



From Mongols to Television and Cinema

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Introduction

The *Mongols* (Mughulhā, 1973) despite its name, is not a historical film. Instead, it symbolically portrays the difficult psychological state of a director and, more broadly, addresses television and cinema in the 1970s Iran, the obstacles to their expansion, and the harms resulting from their development by applying history. In other words, the main issue of the film is about art itself, cinema, media, their representational nature, and their role in Iranian society. It blends the past, present, and future metaphorically, to construct and critique the status quo.¹ Film is one of the innovative (avant-garde) and unique films in the realm of Iranian cinema of its time. Unlike the films called *Filmfārsī* of the era, *The Mongols* is devoid of romantic and sexual themes and its concept seemed idealistic at the time of its creation.

It is evident that this inclination and selection are connected to the director's (Parvīz Kīmīyāvī) education and occupation in France and possibly his familiarity with French New Wave cinema and Surrealism. Kīmīyāvī's cinema, even due to many of its inherent elements such as ambiguity, uncertainty, narrative rupture and breaking of time, reference to cinema and its satire, distancing the viewer from the world of film and being open to interpretation, is also recognized as postmodern cinema.² Film meets most characteristics which Naficy categorized for Italian neorealism including using long takes, extended shots, filming

in outdoor and natural locations and inclusion of non-professional actors alongside.³

Meanwhile, *The Mongols* is the first film within the Iranian New Wave cinema prior to the Islamic Revolution that can be categorized under the genre of meta-cinema. The most prominent feature of meta-cinema—also referred to as reflective cinema—is its effort to demystify the constructed reality presented by dominant or mainstream cinema.⁴ Meta-cinema represents a form of engagement with and critique of modernity, as cinema itself is a central institution of modernity; hence, any discourse on the role of cinema within society inherently reflects a broader debate surrounding modernity. Critique functions as one of the core conceptual elements of meta-cinema, capable of targeting society at large, the cinematic industry, its creators, and even its audience.⁵

The foundational narrative of *The Mongols* revolves around a critique of television as a modern phenomenon within the context of a developing Iranian society, thereby positioning the film as one of the pioneering works of Iranian meta-cinema. Within this cinematic mode, the director seeks to expose the backstage processes of filmmaking and its techniques to the viewer. In *The Mongols*, Kamrān Shīrdil advances this approach by unveiling the true identity of the “Mongols” depicted in the film—Turkmen inhabitants of Gurgān. Moreover, Kīmīyāvī introduces visual effects techniques used to alter the appearance of actors through the explanations of a television presenter—portrayed by Bahman Farmānārā—thus further engaging the audience in a reflexive cinematic experience.

The meta-cinematic tradition initiated by Kīmīyāvī prior to the revolution was later continued in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema through films such as *Close-Up* (1990) by ‘Abbās Kiyārūstamī, in which Kiyārūstamī endeavors to present certain behind-the-scenes realities of cinema in a quasi-documentary format. Similarly, *Hello Cinema* (Salām Sīnimā, 1995), direct-

³Shahīn Muḥammadī Zarghān, “Sāyah-yi Bād; Nīgāhī bih Film-i Mughulhā,” *Filmpan*, December 15, 2021, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://filmpan.ir/?p=4320>

⁴Parviz Jahed, “Sīnimā-yi Utupiyāyī-i Parvīz Kīmīyāvī,” *cine-eye.net*, April 2020, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://cine-eye.net/featured/سینمای-اوتوپیاپی-پرویز-کیمیایوی>

⁵Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Vol. 2: *The Industrializing Years 1941–1978* (Durham: Duck University Press, 2011), 351; For characteristics of Iranian cinema including the influence of Soviet Social Realism and New German Cinema and French New Wave see Hamid Dabashi, *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema* (Mage Publishers, 2007).

⁶Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1985), 14.

⁷Lisa Konrat, *Metafilm: Forms and Functions of Self-Reflexivity in Postmodern Film* (Riga: VDM Publishing, 2010), 55.

