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The Image of the Teacher in Soviet Feature Films about the War

Ilya Hazanov ^{a, *}

^a Kurgan State University, Russian Federation

Abstract

In Russia, 2025 has been declared the Year of Defender of the Fatherland. One of the goals of educational institutions is to preserve the memory of the heroic victory in the Great Patriotic War as an element of spiritual continuity of generations. Patriotism in Russia is both the foundation of state ideology and a natural component of the worldview of citizens. The article is devoted to Soviet feature films about the Great Patriotic War, which depict teachers. Among the typical characteristics of the teacher's image are moral fortitude, loyalty to pedagogical service, spiritual closeness to children, and activity in the struggle. The main contribution of the teacher to the victory is the moral education of young people. The author substantiates that the idealization of the teacher's image is not a distortion of reality, but a necessary way of creating an artistic image in cinema. In the context of developing media literacy of future teachers, one form of professional training in the process of studying the image of teachers in Soviet cinema is proposed educational project with elements of discussion, including a retrospective and pedagogical analysis of the personal, professional and communicative culture of teachers shown in Soviet war films.

Keywords: media education technology, Soviet feature films, image of a teacher, Great Patriotic War, future teachers.

1. Introduction

80 years ago, the Great Patriotic War ended, which became a huge test and a glorious feat for the Soviet people. The Soviet people made great sacrifices in the noble cause of saving the world from Nazism. The war was won thanks to high morale, dedication, and the unity of Soviet society, where both the army and the civilian population worked together for a common victory. Teachers were at the forefront of shaping the worldview of young people. They inspired young people to help their parents and the country. The Soviet generation of the 1930s and 1940s had high patriotism – this was undoubtedly due to the merit of thousands of school teachers and teachers from other educational institutions.

The education of the modern generation of Russian youth is based on traditional values of continuity, respect for ancestors, readiness to serve one's country and the humanistic cause of peace and cooperation with other peoples and countries. The defense of the Fatherland is a sacred duty for the people of Russia. Cinematography – both Soviet and modern – creates historical pictures about the great victory with a serious contribution of teachers.

Media literacy is recognized as one of the key components of teachers' professional competence, as it directly influences the value and emotional sphere and determines the effectiveness of interaction between teachers and students. Media literacy emerges as a critical skill

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: hazanovilya@gmail.com (I.Ya. Hazanov)

necessary to navigate the complexities of the digital age and critically evaluate information from diverse sources (Začellari, Reçi, 2024).

A pressing goal of modern research in the field of media education and the formation of media literacy is to identify the possibilities of cinema in the professional training of future teachers. In pedagogical education, effective integration of technology enhances learning by complementing human expertise, fostering critical thinking, and facilitating meaningful educator-student interactions (Wilder et al., 2024). The holistic teacher education is sensitive to the lived experiences of student teachers and their teacher educators, helps them to interpret new experiences together, and to deepen their learning about themselves, each other, and the world, now and into the future (Heinz, 2024). The formation of civic qualities of student youth cannot be considered without the relationship with the media space (Chelysheva, 2021).

Using the example of screen arts, we can most clearly trace how the “translation” of the entire diversity of forms of human culture’s existence into artistic and figurative form occurs (Kutsenko, 2022). In the formation of a civil-patriotic position, works of art that represent the image of the Great Patriotic War on a sensory, emotional level are of the utmost importance, since the life experience, including the emotional experience, of people who participated in the Great Patriotic War cannot be conveyed only by purely informational, non-artistic means (Filonenko et al., 2015). Art is capable of raising the prestige of individual professions, shaping tastes, awakening interest in work, and promoting professional dignity and self-respect. Moreover, of all the arts, cinema has been the leader in achieving this social function in the last hundred years (Shipulina, 2010). Educational cinema provides an opportunity to look into the essence of phenomena hidden from human eyes, which allows us to assert that it can be widely used in teaching pedagogy (Naumenko, Shavrygina, 2017). Media content can shape the audience’s beliefs, values, and behavioral models (Gálik et al., 2024). Watching and analyzing feature films gives future teachers an idea of certain types of human behavior in society. The heroes of the best works of cinema are people of strong intellect, great will, and a solid character, who are at the center of the main problems of the era, clearly understanding their civic and human duty (Sitnikova, 2020). It should be taken into account that the image of a teacher can be perceived differently by representatives of different generations (Ölçüm, Polat, 2016).

