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Representation of Family and Family Upbringing in Soviet and Russian Feature Films: Quantitative and Genre Analyses

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Abstract

Feature films about family and family upbringing have significant educational potential since they do not only convey aesthetic values but also contain moral principles and contribute to promoting a certain system of norms and ideals of family relationships and family upbringing. The article made an attempt to analyse and present the dynamics of interest in Russian fiction cinema to the theme of family and family upbringing. The chosen research perspective is due to the fact that the study of scientific findings of Russian and foreign scholars on the theme allowed us to identify a contradiction between a relatively detailed elaboration of family issues in feature films and the researchers' insufficient attention to the statistical side of this theme. The analysis revealed that the period of maximum interest in the theme of family and family upbringing on the Soviet and Russian screens occurred between 1992 and 2020 when 167 feature films were released on the country's screens (about 36 % of the total number of films on this theme). In the second place is the period of the so-called "stagnation" era (1969–1985) when 150 films were created in 16 years (33 %). The same period leads in the average annual number of feature films made about family and family upbringing (about 9 films released annually). A significant decrease in the number of feature films about family and family upbringing was noted during perestroika (1986–1991) which was associated with a general decrease in film production in Russia during this historical period. In terms of genre, in the period from 1920 to 2020, family feature films were dominated by dramas – 188 films (41 %), melodramas – 144 films (31 %), and comedies – 91 (20 %). As for other genres, their number on the country's screens was only 1 %. At the same time, the dominant film genres in different periods were supplemented by other genres such as biography, thriller, action, fantasy, and musical. The number of children's films and fairy tales created by Russian filmmakers that were focused on family and family upbringing was 33 films (7 %). The theme of family and family upbringing has always found an active response in Russian feature films of various genres. The transformation of ideas about family and its values is closely related to the socio-cultural context, political and ideological changes occurring in society at different stages of development.

Keywords: family, family upbringing, media education, feature film, genre, USSR, Russia.

1. Introduction

The increasing importance of preserving and strengthening family values and the objectives of family upbringing in Russia is supported at the state level and determines a dominant vector for modern society. The Concept of State Family Policy in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025 states that "The main priorities for the successful development of the country should be strengthening the family as the basis of the state, as well as the creation of conditions under which

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the family could feel confident in the future and feel protected from risks associated with the birth of a child or several children in the family” (Rasporjazhenie..., 2014). The state policy fundamentals are aimed at preserving the best traditions of the Russian family, one of the most difficult and complex tasks being “preserving, strengthening and promoting traditional family values (including protecting the institution of marriage as a union of man and wife), ensuring the continuity of generations, caring for a decent life for the older generation, the idea of saving the people of Russia as the main strategic national priority” (Ukaz..., 2022). “In order to popularize the state policy in the family sphere, preserve traditional family values” (Ukaz..., 2023), 2024 has been declared the Year of the Family in Russia. All these measures are aimed at strengthening the institution of family and preserving the best traditional educational values that have developed in our country and correspond to its mentality, culture, cultural memory, national customs and traditions.

And a vital role in this process can be assigned to Russian feature films since cinema has a significant impact on the audience thus forming to a certain extent the picture of the world of the mass audience.

Fiction films focused on family and family upbringing have considerable educational potential since they have the ability to broadcast not only aesthetic but also moral postulates, including a certain system of values, norms and ideals of family relationships and family upbringing. This potential is especially significant in the case of Soviet and Russian films, given the peculiarities of the cultural context and the main historical aspects occurring in society today.

Transformation processes associated with representing the family image in film production are closely related to the current social changes. This is because “film art, due to its mass nature, is capable of not only reacting sensitively to changes in social development and emerging acute problems, but also having a socio-psychological, educational impact on the consciousness, worldview, and value ideas of people. Cinema can influence viewers’ values related to their relationships with relatives, children, friends, leisure activities, the level of intellectual, moral and aesthetic development of family members, their worldview, the use of moral norms and etiquette rules by family members when communicating with people around them. This is especially true for the formation of value systems among young people that the future of the family depends on” (Tyulyunova, 2020: 134). Accordingly, it is very important that fiction films should form the correct ideas about the family among the viewing audience, especially the younger generation, thus contributing to the strengthening of family ties and intergenerational kinship ties, promoting family upbringing and mutual understanding between family members.

