Blurring the Colonial Binary

Turn-of-the-Century Transnational Entertainment in Southeast Asia

Nadi Tofighian
Cover: Map over Southeast Asia depicting the movement of mail steamships in 1899. From Karte der grossen Postdampfschifflinien im Weltpostverkehr (Berlin: Verlag des Berliner Lithogr. Instituts, 1899).

ISSN 1653-4859

Printed in Sweden by US-AB, Stockholm 2013
Distributor: Stockholm University Library
To my parents who taught me that the world is but one country and humankind its citizens.
## Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 13
British Imperialism ........................................................................................................ 19
Colonial History of Southeast Asia ................................................................................ 23
Colonial Discourse on Asia ............................................................................................ 32
Historiography of Cinema in Southeast Asia ................................................................. 41
Transnational Entertainment ......................................................................................... 46
Methodological Considerations ...................................................................................... 52
Chapter Outline .............................................................................................................. 60

### Chapter 1: Exhibition .............................................................................................. 63
1.1 Reproducing Scenes ‘as the Phonograph Reproduces Sound’ ................................. 65
1.2 ‘The Largest Life Pictures in the World’: Projecting Moving Images ....................... 72
1.3 ‘Or any other “Scope” or “Graph”’: Proliferation of Film Exhibitors ......................... 82
1.4 Western Technology and ‘Native Astonishment’ ...................................................... 90
1.5 ‘Run By Electricity’: Exhibition Venues and Electric Power .................................... 97
1.6 Film Programming and Musical Accompaniment .................................................... 102

### Chapter 2: Distribution ......................................................................................... 111
2.1 Communication Networks ....................................................................................... 113
2.2 Charles Barney Hicks: From Georgia Minstrels to Harmston’s Circus .................... 119
2.3 Circuits of Entertainment: From Circus to Cinema .................................................. 124
2.4 Distribution Patterns and Practices .......................................................................... 135
2.5 Pathé: ‘The Pioneers of Cinematography in Singapore’ ......................................... 142
2.6 ‘Look for the Japanese Flag’: The Japanese Cinematograph .................................... 147

### Chapter 3: Audience ............................................................................................. 155
3.1 White Privilege and Prestige: A Segregated Colonial Society ................................. 158
3.2 ‘A Motley and Varied Crowd’: Creating a Common Social Space ......................... 166
3.3 ‘For Natives Only’: The Racial Hierarchy of Seating Arrangements ....................... 173
3.4 ‘Prices As Usual’ No More: Admission Prices and Costs of Living ........................ 178
3.5 ‘For Ladies Only’: Targeting Specific Audiences .................................................... 189
Chapter 4: Pictures .......................................................... 199

4.1 'The Best Show Ever Seen': Promoting Spectacle................................. 201
4.2 'The School and the Newspaper of To-morrow': Images from around the World 208
4.3 'The Great White Queen': The Diamond Jubilee in Singapore..................... 217
4.4 Comedy, War, and Méliès: Advertising Individual Films.......................... 224
4.5 'They Are Wonderful Little Men': Russo-Japanese War Films .................... 235

Concluding Remarks........................................................................... 247

Bibliography ......................................................................................... 253
Acknowledgements

As an archival historian I am naturally indebted to many librarians and archivists in several countries who have assisted me in my research. This paragraph can in no way do justice to all the help I have received. Thank you for keeping history and love of learning alive. Several friends, particularly Shamim S., have helped me in the archives, which I am very grateful for.

My warmest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor John Fullerton, who patiently, and with a smile on his face, has guided me through this endeavour for many years, shared valuable perspectives on early cinema, and been generous with his time. My thankfulness also goes to Dr. Stephen Hughes, who gave me vital comments and advice after reading an earlier manuscript; and the title of this dissertation was his description of my work.

I have had the pleasure of working with and learning from many people at the Section for Cinema Studies, Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University throughout the years. Thank you to all of you for contributing to a stimulating research environment. Jakob Nilsson, Sofia Bull, and Anne Bachmann have shared the pleasures and pains of writing in their own processes parallel to me. Joel Frykholm, Doron Galili, Laura Horak, Kristoffer Noheden, and others have given me valuable input and help on previous versions of my text. Moreover, I would like to thank Bart van der Gaag, who worked on the images in this book and made them presentable.

STINT (The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education) through their School of Advanced Asia Pacific Studies (SSAAPS), The Holger and Thyra Lauritzen Foundation, and The Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation have given me grants, which have enabled me to work in archives throughout Southeast Asia, as well as presenting my findings at conferences.

I would also like to acknowledge Nick Deocampo, Stephen Bottomore, and Dafna Ruppin, who have generously shared their research material and knowledge. Teaching and meeting students, in Sweden and the Philippines in particular, has given me the opportunity to make connections between my historical research and literature, and allowed me to further shape my ideas. Furthermore, despite archives and books, life would be much poorer without friends who make me laugh and stimulate my intellect. Finally, thank you to Neda, Simin, and Bahman, who are always present in my heart.
Map over the Malay States during British colonial rule.
In the 1870s and 1880s, the African-American minstrel artist Charles Barney Hicks toured the United States, Europe, and Australia with different minstrel groups. In the 1890s, he toured all of Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, as an advance manager and representative of the popular Harmston’s Circus, run by Jane Harmston Love. Harmston’s Circus reflected the multinational dimension of the Southeast Asian amusement world, being a British-owned circus starring Australian, North American, European, and Malay performers, having an African-American manager, and performing for multi-ethnic audiences all over Asia. In 1897, the circus incorporated a cinematograph in their programme, and exhibited films in cities and towns throughout Java, thereby giving tens of thousands of people their earliest cinematic experience. The film programme featured several scenes from Paris, including dances by two Parisian ladies and a grand entrance of the French President, and was highlighted by Loie Fuller’s serpentine dance.1

This is an illustration of the transnational amusement world of the 1890s, and how cinema was introduced to Southeast Asian audiences. It also demonstrates how issues of colonialism, multiculturalism, race, and gender were intersected.

Blurring the Colonial Binary assesses the development of cinema in colonial Southeast Asia, and how its development disrupted notions of racial hierarchies. This dissertation examines and writes the early history of distribution and exhibition of moving images in Southeast Asia, and aims to contribute to research on film history, Southeast Asian cultural history, and colonial history. The work is interdisciplinary, and located at the nexus of cinema studies, social history, and postcolonial studies. The dissertation charts the development of cinema, and its distribution and exhibition, from a transnational and colonial perspective. I am using the first decade, roughly, of cinema in Southeast Asia (1896-1908) as a point of reference from where questions of imperialism, colonial discourse, nation-building, ethnicity, race, gender, and commerce can be assessed.

I believe there were two simultaneous inter-connected processes operating in the world in the late 1800s. One was bringing the world closer, through technology, trade, and migration, and thereby compressing time and space. The other process, colonialism and imperialism, separated people into different classes of people, ruler and ruled, and white and non-white, creating and

---

1 Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 29 June 1897, 3.
widening a colonial binary. The late 1800s experienced a new level of global connections and consciousness as a result of improvements in the fields of communication, technology, and transportation, in a similar way as we have experienced a new level of global connectivity in the recent past as a consequence of technological development. The cinematograph, together with new and faster communication technologies, reshaped our ideas of time and space. In the late eighteenth century, it took almost half a year for a letter to reach Singapore from Britain. As ships continued to increase their capacity and become faster, together with the building of the Suez Canal, voyages from Europe to Southeast Asia went from taking approximately three months in 1850 to less than a month in 1900. These developments increased the movement of people and technologies to, from, and within Asia. The cinematograph, and prior to that the phonograph and magic lantern, are prominent examples of trying to bring the world closer, and were described as visual newspapers, educational institutions, and ways to travel around the world by contemporary accounts. Cinema functioned both as a colonising tool disseminating imperial images, and a new universal language that broke down ethnic barriers and created new contact zones where coloniser and colonised could meet.

The same technological tools that brought the world closer were used to make conquest and colonial rule easier. Brian Larkin claims that these technologies, be it railways, roads, steamships, telegraphs or cinematographs, are used to amaze and astonish the colonised, and function as a way to signal Western power in colonial territories, something he calls the colonial sublime. From a colonial perspective, the late 1800s was a period when Western nations consolidated their influence over their colonies by making the colonial bureaucracy stronger, and developing land and industry with the manual labour of others. The history of colonialism was changing around 1870 and 1880: new parts of the world were being colonised, and new countries such as Germany, Belgium, and Italy sought colonies as part of their imperial endeavour. From the 1880s onwards rival imperial ambitions,

---

2 Roland Robertson places the turn-of-the-century as the central period for the start of modern globalisation, and argues that globalisation encompasses two central elements, a concrete increase in communication and transportation interconnectivity, such as the telegraph, steamships, railroads, and a more abstract ‘consciousness of the world as a whole’. Roland Robertson, Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture (London: Sage, 1992), 8.


4 Brian Larkin, Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 35-40. The term ‘sublime’ harks back to Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant who used it to describe phenomena outside of our comprehension, and was often used to explain natural catastrophies such as volcanoes and hurricanes.
spheres of influence, commercial treaties, and tariffs directed the colonial policy of European countries, and territorial claims had to be made in order to prevent other European powers from colonising. The sentiment reproduced by British statesmen was that increased colonisation happened through external forces. Lord Rosebery, British Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister (1894-1895), stated in 1893: ‘We have to consider not what we want now, but what we shall want in the future.’ As a result, the area of the earth colonised by Western powers increased from 67 per cent in the early 1880s to 84 per cent three decades later, corresponding with the period Eric Hobsbawm labelled ‘The Age of Empire’. Around this period, from 1874 to 1914, Britain also tripled its colonial possessions in Southeast Asia.

I use this political and economic context as a background against which I project the arrival and development of cinematic practices. I argue that cinema upset the racial, and to some extent gender, divisions in colonial society by changing social practices, and I demonstrate how the closed, all-white colonial social spaces in Southeast Asia were gradually unlocked through entertainment in general and cinema in particular. A strict division between coloniser and colonised had developed and strengthened in the latter part of the 1800s after previously having interacted with the local culture. In order to keep the status of the British in colonial posts, it was deemed important not to devalue the white prestige. An idea of racial exclusivity was developed, and the status of Europeans as the ruling class was explained by their

---

6 Speech at the Anniversary banquet of the Royal Colonial Institute on 1 March 1893 (and published in *The Times* the following day), quoted in William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 78; and in George Bennett (ed.), *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953), 310-311. A larger portion of the speech is reproduced below, as it captures the contemporary attitudes of most European countries to colonial expansion: ‘It is said that our Empire is already large enough and does not need extension. That would be true enough if the world were elastic, but, unfortunately, it is not elastic, and we are engaged at the present moment in the language of mining in “pegging out claims for the future.” We have to consider not what we want now, but what we shall want in the future. We have to consider that countries must be developed either by ourselves or some other nation, and we have to remember that it is part of our responsibility and heritage to take care that the world, as far as it can be moulded by us, shall receive the Anglo-Saxon and not another character […] and we should in my opinion grossly fail in the task that has been laid upon us did we shrink from responsibilities and decline to take our share in a partition of the world which we have not forced on, but which has been forced upon us.’
whiteness. Countries within the British Empire received ‘Imperial Preference’. Emphasis was, however, on white people in the colonies, and the aim of Imperial Preference was thus ‘to consolidate the British race’. Around the turn of the century, these binaries were also challenged by the progress of Japan, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, and Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

Southeast Asia was a strategically important geographical area, both politically and commercially, being a connecting port for India, China, and the Pacific Circuit (Australia and the east coast of the United States). A reason for having a transnational approach is that the idea of modern nation-states did not exist in Southeast Asia. The area was, and still is, very ethnically diverse. The borders in Southeast Asia in the early nineteenth century looked very different, as the region did not really consist of nations, but rather political centres of influence, autonomous provinces, and many stateless societies. Southeast Asia was also a stage where different world powers (Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, United States, and Japan) were present and fought for commercial and political supremacy, and from the mid-1800s more areas of Southeast Asia were gradually colonised by European powers. All Southeast Asian countries, except Siam (Thailand), were colonised during the late 1800s. French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) by France; Burma, Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang, and Malacca), the Federated and Unfederated Malay States (Malaysia), and North Borneo (Sabah) by Britain; Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) by the Netherlands; and the Philippines by Spain and, from 1898, the United States. In addition, Portugal (Macau, East Timor, and the Lesser Sunda Islands) and Germany (German New Guinea) had small colonies in

---


11 Anthony Reid describes the region as ‘the exceptionally plural world of maritime Southeast Asia’. Anthony Reid, Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

12 Such centres included the Theravada kingdoms of Mandalay and Bangkok, the Confucian state based in Hue, the Catholic state based in Manila (Philippines), Franco-Cambodian Phnom Penh, and Dutch-Javan Batavia, which were also centres of economic activity. Many of these centres had rulers (often sultans) who derived their authority from tradition and religion. David Joel Steinberg (ed.), In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 167-168.
the region.\textsuperscript{13} Reality thus paralleled the words of Disraeli, later echoed by Salisbury: ‘In Asia there is room for us all.’\textsuperscript{14}