⁶For example, see: Mahdī Malikī and Rāmīn ‘Alāyī, “Mālikhūliyā dar Sīnimā-yi Āvāngārd-i Parvīz Kīmīyāvī,” *Sikafilm*, June 04, 2024, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://kadasava.ir/981-2/>

⁷Behzād ‘Ishqī, “Kīmīyāvī va bīnī-i Kli’ upātrā,” *Naqd-i Sīnimā* 8 (summer 1994): 185.

ed by Muhsin Makhmalbāf, is another significant example of meta-cinema in the post-revolutionary era, where the filmmaker explores the public’s desire for stardom and uses this theme to reflect upon both cinema and society. An additional dimension of *The Mongols’* influence on Iranian cinema after the revolution is evident in the recurring portrayal of directors in lead roles. Bahman Farmānārā—who, notably, also appears in *The Mongols*—plays the role of a film director within the film in his own post-revolutionary work, *Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine* (*Bū-yi Kāfur, ‘Atr-i Yās*).

The film won the Special Jury Prize at the Tehran International Film Festival in 1973. Among Kīmīyāvī’s featured films, *The Mongols* was the only one to be released to the public. However, Marxist critics in Iran viewed modernist films like this as a form of formalist intellectualism devoid of social ideals and “the masses” and were hostile to them.⁶ *The Mongols* was released for a few weeks at the Capri Cinema — the closest cinema to the University of Tehran, now called Bahman Cinema — and during this limited time, it faced widespread protests from students, mostly influenced by Marxist thought.⁷

The Mongols stands out as a pioneering film of its time for its focus on Iranian ethnic groups and its departure from the typical portrayal of the capital city’s culture. The film’s opening credits begin with a song performed by a Turkmen folk singer and end with the same melody. The Turkmen people, possibly from Gurgān, wear their traditional and local attire and speak in their own dialect. Similarly, the villagers wear their local clothing and speak in their own dialect, which may not be easily comprehensible to Persian-speaking viewers. Sufi and Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mīrzā, two central characters of the film, also wear their own distinctive and possibly authentic attire. When the Turkmen people in the film transform into Mongols, their clothing resembles that of Buddhist monks.





Figure 1: Poster for The Mongols (Mughulhā), directed by Parvīz Kīmīyāvī, 1973.

Story and Characters

Kīmīyāvī appears in this film in his real-life role as a director, while also playing the role of a television employee who must travel to Zāhidān, in far east Iran, to expand the communication network between the capital and the provinces. Kīmīyāvī was the first to use the innovative idea of playing his own real-life role, later adopted by ‘Abbās Kiyārustamī in *Close-Up* (1990) and Muhsin Makhmalbāf *Hello Cinema* (1995).

Following a conversation with his wife, the director devises a clever plan to achieve two goals in a single action. During his one-year mission in Zāhidān, he intends to create his favorite film. The film’s theme aligns with his wife’s thesis on the Mongol invasion of Iran. As the director’s wife immerses herself in writing her thesis on the Mongol invasion, Kīmīyāvī’s mind is overrun by the Turkmen extras whom he has cast as Mongolian warriors, disrupting his mental tranquility. This turmoil even manifests in the film’s sole brief intimate moment, representing the couple’s marital relationship. The haunting imagery of the Mongol invasion once again intrudes, hindering the director’s ability to engage in intimacy. In an earlier scene, the director’s wife outlines her reasons for opposing their trip to Zāhidān,

⁸Behzād 'Ishqī, "Kīmiyāvī va bīnī-i Kli' upātrā," *Naqd-i Sīnimā* 8 (summer 1994): 185.