Historical memory is becoming increasingly mediatized and less connected to the lived experience of the generations that experienced the war, and is oriented toward the pragmatic presentist use of their cultural heritage and established narratives (Igaeva, Nikolai, 2022). Therefore, it can be assumed that the examination of Soviet films about the Great Patriotic War gives us a more realistic idea of the events and experiences of people of that era, since these films were created by directors, scriptwriters, actors who actually lived through this war. Using media education technology in the professional training of future teachers, we can realize the educational potential of these films and present students with guidelines for analysis and correlation with their own worldviews.

The purpose of my research: to identify the main characteristics of the image of a teacher in Soviet feature films about the Great Patriotic War, to determine the possibilities of using these films in the process of developing media literacy of future teachers.

2. Materials and methods

Theoretical analysis of scientific works on cinematography allowed to identify common approaches to constructing the image of a teacher in cinema, including films about the Great Patriotic War. To identify the main characteristics of the image of a teacher in Soviet feature films, content analysis and retrospective analysis were used within the framework of the principles of media pedagogy. The website *Kino-teatr. Ru* (Kino-teatr.ru, 2025) was used to study the history of film creation. To preliminarily identify students' knowledge of the films under study, a frontal survey was conducted, the participants of which were 72 students mastering the profession of a teacher.

3. Discussion

Media literacy is regarded as being a conglomeration of a great many skills including the ability to read, evaluate, analyze, imagine possibilities, deconstruct messages, recognize patterns, challenge meanings, judge credibility, decipher sender intent, counter-argue, dig for truth, avoid influence, and produce messages. It is often characterized as being composed of many other factors

beyond skills, such as many kinds of knowledge, a variety of behaviors, and motivations (Potter, 2022). Media education means teaching about media, not just teaching with or through media (Buckingham, 2019). When teaching media literacy, special attention should be paid to the development of critical literacy (Afrilyasanti et al., 2023; Austin, Domgaard, 2024; Brown, Croft, 2020; West, 2019).

It is necessary to take into account the need to develop the readiness of young specialists to work in the conditions of media multitasking (Yin et al., 2024; Wannagat et al., 2025). Media literacy education requires the use of teaching methods that develop critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration and creativity (Hobbs et al., 2022). In the process of developing media literacy, it is important to consider two basic categories: media messages (information that media creators want to convey to advance their goals) and media effects (ideas, attitudes, and behavior of the viewer; the media message and the audience to which it is broadcast determine the type and degree of effect) (Barman, 2024). The media effect of a feature film is largely determined by the understanding of the historical era it reflects and the emotional response of the audience, which, based on empathy, finds “co-event” with the characters of the film. Media education that does not address the emotional aspect of people's interactions with screens should be considered insufficient (Ferrés, Piscitelli, 2012). Film literacy enables us to put a film in various contexts and supports critical thinking towards film messages and film production (Glotov, 2023).

S.M. Norris (Norris, 2016) notes that the war film occupies an important place, arguably the most important, in Russian film history. Because of its significance, the war movie established a series of “firsts” in Russian cinematic culture. In the case of the Russo-Soviet war film, one of the central ready-made cultural constructions has been the notion of defense of the motherland. The motherland became a way to construct a dynamic entity, one to be loved and defended, and a term that could easily transition to different political situations (and changed political borders). Even in the midst of war, Soviet films focused on human relationships as they were warped by the experience of conflict. Despite the large-scale deployment of World War II as a new kind of founding myth for the Soviet state, official ideology widely denounced militarism (Afinogenov, 2021).

School education always reflected the social processes taking place in the state. Soviet cinema, which was part of the state ideological system, not only transmitted the ideas and attitudes of the authorities, but also reflected reality. Despite its conservatism, the school in feature films of those years appears as a living, developing organism (Rybakova, Ivanov, 2023). Russian scientists note that the presentation of a teacher in Soviet cinema is associated with authority as a characteristic of the image of a teacher, instilled by Soviet culture, and the full respect for this profession that corresponds to this image. In Soviet and Russian films, a teacher is presented as a mentor in life issues, ready to listen to and understand his students. Moreover, in Soviet cinema, a teacher is shown as an ideal (or striving for the ideal) role model for students, an educator, first of all, of moral and ethical values (Kargapolova et al., 2024).