Although Southeast Asia as a concept was non-existent at the turn of the century, I argue that it existed as a form of cultural entity, primarily through networks of shipping, trade, and cultural amusements. I demonstrate the interconnectedness of Southeast Asia that was created during the nineteenth century through various travelling entertainment groups, an infrastructure later strengthened by trade in film. My research has a transnational Southeast Asian perspective with a special focus on the British colonies, Singapore and Malaysia (Streets Settlements, Federated and Unfederated Malay States), due to accessibility of material, their importance as regional trade and distribution centres, language, and as Britain was the most dominant imperial power. Singapore was the hub of Southeast Asia in terms of trade, economic activity, communications, as well as for itinerant entertainment companies, and later regional film distribution. Singapore was essentially a British colonial creation with a mostly Chinese population, centred on free trade and shipping, and made inter-Asian trade considerably larger and faster. It became an important part of the British imperial structure, as an integral part of the trade and shipping network with its strategic geographical position. In less than a century, Singapore went from being a small fishing village to the world’s seventh largest port in tonnage of shipping. Singapore was, moreover, a very diverse city; in the 1901 census, fifty-two different nationalities were recorded.\textsuperscript{15} In her travel writings from 1897, Eliza Ruhmah Scidmore describes Singapore as ‘a place British energy has raised from the jungle in less than half a century’ which ‘holds a whole congress of nations, and exhibit of all the races and peoples and types of men in the world’.\textsuperscript{16} Singapore also quickly came to the public consciousness of the West. In Jules Verne’s \textit{Around the World in Eighty Days}, published in 1873, Singapore was mentioned as one of the eleven principal points of the trip.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
  \item The British were dependent on good relations with minor European powers in Southeast Asia to continue the practice of free trade, and encouraged the existence of Dutch and Spanish colonies in order to prevent other major powers from expanding. Nicholas Tarling, \textit{The Fall of Imperial Britain in South-East Asia} (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993), 55-56;
  \item Emily Sadka, \textit{The Protected Malay States, 1874-1895} (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968), 38.
  \item Eliza Ruhmah Scidmore, \textit{Java: The Garden of the East} (New York: The Century Co., 1898), 1, 3.
  \item The others were Paris, Brindisi, Suez, Bombay, Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong, Yokohama, San Francisco, New York, and London. Rudyard Kipling, in turn, described Singapore as ‘the second doorway of the wide world’s trade’ where ‘East and West must seek my [Singapore’s] aid’ in his ‘The Song of the Cities’ (1896).
\end{itemize}
The time frame of this dissertation encapsulates the Spanish-American War and the entry of the United States as an overseas colonial power, the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, the Second Boer War, the Boxer Rebellion, the leasing of Guantánamo Bay by the United States, Marie Curie winning the Nobel Prize in Physics, the St Louis World Fair, the Russo-Japanese War, Pathé Frères dominating the world film market, Albert Einstein’s doctoral degree, the introduction of women’s suffrage in some countries, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and Rudyard Kipling winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1907. The turn of the century also experienced the further development of many communication devices: the transoceanic cablegram, linotype, typewriter, telephone, phonograph, and photographic equipment. The nineteenth century was also when ethnology and phrenology developed as sciences, and a period when the West explored, defined, and framed the Other. Information gathered by explorers was included in imperial culture through scientific societies, newspapers, journals, novels, and museums, which in turn affected the attitude of people towards other ethnic groups. The entertainment world in the late 1800s contributed to this process and frequently used negative portrayals and stereotypes of non-Western people. Creating ‘native’ villages in World Expositions, portraying African-Americans through blackface in minstrel shows, and exhibiting foreign people in circuses reproduced European imperial ideas and images of non-white people as primitive, backward, and exotic. Early films followed the same pattern and showed the backwardness of colonised people, and as such worked as a justification and visualisation of the colonising and civilising efforts of Western powers.

---

18 Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem ‘White Man’s Burden’ to illustrate the colonial responsibility of the United States in guiding its newfound territory, the Philippines. Ashis Nandy labels Kipling as, likely, ‘the most creative builder of the political myths which a colonial power needs to sustain its self-esteem’. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 37.


The introductory part of the dissertation discusses the different fields of scholarship that this dissertation aims to combine. The first two parts of the introductory chapter, the imperial history of Britain and the colonial history of Southeast Asia, forms an important historical backdrop, and discusses issues such as trade, technological development, and how imperial power affected values, attitudes, and institutions in the colonised countries. This is followed by a postcolonial assessment of the prevalent colonial discourse on Asia, and assesses how racial hierarchies were created and sustained. The following two sections give an overview of research on the history of early cinema in Southeast Asia, and present an outline of the transnational itinerant entertainment world. The introduction concludes with consideration of the methodological framework of the thesis, and an outline of its structure with regards to the organisation of chapters.

British Imperialism

The historiography of the British Empire frequently focuses on a British metropole and a colonial periphery, and different scholars attribute the imperial driving force to different sources.21 Many Britons felt it was a manifest destiny of Westerners to civilise the world by converting ‘natives’ to Christianity, reforming their social structures and practices, as well as spreading Western literature, education, law and order, science, free trade, and material progress. The British Empire was not just seen as a geopolitical power, but also a culturally imagined construct. The British superior self-image with the accompanying national civilising mission meant that being British meant being ‘intrinsically imperial’, and in 1878 Britain’s Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone claimed that ‘[t]he sentiment of empire may be called innate in every Briton’.22 Other historians, however, argue that imperial ideas was a


22 W.E. Gladstone’s speech continued ‘If there are exceptions, they are like those of men born blind or lame among us. It is part of our patrimony: born with our birth, dying only with our death; incorporating itself in the first elements of our knowledge, and interwoven with all our habits of mental action upon public affairs. It is a portion of our national stock…’ (W.E.
question of class, and in the early to mid-1800s, the British Empire had not permeated society, and only the higher classes could be called ‘imperial’. There were, however, attempts to spread imperial ideas among all classes through children’s and juvenile books, stage culture, and other cultural means.

Political leaders stressed the responsibility and the uniqueness of the British. Lord Rosebery called the British Empire ‘the greatest secular agency for good known to the world’, and ‘it is part of our responsibility and heritage to take care that the world, so far as it can be moulded by us, shall receive an English-speaking complexion, and not that of other nations’. Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary (1895-1903), described their role as a mission to carry out the work of civilisation. Having colonies was described as character-building, and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt believed the Philippines would ‘do a great deal for our character’, just as it had done for the British in India. The question of British imperialism had many interconnected as-

Gladstone, ‘England’s Mission’, The Nineteenth Century, September 1878, quoted in Bennett, 264). Also see Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1863-1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 40-41; James Morris, Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968); Robert A. Huttenback, Racism and Empire: White Settlers and Colored Immigrants in the British Self-governing Colonies, 1830-1910. In the late 1800s there was also an increased sense of pride towards the Empire. Books and treatises such as Charles Dilke’s Greater Britain (1870), John Seeley’s The Expansion of England (1883), and J.A. Froude’s Oceana (1885) were written in this period. Furthermore, the Royal Colonial Society (later Royal Colonial Institute) was formed in 1868, the Imperial Federation League in 1884, the British Empire League in 1896, the Victoria League in 1899, the League of the Empire in 1901, the Empire Day Movement in 1903. John M. MacKenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), chapter 6.


Speech by Joseph Chamberlain, 31 March 1897, quoted in Morris, 122

pects, and there were several reasons behind the British superior self-image during the 1800s. First, Britain was the workshop of the world, and produced most of the steel, coal, cotton, and iron in the world, with better quality and cheaper than elsewhere. Second, Britain almost had as many battleships as the rest of the world combined; a dominance that gradually decreased by the end of the century. Britain also built two thirds of the steamships of the world. Third, the British owned almost three quarters of the telegraph cables in the world, which gave them an information advantage, and telegraph and steamship lines were subsidised by the government. Fourth, the belief that the British had a God-given civilising mission to bring Christianity and functioning institutions for the creation of stability and social balance in the world. Colonial territories were thus part of a larger imperial machinery for the British Empire, including the largest navy in the world, the British Army, diplomacy, shipping and merchant networks, missionaries, international trade, the financial system of London, and a colonial bureaucracy.

London, together with Hamburg, Antwerp, and Rotterdam, dominated the world shipping market before the First World War. Britain was the centre of trade credit and insurance, an entrepot for trade, and London was seen as an infallible market where correct prices were given. Britain was a firm proponent of free trade partly because it was the dominant world power, and as smaller trade networks around the world linked to the global system, Britain benefited. New roads, railways, and ports followed colonisation and made people penetrate new places. Steamships, railways, and telegraphs contribut-

28 In 1840, Britain accounted for 45 per cent of the world’s industrial production, in 1880 for 30 per cent, and 15 per cent by the first decade of the following century. The United States overtook Britain as the world’s largest manufacturer in the late 1870s, and in the first decade of the twentieth century, Germany surpassed Britain as well. Paul M. Kennedy, The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 5; Bayly, 173; Aaron L. Friedberg, The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 26-27. The German share increased from 13.2 per cent to 15.9 per cent, and the United States from 23.3 per cent to 35.3 per cent during the same period. During the late 1800s, Germany became an increasingly important shipping power, and threatened British commercial hegemony.


30 Headrick (1981), 129, 162. Britain held five key ports around the world: Dover, Gibraltar, Suez, Cape of Good Hope, and Singapore.

31 During the nineteenth century, for instance, the number of Bible translations increased from 40 to 119 (Hobsbawm, 112).

32 Johnson, 4-5.


34 Britain’s dominance is further illustrated by British merchants in different ports functioning as consuls for other countries, such as the Netherlands, Chile, Peru, Denmark, Portugal, Prussia, Saxony, Austria, Brazil, and France. Consuls were often appointed to open up new trade, and have local justice and local facilities in less developed areas. D.C.M. Platt, The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825 (London: Longman, 1971), 202.
ed to the faster spread and interchange of ideas and news. In the 1800s many new ports were built around the world as shipping and world trade increased. In 1869 the Suez Canal opened, which made travelling distances considerably shorter; the shipping distance between London and Singapore, for instance, became twenty-nine per cent shorter.\footnote{Headrick (1988), 26. The shipping distance to Bombay became 41 per cent shorter, to Calcutta 32 per cent, and to Hong Kong 26 per cent.} Within fifteen years, the Suez Canal route had surpassed the route around the Cape of Good Hope in terms of shipping tonnage.\footnote{D.A. Farnie, \textit{East and West of Suez 1854-1956} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 174; Rupert Emerson, \textit{Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule} (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), 362.} The British dominated the traffic of the Suez Canal. For most of the period until the First World War, British tonnage going through the Suez Canal represented around two thirds of total tonnage.\footnote{Farnie, 751-752.} The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the movement of people and a hitherto unmatched period of migration in the world, which included millions of Chinese and Indians migrating all over the world, including Southeast Asia. Travelling entertainments spread in Southeast Asia largely thanks to an increased number of shipping lines throughout the Pacific and Indian Ocean, as well as an increase in the network of railways.

Britain wanted to be able to pursue free trade in a secure and stable world, and preferably avoid territorial responsibility.\footnote{Robinson and Gallagher concluded their influential analysis of trade and imperialism that the government of Britain tried to have ‘trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule if necessary’. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’, \textit{The Economic History Review}, Second series, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1953), 13.} Ties between commerce, imperialism, and colonialism have been present for centuries. The precursor of the British Empire was the British commercial empire and its East India Company in Asia.\footnote{Parts of India had been under British rule, or rather the East India Company, since the early seventeenth century. The British Crown took over the administration and rule of the colonial possessions of the East India Company in 1857 after the mutiny of lower ranked Indian sepoys. Britain followed the example of the Dutch government who took over the possessions of the Dutch East India Company (\textit{Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie}) in the late 1700s, and in 1815 the Dutch constitution ordained that the colonies would be under the control of the Dutch head of state. Denis Judd, \textit{The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj} (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapter 3-5.} In the 1800s and early 1900s many European countries had colonies in order to promote their trade. There was a strong belief that trade followed the flag, and a vivid political and academic discussion was on-going. Britain as a whole, however, did not reap the financial benefits of having an empire; individual investors, particularly a small elite and merchants in London, did.\footnote{Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, \textit{Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British imperialism, 1860-1912} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Joseph Alois Schumpeter, \textit{Imperialism and Social Classes} (New York: Kelley, 1951), 6. In his influential \textit{Imperialism} from 1902, J.A. Hobson claimed finance was the driving}
was also a way to promote British commercial interests. Lord Salisbury, British Prime Minister 1885-1892 and 1895-1902, said that Britain needed to expand its reach, and ‘to make smooth the paths for British commerce, British enterprise, the application of British capital’ in the new territories. Additional opportunities for profit arose for British business as more colonies were annexed and the Empire expanded; rather than following the flag, trade came ‘wrapped in it’.