As is known, feature films contribute to emotional intelligence and moral qualities of an individual, helping to understand various aspects of human relationships and styles of family behaviour. In addition, one can trace some societal transformations associated with the system of public values, social ideals in feature films released in different years which are reflected one way or another in family foundations, and changes taking place in society as a whole in relation to the family as a social institution, to issues of raising children, and to the culture of intra-family relations.

At the same time, it is well worth mentioning that the educational potential of films representing family and family upbringing largely depends on their quality, as well as on the viewer’s ability to critically analyze them and learn lessons from what they see, and in this context the role of film and media education for the viewing audience (especially young viewers) has become relevant (Chelysheva, 2013, 2022; Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2022).

2. Materials and methods

The material of our research is 458 Soviet and Russian feature films released from 1920 to 2020 about family and family upbringing. The main methodological principles of the study are the principle of theory and practice unity in the study of the family image in Russian feature films in the context of film and media education; a systematic approach to the studied objects including the analysis of representing the family image in feature films in terms of pedagogical, psychological, cultural, and historical approaches.

In the course of the study, we applied a comparative analysis of Soviet and Russian film production related to this theme including the analysis of historical periods and genres. The research methods include theoretical analysis and synthesis, content analysis, comparative historical analysis, quantitative and genre analyses of the above-mentioned audiovisual media texts.

3. Discussion

The theme of family and family upbringing has always been in the focus of Russian research in the humanities. Soviet teachers, psychologists, cultural scientists and sociologists thoroughly explored this theme. For example, the research findings of some Soviet scientists who were often very strongly influenced by communist ideology are devoted to analysing the theme of family and family upbringing in fiction cinema. The works written by A.S. Makarenko (Makarenko, 1947), K.K. Paramonova (Paramonova, 1976), Y.M. Rabinovich (Rabinovich, 1969, 1991) and some other authors of that period are not free from these tendencies. In our opinion, this significantly impeded a comprehensive analysis of both cultural and statistical aspects of the theme under study. At the same time, as evidenced by the analysis of the Soviet works, the authors unanimously emphasized the role and importance of films for education, including family upbringing.

A striking example of this is the famous book “Lectures on Raising Children” written by A.S. Makarenko where the famous Soviet teacher emphasized that every film should, at least for a few minutes, become the subject for discussion in the family. In his opinion, parents should ensure that children express their viewpoints, tell what they liked or disliked in the film, or what made a strong impression on them. If parents see that the child is mainly captivated only by some external events, an entertaining plot, the adventures of this or that character, then they should, with the help of questions, explain to the child the deeper and more important aspects of the film. Sometimes there is no need to ask the child any questions but only to express your opinion in their presence. To a certain extent, parents are supposed to choose which film is more desirable for their child to watch (Makarenko, 1947).

At the present stage of development in Russia, a significant amount of research is also focused on the theme of family and family upbringing. Our analysis has revealed that the theme of family and family upbringing in Russian fiction cinema is interdisciplinary in nature and approaches to this theme may vary depending on the specific field of study, methodology, and sociocultural context.

Various aspects of reflecting family in audiovisual media texts can be found in a number of dissertation studies in recent years. As examples, we can cite a number of sociological studies (Leontieva, 2022; Mishchenko, 2014; Tarasov, 2010), dissertations in cultural studies (Glebkina, 2010; Gozhanskaya, 2006), and art dissertations (Abikeeva, 2010; Sputnitskaya, 2010). Also in contemporary Russia, the family image in cinema is actively studied both within the framework of film studies and in sociological, cultural, psychological and pedagogical scientific research (Chelysheva, 2013; Chelysheva, 2022; Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2022; Obukhovski, 2021; Penzin, 1973; Tyulunova, 2020). O. Posukhova, L. Klimenko and S. Chelyshev presented the analysis of the working dynasties representation in the Soviet cinematography (Posukhova et al., 2021).

As evidenced by the analysis, most authors emphasize the role of cinema in preserving family values, customs and traditions of upbringing in the family: “Cinema, like no other art, in practice reflects the specifics of national identity, namely, it represents the artistic model of society in all its complexity – from its constituent elements – the individual and the family, to the reproduction by means of art of the actual structure of the community of people and the nation as a whole in close connection with national iconography” (Abikeeva, 2010: 3).