A.K. Bernatonyte (Bernatonyte, 2023) emphasizes that the image of a teacher is an embodied myth of the time: times change – the image of a teacher changes. In the cinema of the 1930s – 940s, a teacher was absolutized to the point of idealization, since he carried the light of knowledge, the goodness of the soul and a very correct behavioral model. The teacher personified moral perfection, carried within himself the ideas of a bright future, bringing them closer by the very fact of his existence. That is, the teacher of the present was an idealized image of a person of the future.

D.V. Tsvetkov and A.Yu. Timakova (Tsvetkov, Timakova, 2017) believe that in Soviet cinematography the emphasis was placed on the image of a teacher as an exemplary, textured person, devoid of any negative qualities and serving as a positive example. In modern Russian cinematography, as the authors note, the teacher is already becoming less textured, he is endowed with certain «human» qualities, he begins to resemble a real, living person. The authors believe that this should be a character whose positive qualities dominate over the negative ones. Creating the right image of a teacher in cinematography today is a very difficult task for modern scriptwriters and directors.

I do not think that Soviet cinema did not reflect the human qualities of teachers or reflected them in a completely unrealistic way. A teacher in Soviet cinema, indeed, always made a moral choice in favor of service and self-sacrifice for the sake of his students. Service and duty are the basis of the teaching profession. Soviet cinema combined the features of a work of art, which in its essence is called upon to show aesthetically high examples of worldview and behavior, and signs of

state ideology. Idealization and typification are the key principles of constructing an artistic image. A work of art inevitably has educational tasks. The main thing for a teacher in all historical eras is loyalty to professional values.

During the Great Patriotic War, the values of saving – both physical and moral – their students, inspiring them with their own example of fortitude, helping adults in defending the country came to the fore. If teachers betrayed their professional values, it would deal a heavy blow to the worldview of their students and threaten the existence of the country. Could Soviet cinema afford to show such a thing? Viewers look for support for their convictions in a feature film, not disappointment. The slightest doubts in the high spirituality of the teachers could destroy their faith in the victory of their people in the war. I believe that cinema in any period of history should focus on the high moral principles of teachers. Cinema should not refuse to show situations of moral choice. But this choice should be – even in situations where there is a threat to the life of a teacher – in favor of protecting their students, making sacrifices for them.

This is not unreality, this is a demonstration of the correct performance of professional duty. This is an example for those who are mastering the teaching profession, since full-fledged professional training is impossible without relying on positive examples of professional behavior. If art stops offering the viewer a positive moral image of a person, it will stop performing the functions of art. If a teacher does not carry kindness, service, loyalty, fortitude, then he is not a professional in pedagogy. The absence of negative characteristics in the image of a person is not necessarily a distortion of reality. It is an emphasis on the positive in order to form the worldview of the viewer, first of all, the young viewer. Finally, the truth of the high moral state of teachers is proven by the result of the Great Patriotic War – a victory achieved by the unity and incredible efforts of the people, including children and youth, who selflessly helped their older comrades.

4. Results

For analysis, we selected several Soviet feature films about the Great Patriotic War that featured teachers.

1. *Young Partisans* (1942, directed by Lev Kuleshov, Igor Savchenko). A collection of films created during the war. The film shows how civilians, including children, help the army and partisans in the fight against the occupiers. Children were scouts, couriers, and delivered food to the partisan detachment. The main thing in the film is their spiritual connection with adults, their common goal – to fight the enemy. The interaction with the partisans is coordinated by the teacher Ksenia Andreyevna Kartashova. She is a middle-aged woman, determined, full of dignity, and has absolute authority among the children. The children refuse to obey the Nazi soldiers who burst into the lesson. “They only listen to me here!” the teacher proudly says. When an enemy soldier threatens to shoot the teacher, she, maintaining her composure, addresses the children with a farewell speech: “Study well. And remember this lesson of yours!” One of the students decides to risk his life to attract the attention of the partisans and call them for help. The teacher and her students are saved. The Nazi soldiers are shown in the film stereotypically, even caricaturedly, but the real thing here is the unity of the teacher and students, which helps unarmed people fighting for their freedom to stand firm.