In the historiography of the British Empire, the colonies in Southeast Asia are partly neglected, and sometimes seen as an extension of imperialism in India. Burma and Straits Settlements were at times under the direct rule of British India. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India 1899-1905 (and later Foreign Secretary, 1919-1924) stated in 1901: ‘As long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it, we shall drop straightway to a third-rate power.’ Imperial expansion was sometimes caused by local administrators of a colonial empire creating considerable leeway vis-à-vis the British imperial government, by taking steps without their support. It was not uncommon with secondary imperialism, where British India or colonial administrators, rather than Britain, annexed a territory, for instance, Singapore, and later the British government accepted it as part of the Empire. Another approach was to create protectorates, such as parts of the Malay States, in order to avoid annexation and have minimal administration.

Colonial History of Southeast Asia

The notion of Southeast Asia was not widely used until after the Second World War. The Southeast Asian region was often grouped together with China, Japan, and Korea, and referred to as the Far East. For a long time the region was considered as a geographical afterthought, and merely viewed as the area between the vast empires of India, China, and Japan. The Sino-

\[\text{footnotes}\]

---

41 Lord Salisbury, speech at House of Lords, 14 February 1895, quoted in Bennett, 312.
42 Headrick (1988), 379.
43 Quoted in Judd, 101.
45 For a more historical discussion of the term Southeast Asia, see Donald K. Emmerson, “‘Southeast Asia’: What’s in a Name?”. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1,
Japanese War in 1894-1895, the Boxer Uprising in China around the turn of the century and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905 brought the Far East to the political foreground in the West, and many politicians and intellectuals started viewing Asia as a military and economic threat. Hobson believed Asia was the litmus test for Western imperialism: ‘For Europe to rule Asia by force for purposes of gain, and to justify that rule by the pretense that she is civilizing Asia and raising her to a higher level of spiritual life, will be adjudged by history, perhaps, to be the crowning wrong and folly of imperialism.’

Insular and peninsular Southeast Asia (today’s Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines) had, and still has, linguistically and ethnically diverse populations. The Malay region consisted mainly of smaller, regional sultanates, and several autonomous island communities. There were frequently wars among sultans and datus (local chieftain or royalty), piracy increased, and small independent kingdoms were established. This provided an opening and a justification for European expansion. The Malay region had strong internal trade networks well before European intervention, and local demand for European products was, therefore, fairly low. Trade ports were especially important, and functioned as hubs for a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan population, including Malays, Javanese, Makassarese, Indians, Chinese, Arabs, English, Dutch, Germans, and Portuguese. Much of the influence of Western powers in Southeast Asia was dependent on their control of trade. Southeast Asia was seen as a vast market, with a large potential for exporting goods, and many valuable natural resources. The trade of most Asian countries, except Japan, had a typical colonial character: raw materials and consumption articles were exported, and manufactured goods were imported. Trade in the colonies, both exports and imports, increased during the colonial period; it is however not clear whether the local population


46 Hobson, 327.
48 Johnson, 8.
49 Innes (1901).
would have chosen Western commodities under different circumstances. The Straits of Malacca and the Straits of Sunda were the two ways that ships entered the Malay archipelago, and were particularly important from the perspective of trade. The completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 made the Straits of Malacca, rather than the Straits of Sunda, the shortest and fastest way between Europe and Asia. This enhanced the importance of Singapore, at the expense of Batavia (Jakarta), and made it the centre of trade. Singapore became the most important colonial port for commercial development in the Far East.

In 1819, Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company leased and developed Singapore from the Sultan of Johore, as the British needed ‘an inch of ground to stand on between the Cape of Good Hope and China’. At the time, Singapore consisted of 120 Malays and 30 Chinese, but the city rapidly grew, and when the first census was taken in 1824 the population was over 10,000 people. As a result, different nationalities were allotted different geographical housing quarters. The port cities Penang, Malacca, Province Wellesley, and Singapore formed Straits Settlements in 1826 with Penang as centre (in 1832, Singapore became the capital), and controlled by the East India Company. In 1851 it was put under the jurisdiction of the Governor-General of India, and from 1858 it was under the India Office in London. In 1867, Straits Settlements became a separate Crown Colony with

---

51 Davis and Huttenback, 306.
52 The Dutch controlled both Straits until the British East India Company leased Penang from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786. Penang was a good port of call heading to China, and the trade port stopped the Dutch from getting too much control over trade. Nordin Hussin, Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780-1830 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007).
53 Farnie, 101-102; Francis E. Hyde, Far Eastern Trade, 1860-1914 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), 16-17. In a sense, Singapore was not a unique trade centre as it functioned as the successor of the Malay/Bugis centre Riau. Riau was located south of Singapore, and was ruled by the Sultan of Johore (Carl A. Trocki, Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 8-14). Trocki further argues that the founding of Singapore was mostly about the opium trade (and also used for weapons trade).
54 Stamford Raffles, letter dated 14 April 1818, quoted in Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources (London: Lloyd’s Greater Britain Publishing Company, 1908), 22. In order to get the land, Raffles gave the Temenggong of Johore a $3,000 annual allowance, and protection from enemies, and an annual allowance of $5,000 to Tunky Lung, the son of the dead sultan (SarDesai (1977), 35). The possession of Singapore, for instance, was not part of a plan for geographical expansion, but rather ‘the occupation of an advantageous position for the protection of [British] commerce’. (Guidance from the British government to Raffles, quoted in Emerson, 82). Raffles, who bought and transformed Singapore, saw the potential of Singapore as early as 1819: ‘If no untimely fate awaits it, it promises to become the emporium and pride of the East… It would be difficult to name a place on the face of the globe with brighter prospects.’ (Raffles correspondence, quoted in Tate (1979), 149).
its own Governor and executive and legislative councils. Straits Settlements played an important role as the trading link between India and China. Singapore, in particular, was a large free port, a centre for trade and storage, and quickly became a focal point for trade to the Federated Malay States, Dutch East Indies, Siam, and Indochina. Another reason to focus on Singapore is that it was the centre of the Malay world. Malays lived in a transborder world, being in Singapore, British Malaya, parts of Dutch East Indies (Sumatra, Riau, Borneo), southern islands of the Philippines, southern Siam, parts of Indochina, and they moved in the region.

Singapore was a merchant community where a large share of the population viewed themselves as transient. The cross-boundary Indian and Chinese communities and businesses also illustrate the inter-connectness of Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia was a region where there had been many linguistically heterogeneous Chinese for centuries. The Chinese provided a workforce, created trade links between countries, and became the middle-man filling the space between coloniser and colonised. Chinese entrepreneurs were important in regional trade, and were an essential aspect of the commercial growth and development of Singapore, as well as Batavia, Manila, and Bangkok. European companies were responsible for most of the bulk trade, whereas Chinese middlemen primarily handled the distribution within cities and towns, and were intermediaries between European agency houses and small Malay local traders. The Tamil, or the Chettiar, community had businesses and plantations throughout Southeast Asia, primarily in Burma and Malaya, but also in Cochin-China.

57 Kahn, 37, 92.
60 Tate (1979), 158.
Java was the centre and focus of the Dutch colonial Empire, and the other islands in the Dutch East Indies were merely nominally Dutch and treated as the periphery. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Dutch control gradually increased. The main reason for Dutch colonial expansion was to prevent other imperial powers from expanding in the region. This is the same sentiment as that expressed by Lord Rosebery quoted earlier. In some respects, it was part of a European arms race, where governments expanded their overseas territories. During the preceding two centuries, the Netherlands had been the biggest competitor to British supremacy in Southeast Asia. Raffles repeatedly stated that he wanted Singapore to become ‘a great commercial emporium’ to destroy the Dutch monopoly in the region. Five years after the founding of Singapore, the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 was signed, where the Netherlands accepted Malacca and Singapore as British territories, and the British agreed to leave Sumatra. These largely artificial imperial borders were kept, strengthened through school education, and in essence form the national boundaries we have today.

After controlling the Straits Settlements, Britain gradually increased its influence and authority over the rest of the Malay Peninsula. The Malay States were initially not considered a place of importance, but the British feared that another European power would occupy the area and disrupt British trade with China. The rule of the Malay States became more formalised, and in 1895 Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan formed the Federated Malay States, with Kuala Lumpur as capital and Frank Swettenham as Resident-General (until 1900). With the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, the remaining Malay States of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Trengganu, were put under British control, and with Johore formed the Unfederated Malay States.

64 Raffles to Colonel Adenbrooke, quoted in SarDesai (1977), 36.
65 The Anglo-Dutch treaty from 1871 kept the Dutch Empire intact, as the British were eager to keep the French out of the archipelago. In return, the British were able to continue its free trade policies in the Dutch East Indies. Reid (1969), 291.
66 The result of the independence process in Southeast Asia was culturally heterogenous nation-states. This is what Anthony Reid calls the ‘imperial alchemy’; transforming different ethnic groups such as Acehnese, Bataks, and Balinese into Indonesians; and Chinese, Malays, Kadazans, and Tamils into Malaysians. Reid (2010).
of the Federated Malay States, ruled Straits Settlements. Each Malay state was ruled by a Sultan, a British Resident-General, and had a civil service where the higher officials were British. The municipal commission in Singapore around the turn of the century consisted of 79 per cent Europeans, and the rest Chinese. In 1897 a durbar was held where the sultans gathered to get a sense of common identity and demonstrate that the British had brought peace and new order to the region. The rule of the sultan had been absolute, and there was an air of divinity around them. The British Resident-General, however, dictated the succession to ensure that only those loyal to the British Empire would become future sultans.

The largest imperial threats to Britain were France and Germany. France gradually conquered Cochinchina and Cambodia between 1862 and 1867, Annam and Tonkin in 1882, and occupied Laos between 1893 and 1904, often in conflict with Siam. Siam was never colonised, and was an Anglo-French strategic battleground and a buffer state between their colonial possessions. Siam continually had areas to the south occupied by the British and to the East by the French. The British interest in Siam was twofold: to avoid France colonising Siam, which would mean a joint border, and to keep the dominance over Siamese commerce. Germany was a rising power with a strong navy and increased trade with Southeast Asia. Germany entered the colonial race very late compared with other Western powers. In the late 1800s Germany acquired colonies, such as German New Guinea and Chinese port cities, and by the turn of the century, was the fifth largest empire in development of the Federated Malay States and British influence. Swettenham had previously been Resident of Selangor (1882-1889), and Resident of Perak (1889-1895).

Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2003), 61. Of the ones nominated by the Governor-General, 95 per cent were European.


Chandran Jeshurun, *The Contest for Siam, 1889-1902: A Study in Diplomatic Rivalry* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1977). Another reason for the rivalry of Britain and France in Siam was its strategic position as a trade route to Yunnan in China. The British dominated the overland and overseas trade of Siam; in the early 1890s, 87 per cent of the shipping of Bangkok was British (SarDesai (1977), 92; Platt (1971), 204). The Entente Cordiale in 1904 between Britain and France settled the respective borders in Siam. Other battlegrounds between the British and the French were in Burma, Egypt, Somaliland, Eritrea, and West Africa.
population, and third largest in territory. German dominance was also reflected in the local Southeast Asian press, where it was reported that German trade developed, and that they bought and controlled more shipping lines.

Among the colonised there were local elites consisting of sultans, princes, *ilustrados* (educated elite), and rich merchants, many different ethnic minorities, as well as Indian and Chinese labour. These heterogeneous groups, in terms of language and ethnicity, made it possible for colonial rule, as there was no strong central unifying force to resist colonial forces. Much state building was a top-down project, and there was often a local, ruling class that Western powers created alliances with, often through monetary means. An early part of the colonising process was trying to create a new ruling class through education. There was awareness in the early 1800s about the need of having the support of a growing number of the local population. Through education, new modern structures were created that broke with the traditional societal hierarchies, which even many critics of colonialism hailed as a positive development. When the Philippines became U.S. territory, and the ‘insurgents’ were defeated, the United States sent ships of teachers, the so-called Thomasites, to create a new public school system and mold the Filipinos way of thinking. Educational policy was an efficient way of westernising and controlling the colonised by modifying native ways of thinking, redefining cultural norms, and altering the perception of the colonial state to a benevolent state. An Asian educated in a colonial school, it was believed, would identify with the colonial power, and not the colonised. Education could, therefore, work as a way to accentuate differences between people. The education system in British Malaya consisted of vernacular schools, focusing on basic learning and technical skills useful for rural life, and English schools, which became a social class marker that connected the upper classes to the British. There was a fear that education could lead to locals not wanting to work with basic tasks any longer, and instead claiming employment in the government administration.