The well-known Russian media educators O.A. Baranov and S.N. Penzin analysed the interaction of modern media, family and school, emphasizing the key role of family traditions in education which were historically present in Russian cinema and have not lost their positions on the modern screen: “At the start of the third millennium, cinema makes us think about the order that existed since time immemorial, trying to help save the family – the most precious thing that can be in the life of each of us” (Baranov, Penzin, 2006: 36).

By the way, a few years later S.N. Penzin continued to analyse the educational potential of cinema and its role in fostering moral and aesthetic culture of the younger generation: “Film art helps “to be with everyone” and at the same time “to remain oneself.” If we turn to the three spheres in which the personality formation occurs – activity, communication and self-education, then the sphere of influence of cinema is precisely self-knowledge. Thanks to the screen, a person gets to know himself better, and the path to self-education opens before him” (Penzin, 2010: 47).

E.V. Zhelnina and L.N. Galiullova carried out a content-analysis of the family image in Russian film production where the role of cinema in promoting family values among the younger generation is emphasized: “Today the film industry is the part of mass culture that is largely responsible for shaping

the image of the family. Therefore, it is worth thinking about those images, author's positions, and worldviews that are imposed on us from the screen" (Zhel'nina, Galiullova, 2019: 70).

V.A. Obukhovski, considering the impact of Russian cinema art on the value sphere of modern youth, draws our attention to the ever-increasing role of audiovisual media texts on the modern digital generation: "Cinema is an important factor in promoting family values among young people. Young people, as representatives of generations Z and Y, are primarily readers of media texts; film culture is in demand among them as an almost prevailing form of leisure. Consequently, an emerging personality, faced with seminal problems, with the need to find an example or model of behaviour, is forced to look for solutions in the surrounding information field, including the film industry" (Obukhovski, 2021: 47).

As for foreign research, their emphasis is primarily focused on the political and ideological analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet audiovisual media texts (Dubois, 2007; Lawton, 2004; Shaw, Youngblood, 2010; Shlapentokh, 1993; Strada, 1989; Strada, Troper, 1997) instead of analysing on-screen family themes. We can also state that some foreign scientists focus on the image of family and family upbringing in Western audiovisual media texts (Albada, 2000; Cheung et al., 2022; Douglas, Olson, 1995; Fulmer, 2017; Jenkins, 2015; Kerry, 2016; Laurence, 2017; Levy, 1991; Lloyd, 2014; Ousselin, 2016; Potter, A. 2022; Sells, 2016; Staricek, 2011; Tanner et al., 2003; Zurcher et al., 2018, 2020). As a result of exploring different foreign research findings, we did not manage to find any Western studies that would touch upon the statistical aspect of the theme under study.

Thus, despite a fairly wide range of issues touched upon by Russian and Western researchers exploring the family image reflected in feature films, the statistical analysis of Russian feature film production about family and family upbringing remained outside the scope of scientific research in Russia and abroad, although, in our opinion, this angle of view can greatly expand the understanding of the studied issues in sociological and cultural terms.

4. Results

The statistical analysis of Russian film production focused on family and family upbringing can help to better understand the sociocultural evolution of the theme in Russian cinema and compare different approaches to studying it in Soviet and modern Russian historical and sociocultural contexts.

In order to trace the quantitative and genre dynamics of film production of Soviet and Russian feature films about family and family upbringing from 1920 to 2020 (in total, about 458 feature films and series were released in the USSR and Russia during this period on this theme), we followed A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov et al., 2020) and conditionally adhered to the following historical periodization of feature films about family and family upbringing:

- 1) family issues reflected in Soviet feature films of the 1920–1930s;
- 2) family and family upbringing in feature films of the "Stalinism" era and the first post-Stalin years (1931–1955);
- 3) family and family upbringing in the mirror of Soviet cinema of the "thaw" period (1956–1968);
- 4) family and family upbringing in the mirror of Soviet cinema during the "stagnation" period (1969–1985);
- 5) the family image in Russian feature films during the years of "perestroika" (1986–1991);
- 6) family and family upbringing in Russian feature films at the present stage (1992–2020).