2. *The Village Teacher* (1947, directed by Mark Donskoy). A young girl, Varvara Martynova, who graduated from a capital gymnasium, decides to devote herself to the education of peasant children. She sincerely believes in self-sacrifice and is ready to live for the sake of teaching in difficult conditions. She managed to earn great respect from both her students and their parents. High internal culture, patience, and intelligence allow her to find a common language with people of different social strata. She opens the world around her to peasant children and supports talented students. Thus, she tries to arrange for one of her students to enter a city gymnasium, but the social system of tsarist Russia does not allow this. However, Varvara Vasilievna convinces the student: “You will definitely study!” – and, indeed, after the socialist revolution, he becomes a professor. The viewer seems to live through all the important periods of the country's history together with the teacher – the First World War, the revolution, the 1920s – 1930s, the Great Patriotic War.

Varvara Vasilievna is incredibly brave – she is not afraid to come to the people who were going to kill her. She knows how to convince. The news of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War comes during a meeting with her first students, now adults. Both she and the students are calm and confident that they will fulfill their duty. She personally sees the students off to the front,

her presence is very dear to them. She holds back her tears. The topic of the essay that she offers to schoolchildren in class is: "To live means to serve the Motherland".

The basis for this essay is the story of the feat of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. The teacher really values the letters of her students from the front. She instills faith in victory in schoolchildren. And on Victory Day, a meeting of her students who returned from the war takes place. "My children are everywhere!" – these words mean the meaning of the teacher's life and its noble result. The film shows that the state appreciates the teacher's work and awards her the Order of Lenin. One of the ideas of the film is that teachers do not necessarily have to participate in battles at the front. They make their significant contribution to victory in the war in a different way – they educate worthy citizens.

3. *Trubachev's Detachment Fights* (1957, directed by Ilya Frez). Moscow schoolchildren find themselves in Nazi-occupied territory in the summer of 1941 and join the fight. Teacher Sergei Nikolaevich feels a keen sense of responsibility for preserving the lives of his students. Most of the class is sent to Moscow by train, but several boys and girls are forced to stay behind. The teacher is an inspiration to them, a source of strength and calm. His students quickly become friends with local teenagers and work together. They begin to understand that war is not a game, not an adventure, and requires discipline and organization, although they retain some childish naivety. Sergei Nikolaevich becomes a scout of a partisan detachment. One of the main characters of the film, schoolboy Vasek Trubachev, risks his life, distracts Nazi soldiers and saves his teacher. The naturalness of friendship and mutual assistance, love for the Motherland in the understanding of children, their initiative – this is the main result of the pedagogical work of Sergei Nikolaevich.

4. *Mom, I'm Alive!* (1985, directed by Igor Dobrolyubov). The film shows the struggle of the heroic population of Belarus against the occupiers. Autumn 1943. Teacher Domna Filippovna opens a forest school for children in a partisan camp. However, 12-year-old scout Petya Dym, awarded the medal "For Courage", is sure that he must take revenge on the invaders for his murdered mother and burned village.

"Mom, I'm alive!" is an inscription for his mother that Petya Dym, having entered his native village during reconnaissance, writes on the remains of the stove of his burnt house. This is a sign of his faith in the spiritual connection with his mother. Saving the children, Domna Filippovna tries to continue her studies. She is faithful to her pedagogical duty, maintaining composure even in critical situations. The teacher and the children who remain with her constantly risk their lives, they are persecuted by the occupiers. Petya shows leadership and responsibility for the lives of his schoolmates and the old teacher. The teacher tries to push war out of the teenager's mind as something unnatural. School, education – this is natural, as it is an element of ordinary peaceful life. The teacher is forced to teach children of different ages, in the absence of basic conditions. But she maintains all the traditional rules of the school and thus shows that war is not able to conquer free people. She is strict, but carries great kindness to children separated from their parents. The film shows the sacrifice of adults who sought to preserve the future of their country – children's lives.

There are some general typical characteristics of the image of a teacher in Soviet feature films about the Great Patriotic War:

1. Confidence in their pedagogical mission. This mission is to save their students, both physically and spiritually.

2. Unquestioned authority among children as a reflection of the authority of the school in Soviet society.

3. Knowledge of child psychology, the ability to speak to children in a language they understand. Soviet teachers did not allow familiarity in communication, but became close, kindred spirits for their students. Children matured early during the war, and teachers understood this. On the one hand, they spoke to children as equals. On the other hand, they tried to return to their students at least some features of children's perception of the world around them.

4. Optimism, calm, endurance and faith in victory, inevitably transmitted to students and helped them to survive difficult trials.

5. Teachers become a connecting active link between adults and children in the fight against the invaders. Teachers encourage children to help their parents in achieving victory as a common family goal.