---

74 ‘Another Deal in Shipping’, *Strait Times*, 27 December 1899, 2; Editorial, *Strait Times*, 8 January 1902, 4; Advertisement, *Strait Times*, 2 March 1908, 6.
75 The Acting Resident of Pahang wrote to the Colonial Secretary, 11 June 1894: ‘The influence of pecuniary interest is one of the strongest ties which ensures the loyalty of chiefs to the existing form of Government…’ Quoted in Sadka, 277.
76 Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), ix, 14. Swettenham described the Malay society: ‘There was, in 1874, a very broad line indeed between the ruling classes in Malaya and the raiats, the people. The people had no initiative whatever; they were there to do what their chiefs told them – no more, no less.’ Swettenham (1907), 141.
way of creating a joint perspective and imagined community, for instance, a joint written Malay was created in roman script, which strengthened the connections between the Malay States. English was the language of power, but Malay was, in the words of Frank Swettenham, ‘the lingua franca by which white, and brown, and black, and yellow men exchanged ideas and did business; it was the language of the State councils and the courts, of hospitals and police stations, and of all Government departments in their dealings with natives of any nationality’. Beyond British Malaya, Malay was also used in the Dutch East Indies, parts of the Philippines, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Despite conflicts arising between different European powers as a consequence of their imperial ambitions, there was a sense of a white, transnational community when they were outside Europe, especially when it came to conflicts with non-Europeans. There was an implied understanding of a policy of non-interference. The Boxer Rebellion in China at the turn of the century, for instance, where the Chinese fought Western imperialism brought Western countries closer. Nor was it an alternative to support the dark-skinned Filipino army of Aguinaldo against Spanish and U.S. forces. The rise of Japan, and the Russo-Japanese War put these positions to the test. Many Japanese in the late 1800s believed they were a rising world power. Count Ōkuma Shigenobu, who later became the Prime Minister of Japan (1898, 1914-1916) stated: ‘The European Powers are already showing symptoms of decay, and the next century will see their constitutions shattered and their empires in ruin. Even if this should not quite happen, their resources


78 Chai, chapter 7.
79 Swettenham (1907), 257.
82 The British diplomat and Professor of Chinese, Edward Harper Parker, wrote in 1903 regarding the future of China: ‘Whatever our rivalries and jealousies, we Europeans, including even Russians, are all imbued with the one spirit of humanity, justice, and progress, summed up in the word “Christian”… In the Far East all Europeans are bound together by species of sympathy of which people at home have little idea…’. Edward Harper Parker, China: Past and Present. London: Chapman & Hall, 1903), 44.
will become exhausted in unsuccessful attempts at colonization. Therefore who is fit to be their proper successor if not ourselves.\textsuperscript{83} In 1893, a Japanese Colonisation Society was formed, where it was discussed how Japan could counter the European nations’ expansion with more shipping and trade.\textsuperscript{84} The position of Japan changed further with their victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. The prelude to this was the Anglo-Russian crisis in 1885, and Russia’s advances in Manchuria, which prompted the British to make arrangements with Japan regarding the use of its naval bases. In the mid-1890s, Japan defeated China, which confirmed its self-image as an imperial power. The prevalent Western discourse on Japan was, however, still that their essence was fundamentally different, and inferior, to the European. The British journalist and politician, Henry Norman, wrote in 1895: ‘But Englishman, American, Frenchman, or German is one kind of human being, and Japanese is another. Between them stands, and will stand for ever, the sacred and ineradicable distinction of race.’\textsuperscript{85}

This short description of the colonial history of Southeast Asia illustrates the inter-connectedness of the region, and how borders were steadily drawn and redrawn. It moreover shows the strong presence of European powers, which in turn explains the many Western amusement companies that toured the region. As I am dealing with several cities throughout this work, Table 1 gives population figures to get a frame of comparison.

| Table 1: Population of major Southeast Asian cities (in thousands)\textsuperscript{86} |
|---------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                            | 1890  | 1900  | 1910  |
| Bangkok                                    | 600   | 629   |
| Batavia                                    | 105   | 116   | 139   |
| Hanoi                                      | 103   | 114   |
| Kuala Lumpur                               | 32    | 47    |
| Manila                                     | 154*  | 220`  | 234   |
| Rangoon                                    | 180   | 235   | 293   |
| Saigon                                     | 81    | 166`  | 182   |
| Singapore                                  | 174   | 228   | 303   |
| Surabaya                                   | 125** | 147   | 154   |
| Surakarta                                  | 105** | 109   | 118*  |

*1887; **1895; `1902; `1903; •1905

\textsuperscript{83} Quoted by Henry Norman, \textit{The Peoples and Politics of the Far East: Travels and Studies in the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Colonies, Siberia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam and Malaya} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 392.


\textsuperscript{85} Norman, 397.

\textsuperscript{86} Table derived from statistics in B.R. Mitchell, 42-49. The populations of Ipoh and Taiping, both in the state of Perak in the Federated Malay States, were around 13,000 for each town according to the 1901 census.
Colonial Discourse on Asia

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, Europeans often idealised the ‘noble savage’, and respected other civilisations. British and European superiority was based on morality, law, religion, and political institutions, and not on race. This changed in the early nineteenth century when writers, scientists, and politicians in Britain and the United States argued that it was the innate characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon race, rather than environment and institutions that had resulted in their power.87 Race became an identity-marker for making a distinction between different people, and creating racial hierarchies. This myth, or intellectual invention, in turn helped to justify colonial endeavours. War and conquest were often preceded by public campaigns on the backwardness of the people and the area that would be annexed or colonised, and the local populations were described as lacking the innate abilities to develop their countries. In this section I assess the Western, particularly the British, colonial discourse in regard to Asia. The section examines both postcolonial views as well as contemporary turn-of-the-century colonial newspapers in Southeast Asia.

How we view and define people determines hegemonic structures, and what role different people will and can play in society. In the influential and controversial Orientalism, Edward Said explores the historic Western discourse on the Orient and its inhabitants. He claims that during the past centuries the West, primarily politicians, academics, scientists, and travel writers, constructed the Orient as the weak, controlled ‘Other’ to the civilised West.88 This propelled a series of studies in the field of postcolonial studies. Mary Louise Pratt, Anne McClintock, Fatimah Tobing Rony, and others, have shown how the image of the Other, and the world in general, have been created and reproduced through anthropology, ethnography, travel writing, paintings, advertisements, and cinema.89 The colonised were portrayed to be

politically, ethnically, materially, and culturally inferior to the coloniser. Discourses of a colonial cultural superiority, a colonial civilizing mission, manifest destiny and white man's burden were thereby created. Homi Bhabha describes the process: ‘The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.’ Once such labels and differences have been defined, they will remain, and a sociological circumstance will be termed a definite biological truth. Albert Memmi argues that colonial racism consisted of three components: defining the difference between the cultures of the colonialist and the colonised, exploiting those differences, and claiming that the differences are (biological) facts.

The colonised were commonly referred to in a depersonalised way, as part of an anonymous mass; something Memmi terms ‘the mark of the plural’, although they were an ethnically heterogeneous group. Robert Johnson sums up different attributes Europeans ascribed the ‘natives’: ‘savage, tribal, mob behaviour, ill-educated, irrational, child-like, criminal, excessively sexual, filthy, amoral and irreligious’. There was often inherent contradictions in how the colonised were portrayed. Homi Bhabha describes it thus: ‘The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces.’

The most common characterisation of the colonised was calling them lazy. By repeating and spreading that characterisation through books, reports, local press, and verbally, it became an established myth among colonisers. The characterisation of laziness was particularly efficient, as it contrasted the industriousness and activity of Europeans, and it was evidence of the need for colonial intervention. Indolence became an established fact, and an integral part of the nature of the colonised.

The description above is applicable to the British description of the Malays, as well as in other colonial situations, and helps explain the segregated social life mentioned earlier. Perceived knowledge about the East, or in this instance about Malays, was amassed for imperial purposes, and used to create images and myths about Malays. These images and pre-conceived ideas

---

90 Guha, 3.
93 Memmi, 85.
94 Johnson, 91. Decades earlier, the English had described the Irish in the same way.
95 Bhabha (1983), 34. Memmi makes a similar observation (Memmi, 83).
of the Malays have been prevalent since the sixteenth century when Europeans came to Southeast Asia. Malays were often described as indulgent, indolent, and superstitious in the local press: ‘The Malay is the spoiled child of a too indulgent nature’; ‘The impression is general if not universal that the Malay is too indolent as a labourer’; ‘enjoying a life of lazy indolence who cannot be stimulated to any active exertion’; ‘Malays do not fancy working on [sic] the mines owing to the toil such employ necessitates, whilst on rubber estates they have proved anything but good workers. [...] he is afforded every chance [but] the Malay will not work.’ Rudyard Kipling, again, coined the term ‘the Malazy people’, as a description for Malay people in one of his short stories. British officials, such as Swettenham, repeated these notions: ‘The leading characteristic of the Malay of every class is a disinclination to work.’ Travel writers also helped reproduce the image of ‘the indolent Malays’. José Rizal, the Filipino poet, writer, and national hero, rebutted the myth of the lazy native, and rhetorically compared them with the coloniser: ‘The very Europeans who accuse the peoples of the colonies of indolence... how do they live in the tropical countries? Surrounded by many servants, never walking but riding, needing servants not only to remove their shoes but even to fan them!’

Just as many national borders in Southeast Asia are a colonial construct, so was race. The division of people into different races and sub-categories was a consequence of colonialism, racial theories prevalent in Europe, and the idea of using censuses to categorise people. Censuses played an important role in identity formation as they labelled and defined people. That form of amassing information and knowledge about other territories is part

100 Swettenham (1907), 136 (also see, 137, 304). More than half a century earlier, Raffles described the Malays as ‘so indolent, that when he has rice, nothing will induce him to work’, quoted in Alatas, 117.
101 Del Mar, 61; Alleyne Ireland, *The Far Eastern Tropics: Studies in the Administration of Tropical Dependencies* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), 115-116: ‘As far as my own observation extends, I should say that the Malay of the Peninsula is the most steadfast loafer on the face of the earth. […] and for nine tenths of his waking hours, year in and year out, he sits on a wooden bench in the shade and watches the Chinaman and the Tamil build roads and railways, work the mines, cultivate the soil, raise cattle, and pay the taxes. As all his desires are completely satisfied by this kind of life, you can make no appeal to him for industry.’
102 José Rizal, ‘The Indolence of the Filipinos’, quoted in Alatas, 98.
of the basis of Oriental scholarship that Edward Said criticises as a way for the West to dominate and restructure the Orient. An apparent power imbalance existed in society, as Europeans imposed their view of race and ethnicity on Southeast Asia although they were a clear minority. Defining and classifying other ethnic groups, as well as creating regulations and laws based on race, created a strict division between different ethnic groups. In British Malaya, and to an even larger extent the Dutch East Indies, there were colonial laws, which created limitations and restrictions for non-Europeans. The 1901 census for Singapore divided people into six broad categories (variously called ‘Nationalities’ or ‘Races’): Europeans and Americans (1.7% of the population in 1901, 2.9% in 1891), Eurasians (1.8%/1.9%), Chinese (71.8%/66.1%), Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago (15.8%/19.5%), Tamils and other Natives of India (7.8%/8.7%), and Other Nationalities (1.2%/1.0%). Each group was then further divided into subgroups. The census for the Dutch East Indies divided people into four categories: European, Chinese, other Asiatics (Indians, Arabs etc.), and ‘Natives’ (Inlanders). These divisions had legal implications and created restrictions for everyone but Europeans. One’s racial status determined where one could live, which courts tried one’s case, taxes, what laws were relevant, and also what clothing one could wear. Chinese people in the Dutch East Indies had to live in Chinese neighbourhoods, and obtain travel passes from Dutch government bureaucrats when making domestic trips. These restrictions also signal to what extent cinema and entertainment audiences could be mixed in a common social space in respective city.

104 J.R. Innes, Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements taken on the 1st March 1901 (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1901), 21, 29-34. As a comparison, for the whole of Straits Settlements the numbers were: Europeans and Americans (1%), Eurasians (1%), Chinese (49%), Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago (38%), Tamils and other Natives of India (10%), and Other Nationalities (1%). Innes, 1-2.
105 Chinese, for instance, were divided into Cantonese, Hokkien, Hailam, Kheh, Straits-born, Teo-Chiu, Hok, Chiu, and ‘Tribe not stated’. Malays were divided into Boyanese, Bugis, Dyaks, Javanese, Jawi-Pekan, Malays, and Manilamen. Indians were divided into Bengalis, Burmese, Parsees, and Tamils.
106 Reid (2010), 34. Hitta census.
108 Lea E. Williams, Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1916 (Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1960), 28-34; Purcell, 439. From 1904, it was possible to get a travel pass valid for a year, rather than a single journey.
Charles Hirschman, Syed Hussein Alatas, Joel S. Kahn, and Anthony Reid have, in different ways, shown how ‘race’ was created in the Malay States. Malay itself was a problematic term that was constantly negotiated. The so-called ‘Malay’ people in British Malaya, Dutch East Indies, or the Philippines did not necessarily identify themselves as Malay, or see themselves as part of a specific race or nation.\(^{109}\) Joel Kahn shows how the ‘Malay’ is a constructed term by colonial and later nationalist discourses. The definition of Malay was constantly being negotiated in the 1800s, and people (Bugis, Acehnese, Banjarese, and Maindailing) who had previously been listed as separate racial identities in censuses became listed as Malays.\(^{110}\) In like manner, the term ‘native’ was used in many different ways, and it was commonly used as a generalising term for all Asians and included Malays, Chinese, and Indians.\(^{111}\) It is, however, striking that despite the detailed division of people in many categories and subcategories, the local press and travel accounts still referred to all Asians as ‘natives’.

