“EXCEPTIONAL” HEROES IN INCLUSIVE FILM OF KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. The theme of integrating people with special needs into society is extremely relevant both for the entire civilized world and for our country in particular. The introduction refers to the signing by the Republic of Kazakhstan of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities at the UN headquarters. However, today there is no full-fledged integration of people with disabilities into society. As it is known, cinematography is a modern herald of value orientations, it has educational functions, and also endows a viewer with ability to see beauty in everything. However, domestic science has not yet investigated the image of an “exceptional” hero in cinema, which is a person with a disability. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide scientific coverage of inclusive cinema in Kazakhstan and the image of an “exceptional” hero. The study used theoretical methods such as bibliographic, descriptive, analytical, systematic, chronological and statistical. The results examine the impact of inclusive cinema on the transformation of public opinion, as well as instilling humanity in society. The discussion contains official data on shooting of 248 feature films for the period of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan of which only 17 are devoted to the theme of disability. The article shows the dynamics of the creation of films about disability in the Republic of Kazakhstan, highlights modern inclusive cinema in Kazakhstan on the example of the films “To be or not to be” (2014) and “The girl and the sea” (2017) directed by Aziz Zairov and Mukhamed Mamyrbekov. In conclusion, it is suggested that inclusive cinema can serve as a “beacon” of value orientations for society and a guide in understanding and accepting citizens with disabilities. It also proposes a forecast of development of the trend of creating pictures about people with disabilities.

Keywords: inclusive cinema, a person with disabilities, an “exceptional” hero, integration, humanity, value orientations.


Introduction

It is known, that on December 11, 2008, the Republic of Kazakhstan signed the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities at the UN headquarters, according to which the country undertakes to take the necessary measures in provision...
of the rights of people with disabilities to justice, health care, work, education and mobility [1, p. 38]. Certainly, a number of tasks are being carried out by the country these days. However, there is still no fully-fledged social rehabilitation and integration of people with disabilities into our society. Consequently, this article aims to illuminate in scientific circles phenomenon of inclusive cinema in domestic cinematography, in particular an image of an “exceptional” hero. The authors set the following tasks: to analyze the dynamics of the creation of films dedicated to the theme of disability in the cinema art of sovereign Kazakhstan; to study the film works “To be or not to be” (2014), “The girl and the sea” (2017) directed by Aziz Zairov and Mukhamed Mamyrbekov; to reveal the meaning of inclusive cinema for cinematography and society.

In the article were applied such scientific theoretical methods as descriptive, analytical, systematic, chronological, bibliographic and statistical. According to data for 2020, more than 705 thousand citizens with disabilities live in Kazakhstan and they are disadvantaged, limited in a full life because of underdeveloped infrastructure and rejection of society [2]. The integration of people with disabilities into society, as a rule, affects all spheres of public life, a sphere of culture and education in particular. In the world cinematography many outstanding films have been dedicated to people with disabilities, while in our young country social films about people with disabilities are rare and only a few directors create them. In America and Europe, people with disabilities are full representatives of their countries along with healthy residents, society accepts them, and developed infrastructure allows them to live a decent life. In our country, the average healthy people have no idea what kind of life their fellow citizens with limited life activities lead. For this reason, the theme of inclusive cinema is extremely relevant in solving the tasks set by the government, since in modern times cinema is one of the main translators of value orientations of society. According to a Russian film critic S. N. Penzin, works of screen art form a worldview, patriotism, moral and aesthetic education of both adult contingent and modern youth [3, pp. 6–7]. Social and inclusive cinema has a similar potential: it promotes spiritual growth and self-awareness, broadening horizons and developing empathy. According to a director Aziz Zairov, social films enrich a viewer, open his eyes and heart, contribute to emergence of deep thoughts about what is happening around and, above all, inside a person himself [4].