Table 1 provides numerical data on the ratio of the number of feature films about family and family relationships released in the USSR and Russia (1920–2020).

Table 1. The ratio of the number of Soviet and Russian feature films about family and family upbringing released from 1920 to 2020

<i>Time periods</i>	<i>Number of years</i>	<i>Number of films (total)</i>	<i>Number of films (per year)</i>
1920-1930	11	12	1
1931-1955	25	19	1
1956-1968	13	71	5
1969-1985	16	150	9
1986-1991	7	39	5
1992-2020	29	167	6

If we summarize the data in [Table 1](#) into a pie chart, it will look as follows.

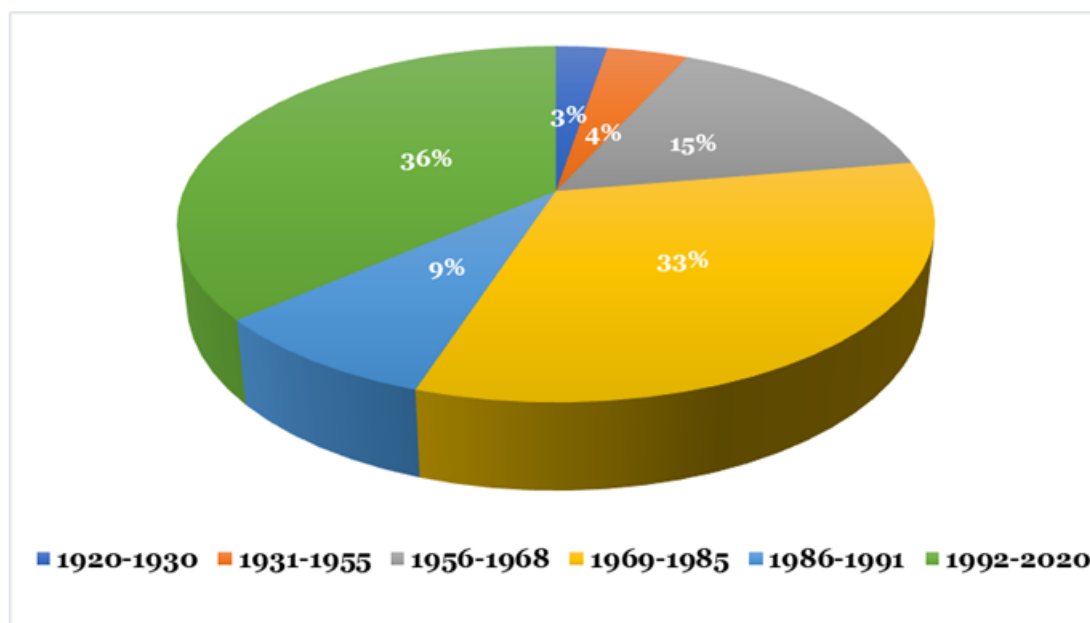


Fig. 1. The ratio of the number of Soviet and Russian feature films about family and family upbringing produced from 1920 to 2020

[Table 2](#) presents detailed data on Soviet and Russian feature films related to the theme of family and family upbringing for one to draw conclusions about its popularity and demand in Russian cinema.

Table 2. The number of Soviet and Russian feature films about family and family upbringing distributed by genres (1920–2020)

Time periods	Genres of films about family and family upbringing					Total number of films (number, %)
	Drama (number, %)	Melodrama (number, %)	Comedy (number, %)	Children's film, fairy tale (number, %)	Other genres (number, %)	
1920-1930	10 (83.3)	1 (8.3)	1 (8.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	12 (2.6)
1931-1955	6 (31.6)	7 (36.8)	1 (5.3)	5 (26.3)	0 (0.0)	19 (4.1)
1956-1968	30 (42.2)	27 (38.0)	8 (11.3)	6 (8.4)	0 (0.0)	71 (15.5)
1969-1985	56 (37.3)	39 (26.0)	35 (23.3)	19 (12.7)	1 (0.6)	150 (32.7)
1986-1991	23 (58.9)	11 (28.2)	3 (7.7)	2 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	39 (8.5)
1992-2020	63 (37.7)	59 (35.9)	43 (25.7)	1 (0.6)	1 (0.6)	167 (36.5)
Total:	188 (41.0)	144 (31.4)	91 (19.9)	33 (7.2)	2 (0.4)	458 (100.0)

If we summarize the data in [Table 2](#) into bar charts, they will look as follows.