Editorials in the local press frequently described Malays as children and argued that the British needed to take responsibility over the development of the Malays, and that they ‘should have been taken by the hand and always led along in the forefront of all this development’.\(^ {112}\) Malays, and other Southeast Asians, were constantly belittled for their looks, manners, and traditions. They were described as unprogressive, believers in supernatural things, such as haunted trees and forests, and what ‘every Malay likes to possess is a clock, and especially those which make the cuckoo sound when they strike the hours’.\(^ {113}\) An 1897 editorial in Malay Mail, also discusses sexual promiscuity and the lack of family values among Malays, as well as ranking different Malay groups, and throwing in some anti-semitism for good measure:


\(^{111}\) John G. Butcher, The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3; Reid (2010), 107. The Dutch used the term inlander (‘native’) to describe Indonesians in a negative way, and when they wanted to be neutral they used Indiers (Indians), as did the Spanish in the Philippines.


\(^{113}\) ‘The Customs of the Malays’, *Pinang Gazette*, 12 October 1892, 3.
The Malay man is too prone to divorce his wife and marry somebody else. The Malay women being almost equally prone to having one or more lovers in addition to their husband. This is the one great blot on the social side of the Malay character. Apart from this, the Malay man is a downright good sort, though we should put the Menangkabow men at the bottom of the list. These Sumatra men have been called Malay Jews, and not without reason. As age advances they become mean, grasping and avaricious to a degree. The Malacca, Negri Sembilan and Perak Malays as a class always get on well with Europeans. The great secret of a Malay’s popularity with Englishmen is that he is a gentleman, whether he be clothed in a dirty old sarong or silk attire. […] But never lend him money!114

Based on these newspaper articles and government records, we notice that the descriptions of the Malays follow the dichotomies described by Bhabha and Memmi; the native is both savage and servant, possesses a rampant sexuality while being childish, is simple-minded yet a manipulator and a liar. These created characterisations gradually become established truths among the local population, even more so with the control of the education system. There was, however, room for improvement. The Malay ‘was by no means a “savage” or uncivilized, though so often described in this manner’.115 Moreover, with (British) education, youth could avoid the lazy habits of the adult population.116 The idea of manifest destiny was explicit among British officials. Infantilising colonial subjects and a paternalistiv view was a common strategy by leading British officials to justify colonial rule. It was frequently repeated that Malays could not govern themselves, and like children they needed someone (preferably British) to guide them and rule them.117 Ashis Nandy has schematised how colonialism dealt with the childlike (‘ignorant but willing to learn’, through reform) or childish (‘ignorant but unwilling to learn’, through repression) Indian,118 and it is also applicable to other colonial areas. Furthermore, the colonised were ungrateful for all the assistance they receive. Good qualities of the colonised were, moreover, often highlighted from a negative perspective. For instance, hospitality was portrayed as a sign of financial irresponsibility and extravagance.119 In sum, people in Southeast Asia were not fit for self-government. It was therefore better that a

114 ‘The Malay’, editorial, Malay Mail, 14 January 1897, 2.
115 ‘The Customs of the Malays’, Pinang Gazette, 12 October 1892, 3.
117 Andrew Clarke, Governor of the Straits Settlements (1873-1875), stated: ‘The Malays, like every other rude Eastern nation, require to be treated much more like children.’ (Report to Lord Kimberley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 24 February 1874, quoted in C. Northcote Parkinson, British Intervention in Malaya 1867-1877 (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1960), 153, and Sadka, 53); Governor Weld stated: ‘Moreover, I doubt if Asians can ever really be taught to govern themselves. Good native government seems not to be a plant congenial to the soil.’ (Letter to the Colonial Office, dated 20 October 1880, quoted in SarDesai (1977), 225).
118 Nandy, 15-17.
119 Memmi, 82, 84.
benevolent ruler, such as Britain, ruled them, rather than selfish, visionless Malay Sultans.120

Other Southeast Asian people were described with similar attributes. J.G.D. Campbell, a British official in Siam, described the Siamese indolence, and said ‘[t]he people are probably among the laziest on the face of the earth, and laziness has become thoroughly ingrained in their disposition’.121 As the British wanted to annex the southern parts of Siam in the early 1900s, the Siamese were described as primitive, indolent, and ‘of a very lazy disposition’.122 There are many cases of Orientalism in these early newspapers when describing the ‘native’ population. The Oriental was often portrayed as irrational, ignorant, and dirty. There were articles named: ‘The Unsophisticated Malay’ and ‘The Blind Faith of the Oriental’.123 The Filipinos were described as being of the same stock as the Malay, ‘in their apathy, their cruelty and their hatred of work, the only things which distinguish them from other Malays being their passion for disorder and bigandage [sic]’.124 In essence, the problem for all Western powers in Asia was the same, since “the fundamentals remain the same, for the East is ever the East”.125

When the coloniser imposes an essentialist identity on the colonised, it becomes easier to reproduce such images and myths, and point to the perceivably vast and fixed differences.126 Swettenham was very influential in creating and reproducing an image of the Malay, and it was reported that his

---

120 A Perak Pioneer editorial claimed: ‘the Malay Sultan to-day is but the sorry figurehead of a race that never in any way showed itself capable or desirous of bettering its material position’. (‘One Way of Governing Malays’, editorial, Perak Pioneer, 26 August 1908, 4). A Malay Mail editorial claimed that each Malay State needed ‘a Protector of Malays’, and ‘that the people of the country should have been taken by the hand and always led along in the forefront of all this development’. (‘Day by Day’, editorial, Malay Mail, 8 March 1901, 2).

121 Campbell, 101-102. Campbell also offered another reading of the supposed laziness of the Siamese: ‘While the white man imagines that it is he who is exploiting a dark race and turning it to his own profit, his victims meanwhile entertain as contemptuous an opinion of him as he does of them. There is no doubt that in his heart of hearts the Siamese really believes that the European is an inferior person. While the Siamese is lazy and enjoys himself, it is the European who does the hard work of administrative government, builds railways, and toils in the merchant’s office. It is the Europeans who are the workers and to the labour of the hive, while the queen bee is enjoying a life of ease.’ (Campbell, 126).


books about Malay people were given to visitors to the region. In these books he often refers to ‘the real Malay’, which reproduces an idea of a fixed, essential identity, and describes how ‘the Malay’ looks, behaves, etc. He opined that the Malay ‘had no initiative whatever: they were there to do what their chief told them – no more, no less’. Furthermore, he described the Malay as a good servant (when hunting), good imitator, dishonest (he borrows money, but never repays it), a murderer, and someone who cares more for his knife than his wife. Despite these prevailing attitudes there was an idea of British exceptionalism; a perception among many Britons that they did not share these beliefs, and valued people after their character, and not their race: ‘In this advanced age, in every land and clime, educated and liberal-minded Englishmen pay no heed to colour and creed. Sound capacity, integrity, and high moral tone of character are virtues which they prize.’

Lake and Reynolds describe the creation of a binary world with a racial hierarchy of whiteness where more rights and possibilities were given to people categorised as white. This was a social categorisation and marker established in the 1800s, which then became a social identification. Japan was called the ‘Britain of the East’ and also described themselves as the ‘white race of Asia’, which illustrates how Japan wanted to distinguish themselves from neighbouring Asian countries as well as highlighting the hierarchy of colour. Japan fought hard for how Japanese people should be classified abroad, and considered it an injustice to be categorised together with other Asians. Attempts were successful in the Dutch East Indies, where a government decision in 1899 categorised Japanese with Europeans in the distinctions between different ethnic groups (Europeans, natives, and foreign Orientals), which meant getting the same rights and privileges as Europeans. In Australia, on the other hand, the Japanese were unsuccessful in their demand for equal treatment to Europeans. Count Katō Takaaki, working for the Foreign Ministry and later Prime Minister of Japan (1924-1926),

---

127 ‘His books, The Real Malay and Malay Sketches, are put in the hands of all intending visitors to these parts as a guide to the country’s life and legend.’ Bernad Nunn, ‘Some account of our governors and civil service’, in Makepeace et al. (eds.), 128.
128 Frank A. Swettenham, Malay Sketches (London: John Lane, 1895), 1-11. And, on the third page, Swettenham reaches the issues of laziness: ‘He is, however, lazy to a degree, is without method or order of any kind, knows no regularity even in the hours of his meals, and considers time as of no importance.’
129 Swettenham (1907), 140, 141, 146, 147; Swettenham (1895), 3.
131 Lake and Reynolds.
132 Iriye, 36-40.
133 The implementation of the law, however, took time, and the Japanese were frequently mistaken for other Asians. Furthermore, the Chinese felt an injustice had been made as they were still classified as ‘foreign Orientals’. C. Fasseur, ‘Cornerstone and Stumbling Block: Racial Classification and the Late Colonial State in Indonesia’, in Robert Cribb (ed.), The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies, 1880-1942. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), 37; Kuitenbrouwer, 257-258; Purcell, 436.
stated: ‘The point which had caused a painful feeling in Japan… [is] that Japan would be spoken of in formal documents, such as the Colonial Acts, as if the Japanese were on the same level of morality and civilization as Chinese or other less advanced populations of Asia.’

Ideas of racial hierarchies were thus prevalent in Japan as well. Nevertheless, categorising Japanese as Europeans illustrates how racial categories are a construct. It also demonstrates the binary thinking in dividing the world into privileged white and Others.

As the Chinese population was an imported work force, they could more easily be praised, especially as they were content working and had no claims for independence. The Chinese comprised more than ninety per cent of the labourers in the tin industry in the Federated Malay States, and were described as being an indispensable work horse and the backbone of the economy.

Chinese who came to Straits Settlements also became ‘better’, and Mr. Hare, the Protector of Chinese in the Straits Settlements, claimed that the Chinese there were cleaner than their Chinese brethren.

Chinese and Indians were sometimes used as a frame of comparison, and a way to criticise the Malays or other natives. Swettenham repeatedly praised the Chinese and called them ‘the bone and sinew of the Malay States’, since they were ‘the labourers, the miners, the principal shopkeepers, the capitalists, the holders of the revenue farms, the contributors of almost the whole of the revenue; we cannot do without them.’

There was, however, an ambiguous feeling toward the Chinese. An editorial in Malay Mail claimed: ‘Most Europeans dislike the Chinese as a race when brought into contact with them, a feeling heartily reciprocated by the Chinese themselves. But the longer one

134 Letter dated 20 October 1897, as quoted in Lake and Reynolds, 145. A few years later, immigrants to Australia had to pass a ‘European’ language test, which again led to Japanese protests. Hisakichi Eitaki, Japanese Consul to Australia, wrote: ‘The Japanese belong to an Empire whose standard of civilization is so much higher than that of Kanakas, Negroes, Pacific Islanders, Indians or other Eastern peoples’ and should therefore be treated as such.’

Consul Eitaki, Letter to Australian Prime Minister Edmund Barton, 3 May 1901, quoted in Lake and Reynolds, 9-10.


136 ‘The Straits Chinese Magazine’, Malay Mail, 8 April 1897, 2.


138 Swettenham (1907), 39-40. Swettenham continues the praise: ‘In all the early days it was Chinese energy and industry which supplied the funds to begin the construction of roads and other public works, and to pay for all the other costs of administration. […] But the Chinese were not only miners, they were charcoal-burners… they were woodcutters, carpenters, and brickmakers… They brought all the capital into the country when Europeans feared to take the risk; they were the traders and shopkeepers, and it was their steamers which first opened regular communication between the ports of the colony and the ports of the Malay States. (Swettenham (1907), 232).
lives amongst the Chinese and the better one gets to understand them, the stronger grows one’s regard and admiration for their many sterling qualities.' Anthony Reid writes about the Chinese as a Southeast Asian ‘other’, and how they were posed as a threat to Southeast Asia and the natives, with their industriousness and their immigration. European colonisers thereby, indirectly, became a guarantor of native survival. With all this being said, it was hard to define who was Chinese, since many had been there for generations, and ethnic intermarriages made categorisations even harder. The British journalist and politician Henry Norman described the Straits Chinese in the following way in 1895: ‘The Straits Chinaman would not exchange his British nationality for anything else in the world; he plays cricket, football, and lawn tennis… and he reads the newspaper. […] He knows that he is the equal of the Englishman before the law, and considers that he is slightly superior to him in other respects.’

This brings to mind Homi Bhabha’s ideas about colonial mimicry, and how the colonised adapts social practices of colonisers, yet the differences are still there. Regardless of education and amassed wealth among the colonised, the colonised subject is ‘almost the same, but not quite’. There is still a qualitative difference between us and ‘the Other’, and that is our whiteness.