**Methods**

The theme of disability in the world cinematography has been widely disclosed and studied since the 1960s, when the European Social Charter was adopted (the first international treaty that contained specific provisions on the rights of people with disabilities) [5]. In the field of cinematography of the United States and Europe an impressive number of scientific works have been written about a hero with a disability and transformation of social attitude towards him in different historical periods: starting from a stigma of a social outcast, a “freak” and a parasite in the period before the First World War, after the war – a respectful and sympathetic attitude towards hero-veterans, and, finally, only in the 1970s due to the Declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities, films appeared which began to display disability in a positive manner [6, p. 109, p. 145, p. 223]. While in the domestic scientific community the theme of disability in cinematography has not yet been disclosed, therefore material for writing this article was taken mainly from media sources of Kazakhstan: interviews with directors, data for statistics, etc. In the article were applied such scientific theoretical methods
as descriptive, analytical, systematic, chronological, bibliographic and statistical. Descriptive and analytical methods were used in the coverage of inclusive films from the “Endless Possibilities” trilogy by directors Aziz Zairov and Mukhamed Mamyrbekov. A statistical method of research was applied to provide a structure on the number of films about disability made in independent Kazakhstan. And finally, systematic and chronological scientific methods were used in the search and collection of domestic films about people with disabilities.

**Results**

As it was already mentioned, in scientific community of Kazakhstan the theme of disability in cinematography has not yet been disclosed. According to officially published data, during the period from 1991 to 2020, 248 feature films were shot in sovereign Kazakhstan of which only 17 were devoted to the theme of disability [7, 8]. And only three out of 17 films feature people with disabilities as the main and “exceptional” heroes (“To be or not to be”, 2014; “The girl and the sea”, 2017 and “Children of the Sun”, 2019). So films devoted to illumination of people with disability are represented by single films according to Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The structure of the created feature films of Kazakhstan for the period from 1991 to 2020 (%).](image)

Figure 1 shows the structure of feature films created during the period of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 1991 to 2020 in percentage, demonstrating that films featuring people with disabilities make up only 5%, and films about “exceptional” heroes, where the main character is a person with disabilities or even less — only 1%. The dynamics of creation of films about people with disabilities during the period of independence of Kazakhstan clearly demonstrates a small, but still stable growth in production of these pictures from year to year. This trend in Kazakhstan is confirmed by the global international movement to increase public attention to the issue of disability, including the new 2020 requirements for the mandatory representation of a hero with a disability in films nominated for Oscar.

The list of Kazakh films where people with disabilities and “exceptional” heroes are presented for the period of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan in chronological order, indicating a category of disability of a hero is presented below:

1. “Goner” (Zhansebil), 1991 (deprivation of limbs);
2. “Aiganym”, 1991 (deprivation of speech);
3. “I don’t want to say goodbye”, 1992 (loss of speech);
4. “Wild East”, 1993 (dwarfs);
5. “Farah, the true story of angels”, 1999 (cerebral palsy);
6. “Leila’s Prayer”, 2002 (deprivation of legs);
7. “Return to A”, 2011 (deprivation of a leg);
8. “Lessons of Harmony”, 2013 (latent personality disorder);
9. “The story of an old woman”, 2013 (paralysis);
10. “To be or not to be”, 2014 (cerebral palsy);
11. “Aigerim”, 2015 (paralysis, loss of vision);
12. “Bopem”, 2015 (fatal disease);
13. “Blind Love”, 2017 (loss of vision);
14. “Call to Father”, 2017 (impaired mental function);
15. “Light”, 2017 (loss of hearing);
16. “Girl and the Sea”, 2017 (cerebral palsy);

Figure 2 demonstrates the dynamics of creation of films devoted to the theme of disability during the period of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It depicts a tendency towards a slight increase in production of these films which is confirmed by the red trend line with the approximation reliability value $R^2 = 0.1545$.

Director Aziz Zairov noted that young people with disabilities who participated in the filming process, as a result, feel much more confident in society, get rid of imaginary fears and feel necessary for people, pleasant changes happen to them [9]. People with disabilities, having watched these films, will also take their spirits and feel themselves as an important part of our society. Thus, inclusive cinema contributes to their cultural integration into society. Moreover, such life-affirming films are a vivid motivational example for desperate healthy people who have sunk to the social bottom. We would like to believe that these films will not leave them indifferent, on the contrary, they will instill hope in a bright future and force them to reconsider their life priorities. Nevertheless, the most significant idea of these pictures is still to increase the morality and empathy of our citizens in relation to people with special needs. These films are focused on the manifestation of humanity, which in turn combines such concepts as kindness, sincerity, empathy. These qualities are the most important component of any civilized society.

