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Borat Revisited: Film, Image Building and Emerging Tourism in Kazakhstan

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This paper examines the relationship of film representations with an emerging tourism in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. It argues that films depicting Kazakhstan will support the future development of tourism's potential in the Central Asian country. This paper further argues that the film industry's globalization processes of production, distribution and exhibition are interconnected with this tourism development and serve as an effective promotional strategy.

Although the film *Borat* in 2006 had made fun of an imaginary Kazakhstan, the country had responded to these misrepresentations with an image building multi-million dollar 'Heart of Eurasia' campaign and the production of feature films showing the country's mythic past. As the only Central Asian country to be nominated for an academy award with the Genghis Khan biography *Mongol* in 2008 Kazakhstan has used film to counter what it perceived as negative representations. It has a well-developed film production infrastructure and a government commitment to fund production. Yet recently it has also come to realize that *Borat* has had a positive influence and boosted its tourism.

Although tourism in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic and the ninth-largest country by area, has been largely underdeveloped, its government has now started a tourism initiative, 'Tourism Industry Development Plan 2020'. Its goals include seeking investment, the creation of new jobs in a tourism industry and increasing tourism's contribution to the country's GDP. This is at a time when it is launching a ten part television series *Kazakh Khanate*, based on *Game of Thrones*, as a 'visual extravaganza' of its history and the establishment of the first Khanate in 1465. Targeting Chinese, Turkish and English speaking markets, this series may generate appealing representations for the growth of tourism.

The country offers a range of natural settings including some of the highest mountains in the world to the vast steppe region, lakes, and desert. This contrasts with its cosmopolitan cities with well-developed cultural events, a rich diversity of cultures, historic sites and traditional villages. Furthermore, its wild landscape and varied weather has afforded some development of extreme sports opportunities, offering as well golf, skiing and the highest ice skating rink in the world.

The research for this paper uses an analysis of industry trade press and industry data for production, exhibition and distribution within a theoretical framework of Tomlinson's theory of globalization and culture. This theory is based on the conceptualization of cultural representations and economy as forming complex connectivities in global markets. This research analyzes these connectivities to better understand the synergistic relationship of film and the tourism. It concludes that new film representations may have a positive influence for tourism growth in Kazakhstan.