived as something fantastic, magic. In every-day world there was one more world brought to life, very similar by its appearance and in the same time frightening by this similarity. Devil's tricks of illusion included halves of people on the screen, only their heads, feet and that the pistol directed into the hall could easily kill the visitors of the seance" [7].

Talking about the influence of cinematograph on the consciousness of spectator it is worth mentioning the extract from Lev Trotsky's book "Vodka, church and cinematograph" published in 1923 in the newspaper "Pravda" because it was related with the theme of religion: "Cinematograph competes not only with a tavern, but with a church as well. And this competition can be fatal for church if we add to separation of church from socialist state the integration of socialist state with cinematograph". There is no religiousness in Russian working class at all and it has never been there. Orthodox church has always been a habitual ceremony and official organization. It was not able to penetrate deeply into consciousness and connect its dogmas and canons with internal life of ordinary people. The reason for that was the same all the time: uneducatedness of old Russia, including its church. That is why Russian worker while awakening himself for culture can so easily free himself from purely external habitual connection with the church. Icons are in the house because they are already there. They are a part of interior, they decorate walls, without them the house will be empty, uncomfortable. But worker will not buy new icons, in the same time he can not refuse from the old ones because of the absence of will. And they go to church not because of religiousness: it is light in church, everything looks nice, people sing well-the whole range of social-esthetic bait which are absent at the factory, in the family, in everyday street. Using theatrical tricks the church influences the vision, hearing, smelling (ladan!) and through them-on the imagination. But people's need in theatrical tricks-to see and hear something unusual, bright, which will lead away from routine of life-is very great, invincible from child years and up to the very old age. And here the thought again is directed to the most powerful - and most democratic - thing: to cinematograph. Not needing complicated hierarchy, brocade etc., cinematograph unfolds on the white sheet much more fascinating performance than the richest, experienced in thousand years of theatrical tricks church, mosque or synagogue. There is only one performance in church-from year to

year, but cinematograph is available in the same hours and situated not far from your place and will show pagan, Christian and Jewish Easter ceremonies, in their historical continuity and in their ceremonial mimicry. Cinematograph will entertain, enlighten, astonish your imagination with a character and free from the need to cross the church threshold. Cinematograph is a great competitor of not only a tavern, but a church as well. This is the weapon which we must master by all means!" [8].

We understand from the article that cinematograph threatened to push the church away from the consciousness of ordinary people. And it meant loss of power of rich people over illiterate people, thus, cinema became powerful ideological weapon in the hands of proletariat.

But what is a religious film? A film where main characters are church officials or a film which will tell about religious wars and breakthrough moments in history and religion? Not only. There are some films where theme of belief is not leading one but they contain religious implications: quest for life purpose, humanity in regard to your nearest person.

"There are different answers to the question what to consider religious cinematograph. Among many approaches two of them seem most natural and, probably because of that, most common. The first approach-not to think twice and refer to religious cinematograph all films with appropriate plot and characters-which directly devoted to flock of souls, church and religion, as well as to different particularities of relationship between protagonist and the God, divine beings or at least some superior (moral, spiritual) substance. The 2nd approach-it is quite opposite to the previous-the piece of creative work does not demands any attributes of confessional of formalized character-in order to say if a film is religious or not. All that it needs-our opinion that it *is* religious. That is why, the supporters of this approach remind eagerly: art knows a lot of deeply religious works (including pictures), in which spiritual and religious contents can not be manifested in spiritual ceremonies but in the same time this content is unconditional and deep. As we can easily prove, the 1st approach is based on phenomenal and nominal methods of analysis, the second-on noumenal and hermeneutical. The first tends to self-restriction and formal rigour, the second-tends to see religious content everywhere-from *Solaris* to *Mission impossible*-because any story can be easily turned into more or less suitable allegory about belief, hope and love. That is why supporters of the first approach justly criticize the supporters of the second approach for whateverism and

the latter-also justly-answer the first that "spirit breathes where he likes" and that it is not possible to deprive a film from religious dimension only because that there is no priest in the screen. But sometimes these views co-exist, changing their roles depending on the changes of mood of their bearer" [9].

Having considered all what was said above we can conclude that it will be correct to consider the films religious where in terms of belief and specific religion some problem of existence is revealed.