**Discussion**

A film gives a viewer an opportunity to feel empathy towards its heroes, so screen images allow a person to reveal his own psychological identity outside of rational consciousness. The highest impact of art on the emotional component of the individual is attributed to the phenomenon of catharsis. Due to catharsis, as L. S. Vygotsky believed, emotions transit to the level of spirituality and become “intelligent feelings” [10].

T. A. Florenskaya argues, that emotional transformation is the change of negative emotions into positive ones, due to which there is a holistic and spiritual change in the personality [11]. Certainly not every film is able to evoke experiences similar to catharsis but films about disability can cope with this task.

Displaying the image of a person with a disability is typical for many foreign films
including world cinema masterpieces [12 p. 141; 13. p. 983; 14.; 15. p. 256; 16. p. 51; 17. p. 783]. However in September 2020, the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced new standards for performance and “Oscar” nomination for “Best Picture” at its Aperture 2025 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. These standards are designed to encourage fair representation on and off screen, to better reflect diversity of people with disabilities to moviegoers. Thus, according to Standard A: screen display, themes and narratives about people with disabilities should be in the general cast (A2); the main storyline, a theme or narration of a film should also focus on a group of people with cognitive or physical disabilities, deaf or hard of hearing (A3) [18]. The Academy sets standards for representation and inclusion to qualify for Oscar Award. Accordingly, more films on disability will be made by American directors to get the desired award and to become recognized. Nevertheless much more valuable point is that the theme of disability will be raised world-wide more convincingly and more than possible that this tendency will influence on the same issue of our country as well.

The inclusive and social films “To be or not to be” and “The girl and the sea” directed by Aziz Zairov and Mukhamed Mamyrbekov, above all, are distinguished by genuine sincerity and life-affirming position of “exceptional” heroes who are students of the rehabilitation center (Association of Parents of Disabled Children) Almaty, Kazakhstan. These films are full of drama, they tell about the difficult life of people with disabilities, but at the same time they narrate about strength of human spirit, thirst for life and faith in a bright future. The protagonists of the films are young people diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Takhir Umarov (“To be or not to be”, 2014; “The girl and the sea”, 2017) and Dinara Sharipova (“The girl and the sea”, 2017).

“You have to become a kind of mouthpiece. Talk about spiritual values, about those things that can change the world for the better, change the attitude of society ... And now, taking this opportunity, you can express everything that is painful for all people with disabilities. Since you are already Hamlet, you must broadcast”—such instructions were given by the director Aziz Zairov to an exceptional actor Takhir Umarov during the filming “To be or not to be” [19]. He prepared the actor for the role for a year and a half, they brought Hamlet’s monologue to perfection. The director was strict with his actor. Aziz Zairov demanded full dedication from Takhir Umarov so that the audience applauded him not because of pity, but recognized his talent. The director set a difficult global task for, at that time, 20-year-old Takhir with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy and a severe degree of stuttering. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties Takhir surpassed all expectations and played one of the best Hamlets, according to a famous British actress, director of the Shakespeare Theatre in London, Sarah Berger. She said that the picture is a modern interpretation of an old story and a breath of fresh air in modern cinema [20].

The inclusive film “To be or not to be” vividly shows one day in the life of a person with a disability. According to the plot, a young man dreams of becoming an actor, so he diligently rehearses Hamlet’s monologue throughout the day. In addition to dreams of acting, the guy dreams of reciprocal love of his neighbor, he imagines himself in the role of Hamlet, and her as his Ophelia. In parallel to the “ideas about high”, a viewer is shown a quite ordinary—a life of the hero and difficulties caused by his limited abilities. The culmination of the picture becomes the news for the “exceptional” hero that his beloved one preferred a healthy young man to him, after that everything breaks off in him including the desire to live. However, fortunately, a thirst for life overcomes
momentary weakness. It is difficult to disagree with the words of a co-director of the film, Mukhamed Mamyrbekov, that “this is a film about love: about love of the protagonist for a profession, mother, girl and, finally, life” [21].