**Historiography of Cinema in Southeast Asia**

The early history of cinema is usually concerned with technological development, its connection to other art forms, and national film histories. I have tried to re-evaluate these national histories, and situate the films in a transnational context by highlighting the Southeast Asian entertainment circuit which, in turn, was connected to a larger network of communication and commerce. Current research on the history of cinema in Southeast Asia usually focuses on domestic film production that started in the 1920s or 1930s in most countries; José Nepomuceno formed his aptly-named Malayan Movies in 1917 in the Philippines, and that was the earliest domestic film company in the region. The first two or three decades of film exhibition and distribu-

---

140 Reid (2010), chapter 3.
141 Norman (1895), 41-42.
tion in the region are often covered in a few introductory pages in national film histories. Historical research on the impact of exhibition and distribution of early films in the region, and how it affected cultural history, is thus missing. Singapore and Malaysia are also among the least researched areas when it comes to the early history of cinema in Southeast Asia. The two notable exceptions are the Philippines and Thailand (or, rather, Manila and Bangkok). Furthermore, there is no research with a transnational, historical perspective, as most scholars focus on national film histories. This dissertation strives to redress some of these omissions.

The Philippines is the Southeast Asian country where there has been most research on the history of early exhibition. In the Diamond Anniversary of Philippine Cinema, a short chapter discusses the earliest film screenings in the Philippines. Clodualdo A. del Mundo devotes a chapter of Native Resistance: Philippine Cinema and Colonialism 1898–1941 to a discussion on aspects of Philippine cinema and early film screenings, and relates it to U.S. colonial rule. In two volumes Nick Deocampo covers how Spanish and U.S. colonial rule, respectively, influenced Philippine cinema, including the earliest film exhibitions in 1897 that were conducted by the Spaniards Antonio Ramos and Francisco Pertierra, and the Swiss Mr. Leibman and Mr. Peritz before the Spanish-American War. A limitation of these important historical works, is that they rely on one or two newspaper sources, thereby omitting several early film exhibitions and reviews, as illustrated by the filmography in Deocampo’s book.

For Siam, Scot Barmé connects early film exhibitions in Bangkok and their audience composition to the development of national culture, commercial mass culture, and gender relations during the first decades of the twentieth century. As part of his research he also surveys the first decades of film exhibition in Bangkok. The book is well researched, and Barmé uses multiple contemporary sources, both English and Thai. He describes the development of early cinema in Bangkok, and mentions the early film screenings of S.G. Marchovsky (1897), British Imperial Bioscope (1903), Edison Cinematograph Company (1903), and the Japanese promoter Watanabe Tomoyori (1904). Barmé also briefly discusses the admission prices of cinematic exhibitions, and described the cheapest ticket as being ‘just within

---

147 Deocampo (2003), 372-375. El Comercio, and to some extent Manila Times, are the main sources.
reach for a member of the urban working class in full-time employment'.

Scot Barmé has also written about the interest of Thai Royalty in the new technology, and they frequently arranged private screenings in the Palace. The monarch also bought a cinematograph and a laboratory, and King Chulalongkorn’s younger brother, Prince Sanphasat, started making films around 1900, for instance, from the thirty-year anniversary of the Coronation of the King in November 1903. In addition, Dome Sukvong, the Thai historian and film archivist, has written quite extensively about different aspects of the early history of film exhibition and distribution in Thailand. His work is, however, in Thai and not available in English.

The historiography of motion pictures in colonial Indonesia started, up until a few years ago, with the year 1900 when the earliest film exhibition on Java is claimed to have taken place, an inaccurate statement that has been repeated so many times that it has become a myth and part of history-writing. My research shows that there were several travelling film exhibitors that toured Java, Sumatra, and Makassar as early as 1896, and there were over a hundred film exhibitions in the Dutch East Indies in the 1890s. This lacuna is covered to an even larger extent by on-going research at Utrecht University, where Dafna Ruppin is working on a dissertation covering early cinema culture of colonial Indonesia from 1896 to 1914 from the perspective of film distribution, exhibition, and reception. Ruppin is using an impressively wide array of newspaper sources, both Dutch and Malay, and has found that the earliest cinematographic exhibition in Southeast Asia took place in Batavia in October 1896 by L. Talbot, who then toured the Dutch East Indies, where he also filmed different scenes. In 1898, Talbot exhibited images from native life in Malaya in the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and Bangkok.

A difference between the history and role of cinema in French Indochina vis-à-vis other parts of Southeast Asia is that early French film companies used French Indochina primarily as a production site to make colonial films for French audiences, rather than as a market where they could exhibit their films. As early as 1896 the Lumière brothers sent Constant Girel to French Indochina to film exotic views.

149 Barmé (2006), 60.
history of colonial film production (he lists 243 films) in Vietnam from 1896 to 1926, and how French control affected film culture in Vietnam. The work, however, does not cover the history of exhibition and distribution. There is also an ‘official’ history of cinema in Vietnam published by the Viêt Nam Cinema Department in 2003, which is only available in Vietnamese.

The first chapter deals with the first decades of film distribution, production, and exhibition in colonial Vietnam. It starts by discussing the earliest film exhibitions in the region, and Lumière operators, such as Gabriel Veyre, shooting films there. It, incorrectly, dates the earliest film exhibition to 6 November 1898 in Chợ Lớn, a Chinese market town southwest of Saigon, whereas there were several cinematographic exhibitions prior to that, for instance, at Salle de la Societe Philharmonique 4-7 September 1897, and at Salle du Chat d’Or 13-17 October 1897.

I have been unable to find any research that covers the early history of cinema with particular regard to exhibition and distribution in colonial Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, and Laos. There is a lack of historical research. The Encyclopedia of Early Cinema, for instance, claims that the earliest film exhibition in Malaya was held in 1898, and the next one in 1906. The Encyclopedia further states that the earliest film exhibition in Cambodia took place in 1909. Also in these cases, there are hundreds of early film exhibitions that have been omitted. There might, however, be other research articles in local languages that I have not encountered.

The development in Southeast Asia will at times be set in a broader context of the development of early film exhibition and distribution by being compared to the situation in neighbouring colonial India, or rather its larger port cities. The British Indian empire was concentrated in three regional centres that also functioned as trade entrepots: Bombay in the west, Calcutta in the northeast (Bengal), and Madras in the south. India was the most important colony of the British Empire, and had a strategic trade position. A reason to use India as a benchmark is that it can be viewed as a springboard from which the British expanded into the rest of Asia, in commercial, political, and missionary terms. India was also the bridgehead for entertainment,

---

154 Donald Dean Wilson Jr, Colonial Viêt Nam on Film: 1896 to 1926 (Doctoral dissertation, French Department, City University of New York, 2007).
155 The following years saw several travelling film exhibitions in Hanoi, Saigon, and elsewhere in Indochina. After describing the first few years of film history, the history jumps from 1902 to 1914 (Wilson, 39).
156 Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 4 September 1897; Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 13 October 1897.
158 Ingrid Muan, ‘Cambodia’, in Encyclopedia of Early Cinema, 91. There is no separate entry on Laos.
a place from which many entertainers flowed into Southeast Asia. This was also the most common way in which film and travelling showmen entered Southeast Asia. There have been several publications on the early history of cinema in India that also cover the first decade of exhibition and distribution. Stephen Putnam Hughes’ dissertation, completed in 1996, discusses the early touring film companies in southern India, connects them to the transnational network of entertainers, and assesses the structure of the early cinema audience in Madras (Chennai). In a 2010 paper, Hughes uses Indian newspaper sources to map the first two years of cinema exhibition in Madras. Sudhir Mahadevan’s dissertation from 2009 covers the history of visual culture in Bengal, where he discusses the development of cinema, photography, and print culture from 1840 to 1920 in a transnational and international perspective. He does not, however, map early film exhibition, and there are only a handful of occasions where he mentions pre-1910 film exhibition. The same goes for his 2010 article about early cinema history in India. Ranita Chatterjee examines the early film history in Calcutta (Kolkata), the colonial context, and audience interactions. Kaushik Bhaumik, in turn, writes about the first few decades of cinema in Bombay (Mumbai). Several of the itinerant companies mentioned in these works, particularly in Hughes’ work, were also touring the Southeast Asian entertainment circuit, thereby showing the inter-connectedness of the Asian entertainment circuit.

---

Transnational Entertainment

In the late 1800s, the entertainment circuit expanded dramatically in Southeast Asia, as in Europe and North America. Industrialisation and urbanisation led to more developed transport and communication networks, and to increased leisure time and a higher demand for public entertainment, which was relatively expensive. Leisure time became more commercialised with regular and structured amusement programs.¹⁶⁷ In North America, these different entertainments had a significant impact on the creation of an imagined community within society, across class barriers, and including immigrant communities.¹⁶⁸ It has, however, not been analysed to what extent these effects were also valid in colonial societies. These developments also affected the Southeast Asian entertainment world, as the technologies and entertainment companies came to Southeast Asia. By connecting the history of cinema to these travelling entertainments, the interrelation of early cinema and the history of screen and stage culture becomes clearer. There was a rich stage culture during the nineteenth century, such as circus, theatre, opera, vaudeville, minstrel shows, musicals, burlesque, and tableaux vivants or living pictures. These stage shows included new and old screen technologies in their shows, such as the diorama, the panorama, the magic lantern, and later the cinema. Early cinema can be seen as part of this turn-of-the-century visual and technological culture. Tom Gunning describes the emerging cinema "as an occasionally marginal player upon a contested terrain".¹⁶⁹

Prior to the arrival of cinema in Southeast Asia, local audiences had already experienced other forms of Western and local entertainment through travelling theatre, opera, vaudeville, and circus groups. Many people in the region had their first encounter with motion pictures through another entertainment medium, such as travelling circus groups and magicians. The itinerant entertainment forms that are presented in this dissertation mostly originated from Europe or North America. These entertainment forms were later appropriated by the local population, or received a mixed content. What makes them significant is that some of them managed to gather people from all strata of society to their exhibitions, which helped create temporary limi-


nal spaces where audiences mixed. Entertainments also provided sites for new impressions and reflection. The mammoth circus was a harbinger of modernity. Minstrel shows created consciousness of, or performed, racial inequality, sometimes in blackface. Tableaux vivants raised issues concerning gender and impropriety. The itinerant entertainment companies also raises questions regarding what role these travelling amusements played in the colonial process, and whether they should be viewed as sites and symbols for imperialism or cultural exchange.

A field of research relevant for this dissertation is therefore the history of itinerant entertainment companies in the region. Matthew W. Wittman describes the Pacific entertainment circuit of 1850-1890, and the transnational elements of early travelling entertainers and showmen. My dissertation is a temporal continuation of Wittman’s work, and many of the same entertainment companies also toured Southeast Asia during the time-frame of my dissertation. Wittman asserts that Australia, which was a British colony until 1901, was the most important Pacific overseas market for U.S. entertainers, and that many entertainment companies also travelled widely throughout the Far East, primarily to its port cities. Wittman describes the Pacific Circuit as a form of ‘junior circuit’ where U.S. and European performers could perfect their acts before returning home. It was a good marketing strategy for entertainment companies to go abroad in an increasingly inter-connected entertainment world. They were deemed exotic and exciting during their tours abroad, and became increasingly popular as they returned with a cosmopolitan image. Several of those artists were, however, so successful that they spent the rest of their careers abroad. Wittman rarely mentions whether they also travelled to and performed in Southeast Asia, whose port cities were part of the entertainment circuit. Wittman concludes his dissertation by pointing out that the increased importance of colonial ports, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, changed the Pacific Circuit and the itineraries of travelling entertainers in the late 1800s. There were also companies that moved in the opposite direction. Many Southeast Asian amusement companies performed in Europe and North America: a group of Siamese dancers performed in St Petersburg in 1900; the Filipino Clown Bebe and a company of Cambodian dancers performed in Paris in 1906; the Opera Indra Permatta from the Dutch East Indies performed at the Coronation of the King of Denmark in 1906.

170 Matthew W. Wittman, Empire of Culture: U.S. Entertainers and the Making of the Pacific Circuit, 1850-1890 (Doctoral dissertation, Department of American Culture, University of Michigan, 2010).

With motion pictures, new commercial opportunities and artistic possibilities arose. Many early films can be placed in an intermedial setting, either based on the context in which they were exhibited or through their subject matter. Cinema extended the amusement culture on many fronts and through many conduits. Charles Musser opines: ‘It is not just that the cinema wormed its way into virtually every form of popular culture – the fairground, the magic lantern, vaudeville, the beer garden. It must have altered them, destabilized them, and done so in unexpected ways.’ In Southeast Asia, cinematic exhibitions were part of the tradition of itinerant entertainment companies going from city to city in the region. Early cinema is also intersected with the history of most other stage entertainments. Magicians and illusionists played an important role in the development of the film industry. The three magicians, David Devant, Georges Méliès, and Carl Hertz all bought R.W. Paul’s Theatrograph in Britain in March 1896, included it in their shows, and continued their careers in different trajectories. The latter two also affected the history of cinema in Southeast Asia.