Kazakh Cinema in the System of Religious Values:

The greatest integrating trend in modern Kazakhstan is ethno-cultural re-birth and one of the factors of this process is self-identification of Kazakh people. Development of ethnic self-consciousness of the Kazakhstan people was reflected in religious situation. At present moment national religious re-birth is observed in Kazakhstan. Religion as the bearer of spiritual and moral ideals and keeper of cultural traditions is considered as significant value by our people. Therefore the force of religious ethics is actively used with the purpose to form moral and spiritual world of young generation. Population of Kazakhstan has never been inclined to fanatic faith, it will be more correct to say that it has religious tolerance in inter-confessional sphere. Now we shall consider how Islam influenced the art of cinema of Kazakhstan.

Historian of Kazakhstan cinema, Kabyshev Siranov wrote about Kazakhstan cinema of Soviet period: "Birth and development of Kazakh Soviet cinema art is closely connected with historical victories of USSR nations which have reached success in building of socialism and are victoriously marching to the top of human happiness-communism" [10]. This phrase which reflects precisely the situation with cinematograph at that time can be understood as if Soviet films depicted only interests of Communist party and were based on the ideas of materialism. But in reality artistic and esthetic uniqueness of cinematograph was fed up with ethnic material which did not contradict the interests of Marxist-Leninist world view but in the same time it did not prove the exclusiveness of its atheistic outlook. Ethnic films allowed to touch the theme of religion and supernatural. These themes can reveal themselves in ritual scenes connected with birth of death of a man. One of the most prominent pictures of Soviet time with religious values are the key feature was a film of Shaken Aimanov "The land of fathers" (1966). The plot of the film is based on the journey of a grandfather and a grandson from Kazakhstan aul to Russian village in order to bring the ashes of killed in the war father to Motherland. "Since the

film was shot at times of the "thaw" it was possible to show real national features and thoughts, which contradicted the ideological mindsets of the Soviet System", cinema expert G. Abikeeva writes in her book "Nation-building in Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia [11]. So, what is purely national features of Kazakhstan people? The answers can be found in visual and meaning structure of the film. While the authors of the film "Shot at the Karash pass" shot religious scenes by helicopter view the creators of "Land of fathers", on the contrary, accentuate religious ideas with close-up view. In the same book G. Abikeeva writes: "The film starts with the scene which shows grave plate with a writing in Arabic language. For that time it was very brave, the same can be said about mazar-a ceremony of Muslim funeral-and the prayers of the old man" [11]. These scenes are the key idea of the film: every man must be buried in native land. Spiritual values are embodied in the character of an old man who is trying to transfer his outlook to his grandson. The character of Yelubai Umurzakov is saturated with religiousness-every gesture, every look of him, his every word-everything shows his faith. Since the very beginning he begins to pray - to read namaz (a prayer). Close-up view is used in order to accentuate this moment-when the soul of the old man is maximally close to God. The key moment in this film is conversation of the old man with elderly Chechen at the roof of a train: "Why do you go in this way? In your age you must sleep on the floor, says the old man. The Chechen answers that he lives in highlands, has used to live high, "the air is pure there and I am closer to Allah". Been asked why he is going there the Chechen answers: "Old age is oncoming I have to die. And where a man can die if he is not on the native land?"

There is one more very important scene where false prophet while playing dombra says to miserable old men who lost their sons at war that their sons are alive and soon will be back with medals and rewards. And he predicts to the hero of the film, the old man, that his son is alive, the old man gets angry and reproaches the prophet for his lies. False prophet is perplexed and changes the subject of the conversation. He recalls that it is high time to read namaz and leaves having told to the rest that they can find him at home if they need. The old men leave (every goes to his place) but we still have a feeling that the old men in spite of failure of the prophet will go to him anyway, just to hear that their sons are alive, in order to find faith and solace. The following scene of the death of the old Chechen, who is reading out loud the namaz on the roof of the train. The namaz can not be interrupted: it is not possible. The train is entering into

the tunnel and the Chechen had no possibility to bend himself. This scene tells about the strength of the spirit of believer.

Producer of the film Sh. Aimanov wrote: "We made our film taking into consideration that spectator will think everything to the end by himself. We had no intention to show that this was a hero who rode on the native land, got familiar with people, saw destroyed Russian village and he started to perceive the world under new angle, he changed his attitude to people, he, who was restricted by Koran dogmas and the traditions of his ancestors. Everything is so, of course. But it is not so simple in regard to human psychology and the process of insight is not so direct. And we do not know yet if the old man would have refused from his intention to bring the... of his son to the native steppes, if this.. had not rested in the brother grave" [12].