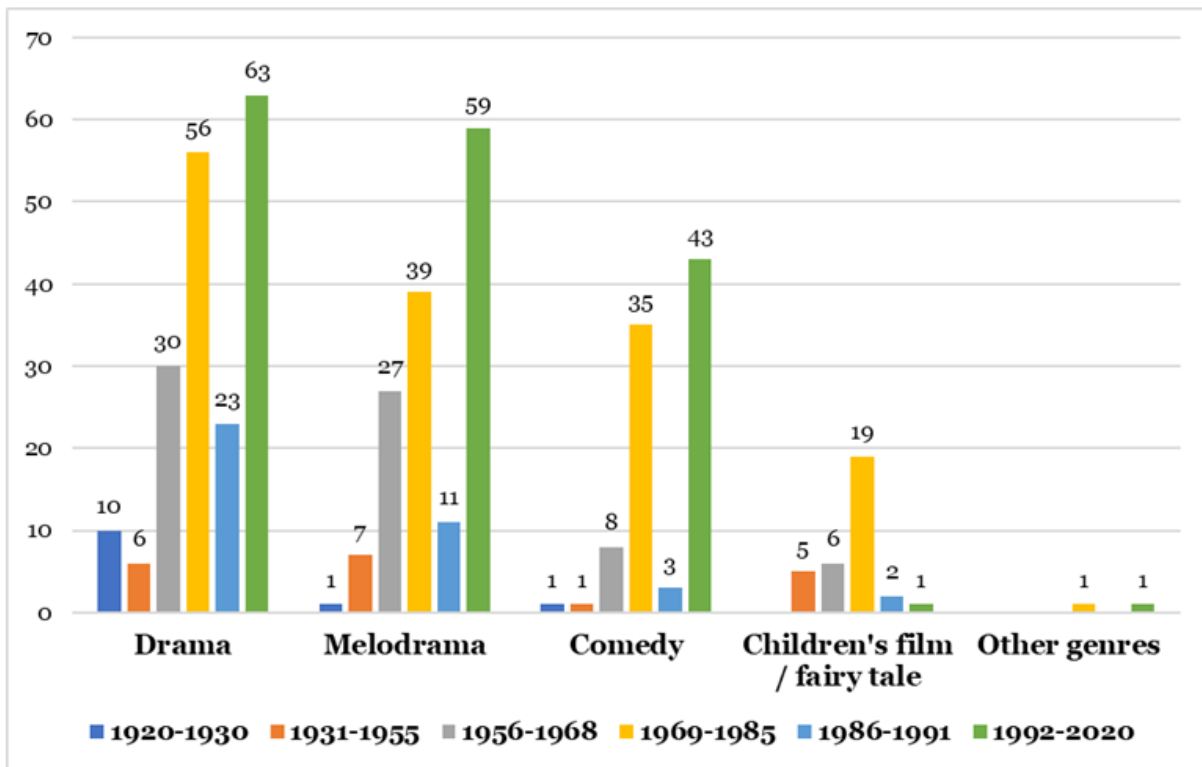


Fig. 2. The number of Soviet and Russian films about family and family upbringing distributed by time periods and genres (1920–2020)