The film “To be or not to be” has a very eventful festival life. As it has taken part in a number of film festivals and has won more than ten international awards and prizes. The most significant of them are: participation in the American film festival “Superfest” for people with disabilities in 2015, where the film was awarded the main prize in the category “Excellence”, the screening of the film made a splash at the festival “Open Central Asia” held in London in October 2017. In San Francisco, at a separate screening at the Facebook office, they even noted the fact that the described situation in the film does not occur in the United States, since they have established social services [22].

A special screening of the film was also held in some cities of Kazakhstan. In October 2014, a press screening of the film “To be or not to be” was held at Arman Cinema Center, a director of which is Baurzhan Shukenov. However, invited directors of other cinemas in Almaty did not come to discuss the screening of the film, since social films are not profitable unlike world blockbusters [21].

Later, the film “To be or not to be” was released with tylo-commentary, that it was adapted to the needs of the blind and visually impaired audience. By the way, the tylo-commentary is an offscreen description of the picture written by a screenwriter and read out by an announcer. Typhloversion is used in order to bring blind and visually impaired representatives closer to ordinary life and subsequently integrate them into society, to familiarize them with the socio-cultural sphere of the country. This is an unprecedented case in our country when a soundtrack commentary on a film was made, while this practice has existed in the world for a long time. So, for example, the entire Golden Fund of America’s cinema is adapted for viewing by blind people. Also in Germany every fifth cinema shows films with tylo-commentaries. Moreover, in many countries on the TV remote control there is a button “turn on /off tylo-comments” [23]. For a long time, director Aziz Zairov had an idea to produce pictures with typhloversion in our country. Finally, he achieved his goal and with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, from now on, domestic films will be released with audio commentaries. The director noted the significance of this decision in the following words: “Social revolution, as an important step towards an inclusive Kazakhstan!.. It is the world of equal opportunities!” [24].

The film “To be or not to be” by the creative union of directors Zairov and Mamyrbekov turned out to be successful, so two years later they shot the next inclusive film “The girl and the sea” (2017) with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan. “The girl and the sea” is the second part of the “Endless possibilities” trilogy, which narrates about the life of young people with limited life activities. The film “The girl and the sea” is based on the real life story of Dinara Sharipova a student of the rehabilitation center, who played the central role in the film. According to the storyline Asel diagnosed with cerebral palsy, lives with her sister. During the day, a girl studies and develops creatively in a rehabilitation center, where she meets Timur, whose role was played by Takhir Umarov from the previous film “To be or not to be”. Young people develop mutual sympathy for each other, but they face a series of obstacles on the way to happiness. The uniqueness of these pictures lies in the fact that they show the expanded life of a person with special needs, presented on their behalf without embellishment, as it is.

The director of the film, Aziz Zairov, noted that this film is a “cry from the heart”
of women with limited life activities who wish to create a family, children, but because of circumstances they cannot make their dreams come true and, as a rule, they are doomed to loneliness. In addition, the director emphasized that the main goal of the film is to improve morality and humanity of our society in relation to people with disabilities. According to the director, humanity and kindness are the main qualities of a healthy society, guarantee of its survival, and the film “The girl and the sea” is a kind of art therapy both for people with disabilities and for the full majority [25].

The festival fate of the social drama “The girl and the sea” turned out to be as fruitful as the film “To be or not to be”. In 2019, the film “The girl and the sea” was shown at the International Film Festival “Eurasia” in Nur-Sultan, at the International Film Festival “Romford Film Festival” (London, the UK), the leading actress Dinara Sharipova was awarded a prize for “the Best Actress” ... Also at the Russian film festival “Silver Akbuzat” held in Ufa, the film received two awards at once — a special prize “For the embodiment of a dream” to Takhir Umarov and a special prize in the category “Social and Motivational Cinema”. At “the International Asian Film Festival” in Barcelona the film won “The Best Film prize” in the Panorama section [25]. Moreover, the picture continued to delight with its successes in 2020. Thus, it received the prize in the nomination “The Best Social Drama” at the prestigious Silk Road Film Awards – Cannes [26]. The same year at the Cinemaking International Film Festival in Bangladesh, “The girl and the sea” won “the Best Social Film in Asia” award [27].