⁹Sa'īd Jamshīdīpūr: "Gūl-i Sīnimā ru Khurdīm! Naqd-i Film-i Mughulhā," *honarist.com*, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://www.honarist.com/2019/12/02/the-mongols-movie>

mentioning the deterioration of her marital relationship with the director as one of them. Kīmiyāvī seems to suggest that the proliferation of television—featuring programs reminiscent of its own era—contributes to the erosion of emotional connections among family members and even a decline in intimate relationships.⁸

The director accompanies a crew on a mission to install a big aerial tower in Zāhidān, but instead finds himself running aimlessly through the desert in various shots. After installing the big aerial, the exhausted and disoriented director stumbles upon a film reel buried beneath the sand, possibly representing the film he had intended to make. He unearths the reel and follows it until he reaches the base of the big aerial, where he is ambushed and captured by Mongols who brandish the antenna as a flag. The director, with his hands and feet bound, is placed beneath the aerial tower, with a guillotine-like television poised above his head.

In the opening scenes of the film, Kīmiyāvī reveals the identity of the Mongols to the audience. The Mongols in this film are actually Turkmen nomads who are cast by the director at the beginning of the film and are instructed to act as Mongols in the film, but not to tell anyone else that they are Turkmen. Kīmiyāvī appears to be suggesting that television and cinema have a non-real identity, and that what is presented in them is an output of the imagination and does not correspond to the reality of society. It is from this perspective that some have considered Mongol's invasion as kind of prediction for the state of Iranian cinema thereafter.⁹

Revealing filmmaking tricks to the audience, or, metaphorically, breaking the fourth wall in cinema, is a type of style that can be seen in the films of French director Jean-Luc Godard. Kīmiyāvī is a pioneer of this style in Iranian cinema, and at the beginning of *The Mongols*, he informs the audience that the Mongols in the film are Turkmen nomads.





Figure 2: A still from *The Mongols* (*Mughulhā*), directed by Parvīz Kīmīyāvī, 1973. Accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWdRTyegTao> (00:00:18).

To explore the reality of how the Turkmen are transformed into Mongols, Kīmīyāvī narrates a segment of cinema history through the voice of a television presenter, Bahman Farmānārā, and explains the process of using cinematic techniques to portray characters in the way that filmmakers want. Kīmīyāvī uses images of the Turkmen at the beginning of the film and the process of their transformation into the Middle Ages Mongols who will go on to play in his film to illustrate these artistic techniques.

For Iranian audiences, Mongols are generally associated with nomadic life and the plundering of primitive tribes, and at the same time, they are the subject of research by the director's wife. As it happens, this image and perception are closely linked to the natural conditions and way of life in Sīstān and Balūchistān province, where Kīmīyāvī has been sent on to install a television station. Through this, the desert becomes a common ground for the Mongols' roaming, the thesis of the director's wife, and his own mission. The desert has become a symbol for the director to express the futility of his efforts. On the other hand, wandering in the waterless desert is indicative of the disorientation that reveals itself in the form of the director's

¹⁰Shahīn Muḥammadī Zarghān, “Sāyah-yi Bād; Nigāhi bih Film-i Mughulhā,” *Filmpan*, December 15, 2021, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://filmpan.ir/?p=4320>

confused and jumbled thoughts. From the middle of the film, the Turkmen chosen by the director to play the Mongols act as actors in television expansion, carrying television antennas as their flag and invading the surrounding areas.

At the outset of the film, the Turkmen are passive individuals who are ordered by the director on how to behave. In the course of the film, they terrorize the local population by invading them. Nonetheless, after some time, they grow suspicious of the nature of their work. Trapped behind a closed door in the vast desert, they demand to open it and begin to engage in discussions with one another about the essence of cinema and its inherent deceits. Towards the end of Kīmiyāvī's film, the Mongols express regret at accepting their roles. Sitting in the desert, they lament that they have been wandering for three months, far from their families, and want to return to Gurgān. Meanwhile, the director, losing his mind, sits on his hotel bed, as if the Turkmen's words also describe his own state of mind.

For the director's wife, the Mongols have a real meaning, while for the director and on the silver screen, they take a symbolic significance, representing the developers of television networks in Iran during the 1970s. The director's wife is opposed to his mission to Zāhidān because she has only two more weeks to complete her thesis. The prospect of staying in remote areas for a year is also unbearable for her. She does not sympathize with her husband's fantasies and bluntly states, “You can't even communicate properly with me at home, so how do you expect to communicate between Tehran and Zāhidān?” It seems that the couple, tired of each other, are trying to connect through their shared interest in history. History acts like a toy to keep two children together for a play.¹⁰





Figure 3: A still from *The Mongols (Mughulhā)*, directed by Parvīz Kīmīāvī, 1973. Accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWdRTyegTao> (00:12:50).