Vaudeville was popular in the late 1800s, as it consisted of several small acts, including different visual novelties such as tableaux vivants, magic lanterns, shadowplay, and magic shows, thereby managing to provide something for everyone. In that way, vaudeville became an aggregate of all forms of entertainment that were popular at the time. Entertainment forms that had previously been independent stage shows were now absorbed by vaudeville. Tableaux vivants were initially an art form that made other well-known art works, such as paintings, statues and novels, available to a broader audience by imitating and interpreting it with frozen human figures, often light-clad women entertainers, props and scenery on stage. Music or a narrator would often accompany the images. Minstrel shows consisted of musical, theatrical, and comical performances by white entertainers in blackface or African-Americans, and emerged in the 1830s in the United States. Minstrel entertainment, with the use of blackface, was popular across all social classes in Britain from the 1830s, and its popularity grew during the 1860s and 1870s. In July 1866 the first African-American minstrel company went to Britain from the United States, but it was not as popular as blackface minstrel com-

174 I have, however, not found any discussion in the local press in the 1890s and early 1900s about the nature and possible moral objections to these shows, in contrast to the debates that arose in North America. See, Jack W. McCullough, Living Pictures on the New York Stage (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983); Robert C. Allen, Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
panies.\textsuperscript{175} The minstrel shows became more popular, larger in scale, removed its ensemble format and started including other forms of variety entertainment, and thus the minstrel shows and vaudeville gradually converged in form.\textsuperscript{176}

Southeast Asia was a site for cultural exchange with influences from several different cultures. In addition to travelling entertainment companies, most of which were based in the West, there were local forms of amusement that attracted large parts of the population. Some local, indigenous amusements appropriated Western commercial forms, and there was a continuous exchange of ideas and forms. Itinerant entertainment companies also added local artists to their show in order to give it a local flavour, since it was cheaper and there was no transportation costs. The local entertainment forms ranged from theatre (such as zarzuela and moro-moro in the Philippines, bangsawan in the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya, likay and lakhon in Siam) to shadowplays (such as wayang kulit in the Dutch East Indies and Malay States) to different kinds of religious festivals. These performances were usually not advertised in the local press, and it is hard to surmise how frequent they were. In the Philippines there was a rich tradition of Spanish zarzuela as well as Tagalog dramas, and there were regular performances in Manila that were advertised.\textsuperscript{177} In the Malay world bangsawan was the most prominent theatre form which combined theatre, opera, and dance. Tan Sooi Beng describes bangsawan as ‘the non-Europeans’ version of Western theatre modified and adapted to suit local tastes’.\textsuperscript{178}

European visitors to Southeast Asia testified to the importance of these entertainment forms for the local population. In Siam, the likay and lakhon were very popular, and the Siamese could watch plays for hours. In his travel journal from 1895, Henry Norman described the love of the Siamese for the theatre: ‘To an ordinary Siamese it is the height of happiness to sit jammed in a dense crowd on the floor, from seven p.m. to two a.m., watching the same play.’\textsuperscript{179} Campbell, likewise described the important role theatre played in people’s life in Siam, and that it was common with improvised street per-


\textsuperscript{176} Allen (1980), 47-48 and Pickering, 30.


\textsuperscript{179} Norman, 421.
formances, particularly by the Chinese.\textsuperscript{180} The Bangkok Amateur Dramatic Society was formed with Siamese actors in the early 1900s with the active support of the Siamese Crown Prince who acted and wrote for the company. The style of the theatre was more ‘Western’, and they performed Western adaptations and original Siamese plays written and acted by Siamese covering aspects of Siamese life.\textsuperscript{181} It was so successful that another theatre company, the Saranrom Amateur Dramatic Society, was formed, and Siamese royalty frequented the shows. All the parts were, however, played by men.\textsuperscript{182} In 1905, Augusta de Wit described the Javanese attitude: ‘To all other pleasures, the Javanese prefers that of witnessing a performance of the wayang, the native theatre.’\textsuperscript{183} For Singapore, James Francis Warren described itinerant wayang troupes that would perform as street festivals, which were very popular among the labourers during religious holidays and other special occasions.\textsuperscript{184}

There are also connections to the research of Matthew Cohen on the mixed Malay theatre group, Komedie Stamboel. Matthew Cohen writes about the development of the Eurasian Malay-language bangsawan troupe, Komedie Stamboel, founded by A. Mahieu in 1891, and assesses their impact in the Dutch East Indies, particularly in Surabaya. The Komedie Stamboel was a child of its time, and combined Malay language, Eurasian actors, Mahieu-composed melodies, and Chinese management to create a mixed amusement form that was neither European nor native, with a multi-ethnic troupe of Dutch, Chinese, Arab, Javanese, and Indian actors, combining elements from the circus, the opera, and the theatre. The company was very popular, and attracted a wide array of audiences; as such it broke down social barriers and marked the ‘potentials of interethnic solidarity’, as well as highlighting social and ethnic differences in the public space. The company lasted for around a decade, and then it gradually lost its appeal, experiencing financial losses and a decline in public perception.\textsuperscript{185}

The circus was the benchmark against which other entertainment forms in Southeast Asia were compared, as it was very popular, particularly the me-

\textsuperscript{180} J.G.D. Campbell, \textit{Siam in the Twentieth Century: Being the Experience and Impressions of a British Official} (London: Edward Arnold, 1902), 151-152.


\textsuperscript{183} Augusta De Wit, \textit{Java: Facts and Fancies} (London: Chapman & Hall, 1905), 137. Worsfold made a similar observation a decade earlier (Worsfold, 56).


nagerie and the hippodrome (horse show). Indonesian newspapers frequently compared Komedie Stamboel, and Wayang Kassim to circuses, when it came to their tents and seating arrangements, audience size, and quality. Circuses were so popular that people were reported to ask for advance wages and pawn their valuables to be able to see their shows.\(^{186}\) Janet Davis calls the circus metonymic for the national expansion and infrastructural development of the United States, especially since it developed and spread with the railways, and as it exhibited the latest technology. She also describes the size and scope of the circus as a sign of European imperialism.\(^{187}\) When European nations started expanding in scope, world fairs and circuses, among others, also used foreign, exotic animals and people as part of their shows. Circus, in itself, was a business with transnational elements, consisting of acts and animals from around the world. By having ethnic diversity among its troupes, the circus could offer a tour of the world.\(^ {188}\) Circuses helped create a shared leisure culture, as it was a community occasion for all ages and social classes. Unloading the animals and setting up the tent was part of the spectacle, and so was the large audience.\(^ {189}\) Over time, circuses enlarged their tents, and added more rings and acts. The three main elements in the circus around this period were the menagerie, sideshows, and the variety show.\(^ {190}\) Circuses continually grew bigger and more expensive to operate, and as part of their attempt to include more performances they started having several stages. They also lowered the price of general attendance, and charged extra for admission to the sideshows. The risk increased as well due to high daily maintenance costs as well as shipping and travelling costs. Days of bad

\(^{186}\) Cohen, 12, chapter 2.


\(^{188}\) The most popular and well-known circus group in the nineteenth century was Barnum’s ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’, which was performed for presidents and royalty, and can be seen as an example of the global consciousness that Robertson described. Barnum himself claims he was so famous that he received a letter from Burma in 1885 addressed to ‘Mr. Barnum, America’. It was posted in Moulmein, Burma, and contained two letters in Burmese to ‘the attendants on the White Elephant’ (which had been part of their circus). It reached Barnum in Bridgeport via the Post Offices of Bombay, Brindisi, the Sea Post Office and New York City. (Davis, 22; Wittman, 175; Phineas Taylor Barnum, *Barnum’s Own Story* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 441).


weather and cancelled performances were very costly. There were economies of scale as the audience increased as well.

There was also a contemporary awareness among Europeans about the negative cultural influences of colonialism. In his travel writing, Henry Norman wrote about Hanoi, but implies that it is valid also for other cities in Asia: ‘The advent of the foreigner has killed native art and handicraft, without contributing anything to replace it.’\textsuperscript{191} Ernest Young, who had worked at the Education Department in Siam, made a similar observation:

> But the most popular of all amusements is the theatre. It is the delight of old and young alike, and is intensely interesting to the foreigner, as probably representing to a very large degree, the primitive way in which the dramas that were presented to his forefathers, were staged and enacted. It possesses an additional attraction inasmuch as it is yet a purely native institution, unaffected by those Western influences that are so rapidly destroying in the East the many Oriental manners and customs that were once the delight of the traveller.\textsuperscript{192}

He does not, however, seem to be concerned with saving the customs that are being quickly destroyed; his main concern is about the negative effect it will have on ‘the delight of the traveller’. The primary function of the ‘strange’ customs and manners are to remain for the pleasure and curiosity of the Western visitor. The same colonial discourse and value chain that was presented earlier in the Introduction is visible here as well, as the Siamese theatre is called ‘primitive’, and reminiscent of dramas that the forefathers of Europeans watched.

**Methodological Considerations**

My dissertation project started with a focus on Scandinavian films and their distribution and reception in Southeast Asia in the 1910s and 1920s. During research trips to Southeast Asia since 2007, I became increasingly aware there were several lacunae concerning research on the history of early cinema in the region. The focus and time period of this dissertation therefore changed in order to cover the early history of distribution and exhibition of motion pictures, starting with the first cinematographic exhibitions in 1896. Between June 2007 and February 2008 I conducted an eight-month archival research trip to all Southeast Asian countries except Myanmar and Brunei.

\textsuperscript{191} Norman, 74.
On subsequent research trips in 2009 and 2010, I supplemented the ground-
laying research with additional archival research. I also met many Southeast
Asian academics, scholars, historians, archivists, and filmmakers that gave
me added perspectives. Teaching at De La Salle University in Manila for
two trimesters in 2010-2011, and giving guest lectures at universities
throughout Southeast Asia further enabled me to present my findings and
discuss the viability of my ideas. I spent a semester at Cornell University in
the autumn of 2011, which gave me access to more primary research mater-
ial, scholarship on Southeast Asia, as well as the scholarly community of the
Cornell Southeast Asia Program.

I researched contemporary newspapers, early films and photographs, gov-
ernment records, censuses, city directories, trade data, travel writing, and
maps. With my sources I tap into the imperial apparatus of information gath-
ering, and most of these sources reflect the contemporary colonial gaze.
Many sources I use were part of the imperial ambition to control the East.
The primary source of data that I use is contemporary local press covering
the period 1890-1910. Methodologically, different film historians who have
written local and national film histories, largely relying on contemporary
newspapers, have inspired me. The newspaper sources, regardless of lan-
guage, provide important reflections on the contemporary cultural climate in
the region. I consider the newspapers to provide clues to the contemporary
society, and give a contextual setting of what was happening in the societies
I study. Newspapers I have examined are based in Singapore, Penang, Kuala
Lumpur, Taiping, Ipoh, Batavia (Jakarta), Surabaya, Surakarta, Makassar,
Medan, Bangkok, Manila, Iloilo, Hanoi, Saigon, Haiphong, and Rangoon.
The number of newspapers in Southeast Asia multiplied in the late 1890s
and early 1900s, and each year saw the birth of many new newspapers, some
short-lived, in different languages. The bibliography lists the newspapers I
have been able to consult in archives, as well as through NewspaperSG, Sin-
gapore’s National Library’s online resource of Singapore and Malaya news-
papers.

I have included newspapers from the Philippines, and to some extent from
Burma as well, although they are at the margin of my research. Burma is
largely outside the scope of this dissertation as it was part of British India. The
Philippines was more connected to Hong Kong and the Chinese circuit
due to its proximity (less than three days by ship), and is therefore also in the

193 This includes Charles Musser, The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907
(New York: Scribner, 1990); Gregory A. Waller, Main Street Amusement: Movies and Com-
mercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930 (Washington and London: Smithsonian
Institution Press, 1995); Jan Olsson, Los Angeles Before Hollywood: Journalism and Ameri-
can Film Culture, 1905 to 1915 (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009).

194 The territory of Burma had gradually been colonised by Britain in the 1800s through three
Anglo-Burmese wars. See Aparna Mukherjee, British Colonial Policy in Burma: An Aspect of
periphery of this work, although I return to it occasionally. Having a pan-Southeast Asian approach has its advantages and disadvantages, and as a consequence the reader might find the dissertation disorderly at times. I, however, believe that the advantages of this approach are significant, as it enables us to follow distribution patterns. Moreover, the itinerant exhibitors in Southeast Asia were not bound by national borders, rather their very practice is in essence an illustration of the transnational foundation of early film in the region.