"Abai" (1995, the producer Ardaki Amirkulov) is one of the films shot at the beginning of the era of independence, where religion and religious consciousness are shown as a part of the nation. The film was shot by the anniversary of the great poet and was based on the novel of Mukhtar Auezov "Abai's way" Artistic advantages of the film and, more often, its disadvantages were described in critical works of national cinema experts and literary critics. All of them claimed that screen version does not correspond to the original, were angry with ethnographic mistakes, too much openness of erotic scene, schematic characters. We want to consider this film in terms of religion, visualization of its values. To begin with, the plot of the film is compressed and based on the one event-building of mosque. We know from the novel about this positive feature of Kunanbai-he was an initiator and if we use modern language, sponsor of big mosque construction. In the film he is quite different from bais (landlord) which were always shown as greedy and inhuman. "The mosque is like a symbol of well-being and unity of the nation. It was the beginning of the mosque construction when Bozhei refuses to cast the first brick which leads to the conflict between Kunanbai and Bozhei. With the end of construction the tragic story of relationship between Kunanbai and Bozhei finishes and this is the end of the film" [13].

Mosque is the key idea of the film and the symbol of high spirituality of a nation. As it seems, the authors planned to use this symbol in the following way: Regardless of horrible actions performed under the orders of Kunanbai, spirituality, belief justify them as sacrifice for great deed. The authors seem to create this spirituality on the screen while showing interior of madrasah and

mosque, decorated with Arabic ornament and prayers, but all their attempts sink against the background of ethnographic mistakes. A spectator does not accept the background as a key component but focuses his attention on the breaking of usual for him genetic codes of behaviour. The spectator will be surprised to find that brother of Abai, Takezhan has suddenly become very mature and even tries to punish Abai, even in the presence of grandmother Zere and all-mighty Governor of generations and polygamist Kunanbai, as ordinary Uzbek dikhanin pours himself tea and asks khazareth about the measure of punishment for Kodar and Kamka, not offering his interlocutor who is bustling about, to have a seat and talk..." [13]. If we take into consideration that religion can be closely connected with ethnic life of people, these mistakes will guarantee the failure of this film with national spectator. Recognition, as necessary psychological technique for perception, does not happen. And even beautiful scenes which demonstrate religious facility, religious cult will not improve the situation and such films will rest on the shelves in a shop without demand for it. So we see that deliberate imposing of some cult facilities without national self-consciousness, without moral and ethics of the people who profess religion, connected with these facility will not give necessary effect: it does not awaken spirituality and is not perceived as something highly moral.

Of course, there were more successful attempts to depict religion and in particular, Islam on the screen by means of feature films and we shall concentrate on them.

The first picture which openly declared Islam was the film of Akan Satayev "Racketeer" (2007). It is standard film like a template, shot in the genre of criminal drama, it is based on the scheme: friends-bandits-death, it resembles very much Russian films about criminal elements, but still it has some particular feature-religious implications about the life purpose. This is a biographic story about a young man named Sayan told by him. The film is shot first of all for the people who were born in times of Soviet Union because the atmosphere of that time was created with great care. The plot of the film is criminal infighting of organized criminal group which is trying to dictate their conditions to Almaty businessmen. Sayan has stepped out of the right way and became a criminal. He believes that everything in this life can be solved by one's fists. But at the end of the picture he understands that his way was full of sins, for which he will be inevitably and severely punished. The main idea of the film was formulated by one of the characters, who stepped into the way of enlightenment having read Koran in the

prison: he cites suru about a cup where a drop falls after every bad deed. When the cup is overfilled it will pour the contents on the owner's head. The "answer" as it is called by gangsters.

This film was without high-quality artistic tricks, however, it had a great success. The secret of the success is simple-if you want somebody to understand you speak language which is understandable for your addressee. Taking into consideration intellectual level of modern spectator it was no surprise that after release of the film everybody started to behave like main character. But the film was able to explain screwed-up kids life purpose of human life. Young men recognized themselves in the main character and Islam became popular among them.