History of the Mongols in the Mirror of the Present

As far as history is concerned, the brief report of the director's wife, while she is typing her thesis, can be considered the most relevant part of the film to the reporting of history. The film opens with the director going about his business, while his wife is typing her research on the Mongols. The director's wife's comments begin with a statement of the Mongols (Tatars) and their divisions, and continue with an explanation of Mongol rule in Iran. Her account is more or less a brief, well-known report of the Mongols that, given the time the film was made (in the 1970s), does not correlate with the latest research findings on the Mongols, which mostly came about after the 1980s. Findings in which the Mongols appear as more than a destructive war machine.

The film references the Yassa and the Bilik, the Mongol laws and regulations, and goes on to explain the military units of the Mongol army and the fear they instilled in the people. As part of the report by the director's wife on the Mongols, the Turkmen group selected in the film is brought into the scene by the director to play the role of the Mongols. It is difficult to say

¹¹A sudden increase in the television budget in the 1970s led media executives to focus on attracting audiences at any cost, targeting the same consumers of popular art, mass-market publications, and commercial films. See 'Alī Qulīpūr, *Parvarish-i Zuq-i 'Āmmah dar 'Asr-i Pahlavī* (Tehran: Nazar, 2018), 155.

whether the reference to Mongol laws and the strictness of their enforcement, as well as the power of the military, has any connection to the conditions of the time. Later in the film, Genghis Khan's first policy to resolve matters through negotiation, and only resorting to force and bloodshed if that failed, is correctly pointed out.

The director's wife introduces her sources during her explanations, and it becomes clear that her report is based on primary historical sources of the Ilkhanate era, such as the works of 'Atā-Malik Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn Hamadānī. She mentions two famous reports from the history of the Mongol invasion that are very familiar to Iranians. The first concerns the only man who managed to escape the massacre of Bukhara, and when asked what the Mongols had done in the city, he replied, "They came and dug and burned and killed and took, then left." The second is a quote from Imam Jalāl al-Dīn – one of the Sufi sheikhs of the time – who, when asked why the Mongols had invaded, replied, "Be quiet, this is the wind of God's needlessness that is blowing; it is not time to speak!"

As alluded earlier, in *The Mongols*, Kīmiyāvī masterfully weaves together the momentous historical event of the Mongol invasion of Iran with the parallel development and expansion of television and cinema in Iranian society during the 20th century. Through his depiction of historical accounts and scenes of Mongol behavior, Kīmiyāvī appears to subtly convey the message that modern media¹¹, like the Mongols, are invasive forces that will soon or later permeate every aspect of life.

Kīmiyāvī's choice of the Mongols as a symbol for the development of cinema and television stems from his unique perspective on the nature of media. In Iranian culture, the name Mongol evokes fear and trepidation, a sentiment that Kīmiyāvī equates with the impact of television and cinema. This analogy is particularly evident in the scene where Kīmiyāvī approaches a towering television antenna while Mongols jump and down



around it, throwing dirt on their heads. The director appears to suggest that cinematic violence can be subdued through artistic techniques. This is illustrated by the abrupt transition from the terrifying scene with the Mongols to the soothing sound of waves, followed by soft music and a noticeable calmness in the Mongols' behavior.

Despite this, in one critique of the film, Kīmiyāvī's critical view of the expansion of television in the country and its contradiction with the progress of cinema and the creative ideas of filmmakers has been called contradictory.¹² This question has been raised that if television is an exotic and strange for villagers and is incompatible with their pure and simple culture, how cinema can be considered an indigenous phenomenon that is threatened by television?¹³ It seems that what has been hidden from the critic's point of view is the contradiction of two specific groups with television and cinema; Some of the villagers are probably traditionalists and also followers of Sufi storytellers who are alien to television, but the opponents of the director and the cinematic idea are not the villagers, but the Mongols who have become members of the television network development team and are not giving them the opportunity to make films. It seems that Kīmiyāvī sees the opponents of television among the masses and the censors of cinema among the development officials.