6. In the conditions of moral choice that everyone faces in war, teachers remain sincere patriots of their country and the teaching profession. Teachers in alliance with their students win, since their actions are based on honesty, selflessness, the desire for freedom and moral conviction.

In a frontal survey of 72 students of Kurgan Pedagogical College majoring in “Elementary School Teaching” and “Corrective Pedagogy in Primary Education”, I found that more than 80 % of respondents considered it important to study feature films about the Great Patriotic War. However, the vast majority of students did not focus their attention on the images of teachers in these films. None of the students are familiar with the films described above. Students agree to study these films as part of an academic project or a pedagogical film club.

For more effective development of media literacy of future teachers, I propose to use the educational project “The Image of the Teacher in Soviet Cinema about the Great Patriotic War: Dialogue of Generations” within the framework of academic disciplines in the module “Educational Activity, Including Classroom Management”. The project type is informational and research. The project is carried out in microgroups of no more than four people and involves making a presentation with elements of discussion.

Project implementation algorithm: 1. Conduct a content analysis of Internet sites dedicated to Soviet and post-Soviet Russian cinema. Select feature films about the Great Patriotic War, in which the characters are teachers. 2. Watch the selected films, formulate the main ideas, including in the field of moral education. 3. Highlight the key scenes with the participation of teachers. 4. Analyze the images of teachers in these films, revealing their level of personal and professional culture, ideological and moral attitudes, features of interaction with students, adult compatriots in the common fight against enemies. Show the influence of socio-historical conditions of life on the image of teachers. 5. Organize a group discussion on the following questions: a) what goals do teachers set in their professional activities? Are these goals “eternal” or do they depend on a specific historical era? b) how do teachers behave in critical situations, what influences their behavior? c) are the images of teachers idealized? Do they reflect the real personalities of teachers or are they guided only by the ideological attitudes of the state? d) Are the images of teachers in Soviet feature films about the Great Patriotic War guidelines for your professional activities? How do these images relate to the teachers you have met in your life, as well as to the images of teachers in contemporary Russian cinema?

The result of this educational project may be open screenings of the studied Soviet feature films about the Great Patriotic War for a wider student audience. These screenings involve discussion of the films and may be dedicated to Victory Day and Teacher's Day in Russia. This project is relevant for the formation of motivational and value components of media literacy of future teachers.

5. Conclusion

Media education is a life process and way of living that helps us in behaving with others and understanding others (Omar, Merah, 2024). It should be taken into account that in the public consciousness it is audiovisual media (cinema and television) that determine the qualities that characterize the image of the “ideal” teacher, which should be assessed as a system of requirements imposed on him. Modern audiovisual media texts should support and form images of real teachers who understand and keenly feel their responsibility for the future of the country (Prigarina, 2022). Media texts form stereotypes that can influence society in general and individuals in particular. At the same time, these stereotypes are borrowed from real life and, being slightly or significantly transformed, they produce new stereotypes affecting the community. War films evolved in response to political, social and cultural changes in the country, but always had an ideological function. War films were used to mobilize the population, to generate patriotism and to reinforce state ideology (Youngblood, 2007). Cinema constructs images of teachers from a range of ideologies that can be echoed in other expressions of social discourse, and in turn these cinematic constructions again influence the imagination and social discourse (Gagliardi, 2019).

Modern researchers rightly note that the national idea is the core of the development and stability of society, the foundation of the national and spiritual perception of the world, a storehouse of the people's imperishable values formed in the course of historical existence. The national idea formulates what is already inherent in the Russian people. It has been suffered through the entire Russian history, the main thing in it is the spiritual and moral ideal, which must be revealed and conveyed to all who are interested in their native history and love it (Kiselev, Lubkov, 2024). I believe that the image of a teacher, for whom a high spiritual image is an invariable element of pedagogical professionalism, must be reflected in cinema. This is an element of the national idea of Russia. Soviet cinema systematically created this image, and viewers

believed in the correspondence of this image to real life. Many highly moral teachers, faithful to their duty, live and work in modern Russia. These teachers are the key to successful education of the younger generation. Modern Russia, in the reflection of the image of teachers in cinema, undoubtedly needs optimism and faith in the spiritual foundation of education, continuity in the construction of the artistic image of the teacher is necessary. Modern students – future teachers should become the heirs of the best moral qualities of the teachers of the Soviet period.

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