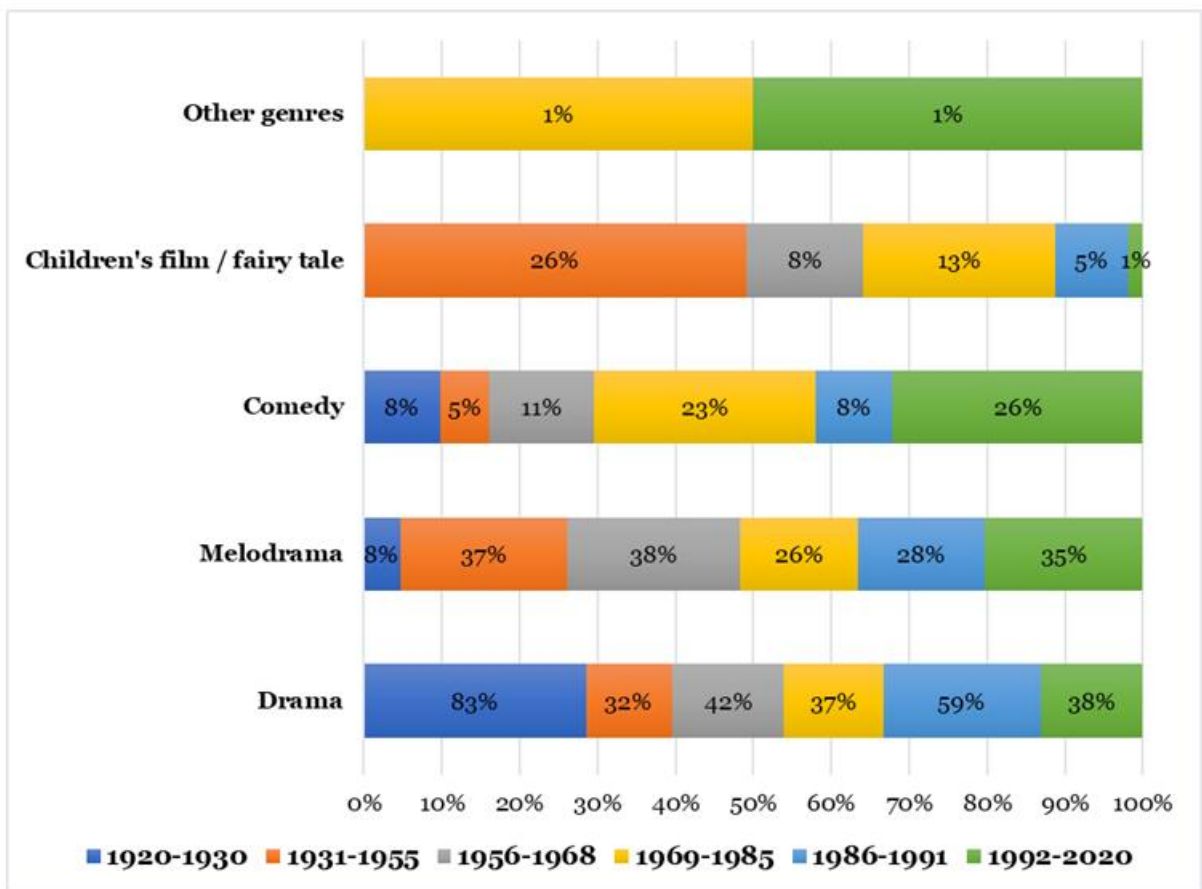


Fig. 3. The number of Soviet and Russian films about family and family upbringing distributed by time periods and genres in percentage terms (1920–2020)

According to the data presented in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#), the period of utmost popularity and interest in the theme of family and family upbringing in Russian feature films occurred in the modern Russian period (1992–2020) when 167 feature films were released (about 36 % of the total number of films on this theme). In the second place is the so-called “stagnation” period (1969–1985) when 150 films were created during 16 years (32.7 %). The same period leads in the average annual number of films about family and family upbringing (about 9 films released annually).

A significant decrease in the number of feature films about family and family upbringing was noted during the perestroika period (1986–1991). This, in our opinion, was due to the crisis and difficulties that led to a reduction in the number of films being made and a general decrease in the pace of film production in Russia in this historical period.

Also, among the issues that we attempted to trace during the analysis were the identification of dynamics and possible areas of change regarding the ratio of the number of feature films related to the theme under study, distributed by genres.

As can be seen from [Table 2](#) and [Figures 2](#) and [3](#), in terms of genre variations in the period from 1920 to 2020, family feature films were dominated by dramas – 188 films (41 %), melodramas – 144 films (31.4 %), and comedies – 91 (20 %).