In *The Mongols*, the indigenous people of Sīstān—those who are about to receive a television antenna—symbolize the traditional Iranian society of the 1970s. At first, they are seen illegally excavating the ancient artifacts of their ancestors and finding valuable pots. The director's voice, in conversation with one of them, expresses disapproval of their actions. He says, "Your shovels and picks are also antiques, provided that these walls collapse on you, and you will be found in a hundred years. If everyone were to steal their father's pots, there would be nothing left for you!" Then, one of the villagers finds an old pot. At first, it is thought to be a Bāyazīdī pot, but another person says it is Mongolian. And just then, the Turkmen—the Mongols of Kīmi-

¹²The film was made during a period when Rizā Qutbī, the first director-general of Iran's National Radio and Television, was strongly committed to expanding television transmitters to remote cities and even villages. See Jamshīd Akramī, *Pīrāmūn-i Sākht va Naqsh-i Risānah-hā: Hamāyish-i Shīrāz* (Tehran. Sūrūsh. 1977), 21-22. Qulīpūr believes that Mughulhā was an attempt to critique the unregulated expansion of television and its programs which was concern even for some executers and producers in television sector 'Alī Qulīpūr, *Parvarish-i Zuq-i 'Āmmah dar 'Asr-i Pahlavī* (Tehran: Nazar, 2018), 155.

¹³Robert, Sāfāriyān, "Moghūlhā: Anbāshṭah az Nishānah-hā," *Naqd-i Sīnimā* 8 (summer 1996): 191.

yāvī's film –arrive. The villagers think that the Mongols are government agents and have come to punish them. Apparently, Kīmiyāvī intended this scene to reflect the view of a segment of the population towards the expansion of mass media—in this case, television—which they saw as serving the government's interests. The villagers flee from the Mongols, and two of them take the Mongols to the village. On the way, the villagers realize that this group is not a government inspector but rather wants to bring television to their village.

After the Mongols enter the village, the villagers go with kerosene lamps on their folk hats in search of a dervish to ask him about the history and identity of the Mongols. They go to the dervish's resting place early in the morning. Apparently, these kerosene lamps are placed on their heads as a sign of wonder, because when they sit on the ground to talk to the dervish, smoke comes out of these kerosene lamps and the dervish tells if he narrates the story of the Mongols, "the smoke will rise from their heads. (a Persian idiom that is used to express the peak of surprise). The dervish is a symbol of Iranian culture and traditions, and when he enters the caravanserai, the Mongols not only do not harm him, but are somewhat afraid of him. At night, while the Mongols are in the caravanserai, the dervish recites poems in praise of Imam 'Alī -the first Shi'ite Imam and the charismatic personality of the Sufis- and enters there with a lantern in his hand and lies down in the middle of the courtyard. The Mongols are completely motionless on the platform, as if they are afraid of the dervish. Their fear of dervishes and Sufis is historical reality, as they are reported to have believed in the magic of shamanism and were afraid of those who were connected to supernatural forces. The dervish/Sufi tells the villagers about the Mongols as shadows in the wind of history, who are no longer there, but their destruction remains. The constant presence of wind and wave sounds in these scenes serves as a reminder of the director's focus on the lasting negative effects of the expanding media. This significance increases when we recognize that the sounds of wind and waves are two important



and pervasive elements in the film, continually present throughout.¹⁴

When the villagers do not reach a conclusion from talking to the dervish and the issue of television remains unresolved for them, they hold a consultative meeting to talk about television and the Mongols. Apparently, from the director's point of view, their talks reveal truths about the Iranian's view of television at the time of making the film; Most of them believe antennas are useless and if the Mongols had planted trees instead of them, it would have been more useful and productive. One says the Mongols (media managers) think that whatever is good for themselves (in the capital city of the country), should be good for others too. On the other hand, a young man who is in favor of television replies: we are capable of planting trees, but we cannot create a television antenna, and also, we could learn from television how to plant trees, and furthermore, its programs help us to feel relax after daily work.