It is also necessary to note separately the talents of a performer of the main role, Dinara Sharipova - she is fond of beading, writing stories, painting pictures, making origami, typing on the keyboard, and she does all these actions only with the help of her feet. The girl’s paintings adorn both private collections in Kazakhstan and Japan, the USA, and England. In addition, Dinara studied remotely at St. Petersburg University. She combined her studies with work at Capital Bank Kazakhstan, where she acted as a HR administration specialist [25].

In 2019, the film “The girl and the sea” was shown at Forum Almaty cinema, where it received a deafening notice. Also a professional and high-quality dubbing of the film into Kazakh language was made. A separate premiere with typhloversion is awaiting blind viewers. The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev visited the rehabilitation center, where he was presented with CDs with the films “To be or not to be” and “The girl and the sea”. The President of Kazakhstan highly appreciated the contribution of directors and actors to the cinematography of country [28].

At the moment the third final part of “Endless Possibilities” trilogy called “Mom, I am alive!” is being shot. The picture is dedicated to the mother’s selfless love for her children. It is extremely important for directors A. Zairov and M. Mamyrbekov to convey to a viewer all mothers’ courage, their soul pain, responsibility that falls on their fragile shoulders, especially when it comes to sick children [29].

**Conclusion**

Cinema art is a contemporary powerful tool that makes people aware of crucial social issues such as disability in particular. Moreover, cinema not only introduces a theme to a viewer, but it invites him to take a part in it by experiencing catharsis and change the attitude as a result.

It was known that in sovereign Kazakhstan were shot 248 feature films of which only 17 were devoted to the theme of disability. And only three out of 17 films present people with disabilities as the main
and “exceptional” heroes. So in domestic cinematography there are very few feature films where people with disabilities are presented (5% and 1%, respectively). At the same time, there is a tendency towards an increase in the production of films on this theme which is confirmed by the creation of such films for the first time, where the main character is not an actor but a person with a disability. Films “To be or not to be” and “The girl and the sea” directed by Aziz Zairov and Mukhamed Mamyrbekov give a viewer a tremendous opportunity to plunge simultaneously into the physical world of limited opportunities and into the rich inner world of unlimited possibilities of “exceptional” characters. Inclusive cinema does not demonstrate a parallel reality, but the real one, to which many prefer to turn a blind eye. But this kind of cinema always touches to the depths of soul, changes the attitude towards one’s own, as it turns out to be, trivial problems, helps to look at life in a new way and to re-evaluate a system of values. Such pictures are necessary for society so that it learns to understand and accept people with special needs.

As it was mentioned, at the moment the third part of “Endless Possibilities” trilogy is being filmed: “Mom, I am alive!” of directors A. Zairov and M. Mamyrbekov. It is known that various genres of a film: from comedies to horrors with a participation of people with disabilities have long been practiced abroad, while nowadays in domestic cinematography, as a rule, it is mainly a drama. That is why Aziz Zairov would like to shoot a comedy film with a participation of an “exceptional” hero, where a person with disability and situations in which he finds himself will cause good-natured laughter and smiles from a viewer. Also by the next year a film “Paralympian” by director Aldiyar Bayrakimov will be released, which tells a story of an athlete who managed to rehabilitate himself and return to sports after a tragic accident, as a result of which he loses his leg. Thus, we can safely assume that the trend of integrating people with disabilities into society will continue both in the art of cinema and in other spheres of life.

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**Contribution of authors**

A. A. Kassymkhanova – implemented drafting of the work, acquisition of data, literature and film searches, analysis of data.