The number of children’s films and fairy tales about family is significantly less – 33 (7.2 %). As for other genres, the number of such films is only less than 1 %, although it is important to note that the dominant film genres in different periods were supplemented by other genres, for example, drama was sometimes combined with a thriller (*Bear’s Wedding / Medvezh’ja svad’ba*, dir. K. Eggert, 1925; *What Senka Had / Chto u Sen’ki bylo*, dir. R. Vasilevsky, 1984), an action movie (*Deserter / Dezertir*, dir. Yu. Muzyka, 1997; *Brother / Brat*, dir. A. Balabanov, 1997), a biography (*Svetlana / Svetlana*, dir. Ye. Zvezdakov, 2018) or even a fantasy (*Tears Dropped / Slyozy kapali*, dir. G. Daneliya, 1983).

At the same time, several types of films of the dramatic genre were presented on the Russian screen: a social drama (*Son / Syn*, dir. S. Ross, 2014; *Deep Rivers / Glubokie reki*, dir. V. Bitokov, 2018), a military drama (*Legal Marriage / Zakonnyj brak*, dir. S. Mkrtchyan, 1985; *My Little Sister / Sestryonka*, dir. A. Galibin, 2019; *The Cry of Silence / Krik tishiny*, dir. V. Potapov, 2019), a criminal drama (*Voroshilov Sharpshooter / Voroshilovskiy strelok*, dir. S. Govorukhin, 1999).

Soviet and Russian melodramas about family and family upbringing are also sometimes combined with other genres, for example, a melodrama-thriller (*The End of the Season / Konets sezona*, dir. K. Khudyakov, 2019) or a melodrama-fantasy (*He’s a Dragon / On – drakon*, dir. I. Dzhenidubayev, 2015).

Some dramas are based on classical literary works and are their film adaptations (*Fathers and Sons / Ottsy i deti*, dir. A. Bergunker, N. Rashevskaya, 1958; *The House with the Mezzanine / Dom s mezoninom*, dir. Ya. Bazelyan, 1960; *A Nest of Gentry / Dvorjanskoe gnezdo*, dir. A. Konchalovsky, 1969; *The Brothers Karamazov / Brat’ja Karamazovy*, dir. I. Pyryev, 1969; *A Cruel Romance / Zhestokiy romans*, dir. E. Ryazanov, 1984; *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District / Ledi Makbet Mcenskogo uezda*, dir. R. Balayan, 1989; *Heart is Not a Stone / Serdce ne kamen’*, dir. L. Pchylkin, 1989).

Soviet and Russian children’s feature films are represented mainly by fairy tales and adventure films. The examples here include Russian folk tales and films of the adventure genre (*Children of the Partisan / Deti partizana*, dir. L. Golub, N. Figurovsky, 1954; *The Kidnapping / Pohishhenie*, dir. V. Tarasenko, 1984) or a musical film (*Mary Poppins, Goodbye! / Meri Poppins, do svidaniya!*, dir. L. Kvinikhidze, 1983).

5. Conclusion

Thus, the analysis allowed us to conclude that the theme of family and family upbringing represents one of the vital areas of social development in our country. Preserving and strengthening the best family traditions, values and foundations that have been accumulated in the history and culture of our people are a priority area of the state policy and have become essential vectors for further development of education, science and culture.

Any social and public changes are reflected in one way or another in culture and art production. Feature cinema is no exception here. At different stages of Russian feature cinema, the theme of family and family upbringing was invariably present. At the same time, emphasis and priorities changed depending on the sociocultural context, historical and social changes occurring in society.

At different stages of development, the importance of issues related to the educational potential of feature films remained unchanged. This is evidenced by numerous studies of the theme under study presented in different years in cultural, pedagogical, sociological, and art contexts.

Meanwhile, the study of Russian and foreign scientific research on the family image reflected in feature films allowed us to note quite close attention to family issues in feature films and, at the same time, insufficient knowledge of the statistical side of this theme. Turning to this side of the study, it seems to us, will make it possible to present more extensive and detailed ideas about the issues under study in sociological and cultural contexts.

Over the years, the theme of family and family upbringing has been presented in different genres of Russian feature films. The interest of filmmakers and audiences in this theme is dictated by the enduring value of family in a person's life, its importance for individual and social well-being. That is why the presented theme is significant in the context of film and media education aimed at developing the skills of the younger generation to analyse, critically perceive and creatively master the media space.

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