Talking about identification of ethnos with values we have to touch one more form of religion, existing in Kazakh land. This is Tengriism. "Apart from religions which were created by prophets and their supporters Tengriism which had not its own writing notation originated by natural evolutionary-historical way. It is based on outlook which has embodied in itself religious and mythological ideas of ancient Turanese people. Tengriism based on the idea of Superior mind-personification of creative power is one of the most ancient monotheistic religions. Called "Worship to the Sky" Tengriism from the very beginning was based on the cult of the Sun-the main source of life on Earth and astronomic symbol of man's creative power, cultural bearers of which were cattle-farmers of Turan" [14].

Tengriism managed to keep its values till now and the producers from different countries, as a rule from post-Soviet space are visualizing these values in the cinematograph. There are a number of films in Kazakh cinematograph where the plot is based on religion of Tengriism.

Film of Serik Apymov "Hunter" (2004) is one of the demonstrations of Tengriism values in Kazakh cinematograph.

The film was considered as a parable, new myth. In adjacent to the mountains village a boy with cold hands was adopted by the mother of local prostitute. The mother's lover-a hunter-decides to bring him up. They together go high up in the mountains: they hunt, shoot wolves, get food. The hunter transfers to the boy the mystery of relationship with women and the nature. Then a boy enters big world in order to return in the end to the place where he belongs. Having returned he gets to know that Hunter has died and the boy takes his place. If to consider this film from the point of view of Tengriism structure of the world, this is a story which tells how a

man who was born in the low world tries to enter medium world and become the owner of earth's surface.

Below we cite the Apymov's words about his film: "Recently the hero image has disappeared from Kazakh cinematograph and I tried to show it in "Hunter". Frankly speaking, I had to mythologize him. I would not say that it is positive example for young Kazakh people. It is like in a parable: "A man came to God and contemplated for his life. He says: its sadness, not a life. The God says: Listen, I sometimes send prophets down to Earth, you should go to them. A man: there have been so many prophets around me and all of them speak different things, I can not make out what they say. God: The prophets speak the same language only for different nations for their languages, in order to be understood". I thought: even the God follows the fashion in order to explain to a man the least ideas. Why mustn't I follow it? It is not epatage. Exotics? Maybe.

The Hunter asks the boy: "What is that woman doing?" - "She let her hair loose" -the boy answers. Then he comes again, shoots and asks again, what she is doing. She let her hair loose again. Loose hair in Kazakhstan means that a woman wants a man. That is all.

Maybe the young people did not understood it at the film review, the old men understood. Let us imagine a lake. Who can not swim will go there to the half of his height and will be happy. This is shallow-brained understanding of the scene. Who can swim better will swim far from the shore. The depth is over there [15].

The reason of incomprehension of the film is on the plane of religious values about which we talked earlier. A spectator came in order to recognize in the picture his existence but saw old-new myth-creation. People who did not profess Islam understood and accepted this film. The rest just shrugged their shoulders, about what is this film? "Poet is judged by the laws which were chosen by him",-Pushkin said. This film can not be judged in Islam terms. A spectator must have Tengrian vision.

CONCLUSION

Religion and religious values in cinematograph has huge humanizing potential. The nature of cinematograph is such that religious ideas after their visualization become as real as things because cinema language allows to depict religious values in specific and sensual form. Kazakh cinematograph of Soviet period in spite of its totalitarianism still did not loose national traditions of Kazakh people and religious beliefs. These interrelated concepts were reflected in visual series of films and

thanks to this beneficially differentiated such films from the others. Islam as a religion could not completely conquer the consciousness of Kazakh people. The memory of ancestors was very strong-it was pagan cult, cult of the Sky. Addressing Islam by a part of Kazakh society is important in terms of re-birth of Kazakh national existence, which suggests first of all the knowledge of Kazakh language, moral values. Islam is important for it not only as outlook system but as part of historical memory of the nation, which is natural for modern stage of ethnic self-consciousness of Kazakh society. Tengriism as a cultural phenomenon, open outlook, religious idea is a heritage of our ancestors. Tengriism. is still kept in the memory of Kazakh people as spiritual foundations of Turk culture, as traditions and customs.

Inference: In modern social consciousness the process of re-evaluation of the role and significance of religion, its social functions and meaning for development of society and the state has taken place. Religion is now considered as a form of social consciousness, as integral part of spiritual world and national culture. Today they shoot much more films on religious theme, with analysis of religious values.

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