V. I. Popov – conducted statistical analysis.

B. B. Nogerbek – developed the concept and design of the work.

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ҚАРАҚСТАН ИНКЛЮЗИВТИ КИНОСЫҢДАҒЫ «ЕРЕКШЕ» КЕЙІПКЕРЛЕР

Аңдатпа. Ерекше қажеттіліктері бар адамдарды қоғамға енгізу тақырыбы әлем үшін де, асиресе біздің ел үшін де ете ескі.

Кіріспеде Қазақстан Республикасының БҰҰ штаб-пәтерінде мүгедектердің құқықтары туралы конвенцияга қою қоюы турали айтылады. Алайда, бүгінде мүгедектердің қоғамға толықтаны интеграциясы жоқ, үзінді болушы құқықтық, кинематография – бул құндылық бағдарлардың заманауи аудармашысы, он тәрбиелік функцияларға ие, сонымен бірге көрерменге барлық қажынан қоғамдық қерес білуге мүмкіндік береді. Алайда құнылыс ғылыми мүмкіндігі қеңеттелетін адам болып табылатын қинодагы ерекше кейіпкер бейнесін ар бір зерттеу жоқ, сондықтан бул мүгедектердің қоғамға толыққанды интеграциясы жоқ және ерекше кейіпкер бейнесін ұсынуға мүмкіндік бермейді.

Зерттеу барысында библиографиялық, сипаттамалық, аналитикалық, құрақтұқ, құрақтұқ және статистикалық сияқты теориялық аудармашылар жоқ, сондықтан бұл тым жоқ. Ерекше кейіпкер бейнесін қоғамға жақын аударып, ол ақшаға, қоғамшылықтың, құқықтық және әлеуметті жаттығушы филмдерге толыққанды интеграциясы жоқ. Ерекше кейіпкер бейнесін қауіпсіз етіп, ол адамдарға мүмкіндік береді, адамдарға мүмкіндік береді, адамдарға мүмкіндік береді, адамдарға мүмкіндік береді, адамдарға мүмкіндік береді.

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Тірек сөздер: инклюзивті кино, мүмкіндігі шектеулі адам, ерекше кейіпкер, интеграция, адамгершілік, құндылық бағдарлар.

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(Алматы, Казахстан)

«ОСОБЕННЫЕ» ГЕРОИ В ИНКЛЮЗИВНОМ КИНО КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация. Тема интеграции людей с особыми потребностями в общество крайне актуальна как для всего цивилизованного мира, так и для нашей страны в частности. Во введении говорится о подписании Республикой Казахстан Конвенции о правах инвалидов в штаб-квартире ООН. Тем не менее на сегодняшний день не наблюдается полноценной интеграции лиц с инвалидностью в общество. Как известно, киноискусство является современным транслятором ценностных ориентаций, оно обладает воспитательными функциями, а также наделяет зрителя способностью видеть красоту во всем. Однако в отечественной науке до сих пор не исследовался образ «осенного» героя в кино, коим является человек с инвалидностью. Поэтому целью данной статьи является освещение в научных кругах инклюзивного кино в Казахстане и образа «осенного» героя. В исследовании были применены такие теоретические методы, как библиографический, описательный, аналитический, систематический, хронологический и статистический. В результате рассматривается влияние инклюзивного кино на трансформацию общественного мнения, также привитие гуманности социальному. В дискуссии приведены официальные данные об экранизации 248 художественных картин за период независимости Республики Казахстан, из которых лишь 17 посвящены теме инвалидности. В статье показана динамика создания фильмов об инвалидности в РК, освещается современное казахстанское инклюзивное кино на примере фильмов «Быть или не быть» (2014) и «Девушка и море» (2017) режиссеров Азиза Заирова и Мухамеда Мамырбекова. В заключении высказывается мнение о том, что инклюзивное кино может служить обществу «маяком» ценностных ориентаций и руководством в понимании и принятии граждан с ограниченными возможностями. Также предлагается прогноз развития тенденции создания картин о людях с инвалидностью.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное кино, человек с ограниченными возможностями, «особенный» герой, интеграция, гуманность, ценностные ориентации.

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