Afterward, the villagers pass by the cemetery with a carnival of joy, carrying the television and its antenna, and arrive at the village, where they join a crowd gathered to watch a traditional Sufi play. The Sufi remains indifferent to the jubilant crowd and continues his mourning. With subtlety, whenever the Sufi mentions the armies of 'Umar ibn Sa'd, the commander of Yazīd's army in Karbala, the camera cuts to a shot of the crowd of television supporters. This sequence refers to a belief held by certain extremist religious groups in the 1970s Iran, who viewed television antenna as the "Yazīd's flag."

¹⁴Shahīn Muḥammadī Zarghān, "Sāyah-yi Bād; Nigāhī bih Film-i Mughulhā," *Filmpan*, December 15, 2021, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://filmpan.ir/?p=4320>



Figure 4: A still from *The Mongols* (*Mughulhā*), directed by Parvīz Kīmīyāvī, 1973. Accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWdRTyegTao> (01:10:37).

In the next episode, television's arrival in the village coincides with the Sufi's performance of a traditional play, reenacting the ancient and familiar story of the martyrs of Karbala for the Iranian audience. This juxtaposition highlights the clash between traditional culture and modern media. Notably, the television enthusiasts pass by the Sufi's audience, who remain engrossed in the shadow play, and do not pay attention to the television crowd. The villagers' initial encounter with television is met with joy, but their enthusiasm quickly fades away when a Mongol appears on the screen, prompting them and putting their heads down. This is one of the most meaningful sequences of the film, in which the director tried to emphasize the end of tradition in competition with modern media.



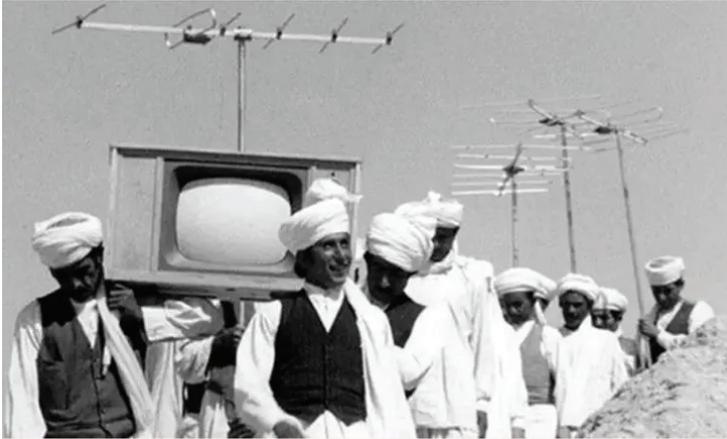


Figure 5: A scene from *The Mongols* (*Mughulhā*), directed by Parvīz Kīmīyāvī, 1973. Accessed via <https://cine-eye.net/featured/سینمای-اتوپدایی-پرویز-کیمیای>

Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mīrzā is a real person who lives in the Arg of Tabas and the director has made a documentary called *P Like Pelican* (*P Misl-i Pilīkān*, 1972) about him. He appears in *The Mongols* in his real-life role and play like the director himself. Like a fortune teller he tells the future by looking in the mirror. When the Sufi, who is wandering from the expansion of television and its supporters, goes to him and asks about the Mongols, Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mīrzā looks in the mirror and replies that he has not seen the Mongols himself, but has heard their history from older people. The Sufi, who apparently does not find the answer to his question, asks about Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mīrzā’s dreams and he describes a dream in which he saw a savior and finally runs after the savior with excitement, but sits down after getting tired. When Sufi follows him, Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mīrzā claims that he doesn’t know anything more and that people don’t ask him questions. Instead, they watch television, and perhaps the Savior will watch as well. Film ends with a saying from Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mīrzā, who says to the Sufi that the Mongols have conquered everything, and you must go with them. This scene coincides with the time when the director also has to go to Zāhidān.

¹⁵Yazdān Salahshūr writes: “I don’t quite recall whether it was 1975 or 1976, but I think it was 1975. One evening, my cousin came to our house and said that a truly exceptional Iranian film would be airing on Channel 2 that night, calling it a masterpiece and creating a lot of hype. He claimed that the film’s audience are intellectuals, not common people... Kīmīyāvī had made this film in response to the onslaught of television on popular culture; a film that even within the framework of Iran’s New Wave cinema seemed very alien, ‘tiresome’, and ‘European’... Neither the film’s plot, nor its narrative style, nor its tone, nor even its explicit and implicit messages were understandable to even the New Wave audience. [The next day, my cousin admitted, ‘I didn’t understand it either!’]” see Yazdān Salahshūr, “«Mughulhā»; Fīlmī kih mīshud bā ān khvābīd yā bā ān bīdār shud! Nīgāhī bih fīlm-i «Mughulhā»,” *Cinema Cinema*, June 30, 2019, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://cinemacinema.ir/news/مغول>

¹⁶Parviz Jahed, “Sīnimā-yi Utupiyāyī-i Parvīz Kīmīyāvī,” *cine-eye.net*, April 2020, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://cine-eye.net/featured/سینمای-اتوپدایی-پرویز-کیمیای>

¹⁵Parviz Jahed argues that, beyond their individual and subjective aspects, Kīmiyāvī's films convey a critical approach to modernity from a social lens and are closely tied to the indigenous, nativist, and politically conscious discourse of the 1960s in Iran and critique Western modernity, much like intellectuals such as Jalāl Āl-i-Ahmad and 'Alī Sharī'atī. In Kīmiyāvī's films, particularly in *The Mongols* and *O.K. Mister*, one can perceive the suffocating absurdity and meaninglessness of a society undergoing transformation and modernization, bolding the critique of Westoxification (*Gharbzadīgī*) by Jalāl Āl-i-Ahmad. We also see the filmmaker as a modern intellectual, trapped in the predicament of modern life, much like the protagonist of *The Mongols*, whom he played himself. However, unlike Jalāl Āl-i-Ahmad's or 'Alī Sharī'atī's critiques, Kīmiyāvī's criticism does not become radical or politicized, as he does not confront the government or political power structures, but rather, like intellectuals such as Dāryūsh Shāyigān or Ihsān Narāqī, focuses only on the negative impacts and roles of modernity and Western culture on Iranian society, without engaging with the power dynamics and structures of Iran's political landscape. See Parviz Jahed, "Sinimā-yi Utupiyāvī-i Parvīz Kīmiyāvī," *cine-eye.net*, April 2020, accessed 22/04/2025, <https://cine-eye.net/featured/سینمای-اتوپیایی-پرویز-کیمیایوی>

Kīmiyāvī's intention in *The Mongols* is not difficult to understand for historians and critics of television and cinema. However, it appears that the general audience has struggled to grasp the underlying concepts, which are often obscured by the back-and-forth narrative between the past and present. This complexity has sometimes led to tiresome conditions.¹⁵

To sum up, *The Mongols* can be seen as a critique of modernity, in which one of the symbols of modernity, namely television, is critiqued through the lens of a historical memory of destruction, the Mongol invasion and rule in Iran. In his other film titled *O.K. Mister* (*Ukay Mīstir*, 1979), Kīmiyāvī explicitly criticizes Western colonialism;¹⁶ this time, however, without resorting to metaphor, he highlights the consequences of modernism on traditional societies. This Meta-cinematic approach is driven from a local perspective, influenced by certain thinkers from the 1970s in Iran, who regarded Western culture and its symbols as intruders to the values of Asian countries. This approach encompassed two spectra: while some considered political structure to be relevant to this invasion, others merely focused on critiquing the symbols of Western modernity, ignoring the political power.¹⁷ Kīmiyāvī can be placed in the second group by concentrating on criticizing a modern phenomenon without addressing political structures and power.¹⁸