Historians, such as Robin W. Winks and others, define history in different ways: (i) what happened in the past; (ii) what people believed happened in the past; and (iii) what historians claim happened in the past. Writing an historical account is, therefore, a challenge as the past is reinventible and can be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Inevitably, there are biases in all (historical) writing, based on the availability of sources and perspective. A bias regarding historical writing about colonial regions is that when there are local sources, they are mostly written by elites, often educated in schools run by the colonial government. This raises issues such as whether these newspapers and their accounts should be viewed as a mouthpiece for the coloniser, and whether, and to what extent, it affects research. The earliest newspapers in a colonial area were usually mouthpieces of the coloniser and mostly brought news from the home front, but as the newspaper landscape became more diversified there was also a wide variety of political stances, and the papers became more focused on local news. Furthermore, newspapers were often an urban phenomenon, and it was hard to reach those parts of the country that were far from the cities and larger towns.

The records and newspapers I have encountered are in many European languages, as there were several colonising countries in Southeast Asia, as well as in vernacular languages. English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Chinese, Malay, Tagalog, Visayan, Khmer, Thai, and Vietnamese are some of the languages that I have encountered in the archives. Of these languages, English is the only language I master, although I have a certain understanding of the other three European languages. By using multi-language sources, albeit with a focus on English-speaking sources, I hope I paint a more comprehensive picture of the history of amusements and motion pictures in the region, as well as capturing the spirit of the time. A methodological limitation is that most of my sources are newspapers in the language of the colonising countries (Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States) where most editors are citizens of the colonising country. I am aware how writing history is affected by the language of the printed source material, and what biases are created by the dominance of European languages among the mate-

rial that is still extant. This should, however, not be seen as a sign that the film and entertainment exhibitions were meant for the foreign population, and vernacular newspapers had frequent advertisements for the same amusement companies. My dependence on newspaper sources, the relative absence of vernacular newspapers, and the general limitation of historical sources, means that some of my claims are more suggestive and that there are, inevitably, chronological and other gaps and absences in the history presented in this study. As all scholarly and research endeavours, I might have drawn some wrong conclusions, and I look forward to being corrected by scholars and future students of this field. Many of the gaps and lack of transnational connections in this narrative will also be remedied with the gradual digitisation of newspapers and periodicals.

The history of early film exhibition can be problematic and hard to trace as many early exhibitions lack surviving records. My research regarding exhibition is to a large extent dependent on early film and entertainment advertisements and notices in newspapers, as I have not been able to locate any contemporary handbills or posters. In the historiography of cinema in Southeast Asia, advertisements have, mostly, been viewed in isolation, thereby creating a historiography that privileges the first film exhibition in a country without creating broader transnational links. I attempt to place the different exhibitions in new and broader contexts, and thereby give them new meaning. By using multiple texts from different sources, the advertisements portray something differently. I have documented and mapped how travelling entertainment groups, including film exhibitors, moved between Southeast Asian countries. I extend this discussion by connecting film exhibitions and travelling entertainment companies to issues such as colonialism, culture, and identity. The many gaps in the current historiography of cinema in the region also necessitate an occasionally lengthy account of different exhibitions.

The dissertation does not offer any formal analysis or close readings of individual films. In many cases, I have been unable to identify what specific films were exhibited. My concerns are not, however, dissecting different scenes or look at individual films frame by frame; rather, I am interested in the context of the film exhibition and, to the extent it is available, the reaction of the audience. The essence of the dissertation starts with the earliest film exhibition in 1896, but since I want to demonstrate that cinema is the continuation of a series of new technologies used for public entertainment, I start in the early 1890s. I have chosen to look at the period up to around 1908 when cinema became more institutionalised and secured its position in society. More permanent movie houses were built in the region, and became institutional spaces for film exhibition. In addition, Pathé opened an office in Singapore in 1907 and in Manila in 1909. The break-off period is also in line
with cinematic developments in the United States and the start of cinema’s ‘transitional era’, as well as other parts of the world.\footnote{196} As the geographical focus of this dissertation is Singapore, and to some extent the Malay States, a short survey of the contemporary newspaper landscape is presented below. Within a few years of the founding of Singapore, English newspapers were started. After a few decades there were several English-language papers focused on trade, shipping, and foreign news. \textit{Straits Times} and \textit{Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser}, who had British editors during the whole period, dominated the English-language papers from the first half of the century. The stated policy of \textit{Singapore Free Press} was ‘sane and sound Imperialism and the support of British influence and prestige in the Far East’.\footnote{197} In December 1894, \textit{Straits Mail} started, initially as a bi-weekly and then a daily, with the hope of being the third, cheaper, alternative English-language paper in Singapore.\footnote{198} Even if I focus on English-language papers, some of them had non-European owners, Parsis and Chinese, and editors as well. The \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, for instance, was founded by Rangasamy Pillay in September 1905. Initially he employed different European editors, then he hired a Parsi journalist and medical doctor, Sorabji Kavasji. The paper had the lowest issue price at 5 cents, and guaranteed Singapore’s largest circulation. Pillay also started \textit{Singay Jana Mitran}, a Tamil weekly newspaper in Singapore.\footnote{199} In Penang, the \textit{Pinang Gazette & Straits Chronicle} was founded in the 1830s, and was ‘the recognised organ of the European community of Penang’.\footnote{200} The turn of the century saw several new newspapers in Penang and the Malay States. The Chinese-owned Criterion Press in Penang started the daily Chinese paper \textit{Free Press} in 1898, and was ‘the recognised organ of the European community of Penang’.\footnote{200}

\footnote{196} See, for instance, Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (eds.), \textit{American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices} (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004). Moreover, the Film Service Association and the Motion Picture Patents Company were formed in 1907 and 1908. 1907 was also the year when film trade journals, such as \textit{Moving Picture World}, started being published. Ben Brewster’s chapter in the anthology discusses the periodisation of early cinema in different European countries (Ben Brewster, ‘Periodization of Early Cinema’, Keil and Stamp (eds.), 66-75).

\footnote{197} Walter Makepeace, ‘The Press’, in Wright and Cartwright (ed.), 255. Editors of \textit{Straits Times} during this period were Arnot Reid 1888-1900, E. A. Morphy until 1906, and then Thomas H. Reid. Walter Makepeace was the manager and editor of \textit{Singapore Free Press} from 1887 until the end of my period. A vast majority of the staff at \textit{Straits Times} were non-European. Other papers came and went during the whole period. \textit{Straits Times} was called \textit{Singapore Daily Times} for a couple of decades (1858-1883), and \textit{Singapore Free Press} was out of existence between 1869-1884. Chen Ai Yen, ‘The Mass Media, 1819-1980’, in Chew and Lee (eds.), 288-290; C. Mary Turnbull, \textit{Dateline: Singapore: 150 Years of Straits Times} (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 1995); Makepeace (1908), 254-257; The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906 (Singapore: Fraser & Neave, 1906), 179, 184.

\footnote{198} The reasoning behind starting the paper was ‘[t]he immense increase in the English speaking and reading population’. Editorial, \textit{Straits Mail}, 24 December 1894, 2.

\footnote{199} The \textit{Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906}, 170; Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 9 April 1907, 1; Turnbull (1995), 64-65; Makepeace (1908), 257-258.

\footnote{200} Makepeace (1908), 258-259; The \textit{Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906}, 229.
*Pinang Sin Poe* (also referred to as *Sin Pao*) in 1895, *Chahyah Pulau Pinang* (a Malay weekly) in 1900, and the *Straits Echo* in 1903. The Malay paper advertised itself as the only Malay paper in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and *Straits Echo* called itself ‘the people’s paper’, and catered to English-educated Asian readers.\(^{201}\) The *Perak Pioneer*, based in Taiping, started in July 1894, in order to avoid dependence on newspapers from Singapore and Penang, and for a cheaper price.\(^{202}\) In Kuala Lumpur, the fortnightly *Selangor Journal* started in 1892 (and lasted until 1897), and J.H.M. Robson founded *Malay Mail* in December 1896, where the first edition had 200 copies.\(^{203}\) The daily *Times of Malaya* started in 1903 in Ipoh.\(^{204}\) The media discourse also saw the region as interconnected, and the English-language newspapers often went into dialogue with other papers in different neighbouring countries, especially the ones in the Malay States, the Dutch East Indies, and Siam. The papers, both the English and the vernacular, were widely circulated in neighbouring countries as well.\(^{205}\)

Carl Trocki describes the flourishing of new newspapers in vernacular languages as instrumental in creating the Singaporean plural society.\(^{206}\) Singapore was the centre for Malay-language newspapers, and *Jawi Peranakan* was the first established newspaper in 1876. In British Malaya as a whole, the number of vernacular newspapers increased during the late 1800s. Sixteen Malay-language journals, many short-lived, were created during a period of between two and three decades, seven in Singapore, five in Penang, and four in Perak; and ten Malay-language newspapers, six in Singapore, 201 The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906, 236; Advertisement, *Straits Echo*, 12 September 1903, 5; Tan Liok Ee, ‘Conjunctures, Confluences, Contestations: A Perspective on Penang History’, in Yeoh Seng Guan, Loh Wei Leng, Khoo Salma Nasution and Neil Khor (eds.), *Penang and Its Region: The Story of an Asian Entrepot* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 12. *Straits Echo* had a British editor, and a Chinese associate editor. Other contemporary papers described the paper as Anglo-Chinese, and at times ‘rabidly pro-Chinese’. (‘Foolish Advertisements’, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 16 February 1906, 2; ‘Proud Singapore’, editorial, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 1 March 1906, 2).


205 *Bangkok Times*, for instance, had a Siamese version that was advertised in the neighbouring countries: ‘Bangkok Times, the leading newspaper in Siam. And widely circulated in Malaya, Cochin-China, the Straits Settlements and Burma. […] A unique feature of the “Bangkok Times” is its Siamese version. Thus the advertiser is enabled to talk with the Siamese as it were in their own tongue without knowing one word of it, the “Bangkok Times” doing the translations required.’ (Advertisement, *L’Avenir du Tonkin*, 30 November 1899, 6; Advertisement, *Singapore Free Press*, 9 January 1900, 4). *Siam Observer* also had two language versions (*The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906, 483, 489*).

206 Trocki (2006), 66
two in Penang, and two in Perak, were formed before 1900. The Anglo-Malay Straits-Chinese Herald or Surat Khabar Peranakan started in January 1894, targeting an Asian readership, primarily Straits-born Chinese, with the explicit aim to help them understand the news as well as practice their English, and also help Europeans learn colloquial Malay. The owners of Singapore Free Press started publishing the tri-weekly Utusan Melayu (Malay Messenger) for Malays in November 1907. Mohamed Eunos was the editor of Utusan Melayu, and played an important role in reconstructing and redefining the category 'Malay'. These vernacular papers were a way for the local population to spread their ideas and discourses, as well as help create new forms of identity. Literacy rates were still quite low, and the readership consisted mainly of Malays, Arabs, Indian-Muslims, and Malay-speaking Straits Chinese. Newspapers were also used as a teaching tool in Malay schools. In his overview of the history of vernacular newspapers in the Dutch East Indies, Ahmat Adam describes the vernacular press as an indirect by-product of European enterprise, and argues that it grew with the spread of schools, modern infrastructure, and communications. There were thirteen vernacular newspapers, five of which were dailies, and six periodicals in the Dutch East Indies in 1900. Most of these papers were dependent on a Chinese and Eurasian readership. The first Chinese paper in Singapore, Lat Pau (Selat News), was started in 1881 by See Ewe Lay, and the first Tamil paper, Singai Nesan, in 1888. The daily Sing Po started in January 1890 by Koh Yew Hean Press, and its proprietor Lin Heng-nan, and continued until 1899. The 1890s and early 1900s saw the publication of several new Chinese newspapers in Singapore.

The subscription and circulation of each newspaper was quite small, although the readership was considerably higher. Straits Times claimed to have the largest and widest circulation of any newspaper in Asia, besides India, with a readership of primarily Europeans and Chinese. Singapore Free Press was reported to have a circulation of 450, Utusan Melayu a circulation

207 Roff (1972), 49. For instance, the daily, short-lived, Bintang Timor (1894-1895) in Romanised Malay with Song Ong Siang as its editor (Song, 281).
208 Editorial, Straits-Chinese Herald, 22 January 1894, 3.
209 Anthony Milner, The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 99-100; Kahn, 10-12; ‘A New Paper. The Malay Mercury’, Times of Malaya, 12 November 1907, 5. There were three pages in Arabic character and one in romanised Malay.
210 Roff (1972), 51.
213 Advertisement, Straits Times, 21 May 1897, 2. The paper stated as early as 1893 that the increase of their subscribers was largely due to more Chinese subscribers. ‘English-Speaking Chinese’, Straits Times, 14 March 1893.
of 550, Lat Pau 350, and Singai Nesan 100.\textsuperscript{214} The vernacular papers in the Dutch East Indies were reported to have 600-800 subscribers.\textsuperscript{215} These statistics on circulation are, however, uncertain. It should also be noted that several people read each issue of the paper in coffee shops or at people’s homes, so the papers reached more people than the circulation indicates.\textsuperscript{216}

The proliferation of newspapers was part of a larger, worldwide process in the late 1800s, when technological development led to news travelling faster and becoming more accessible, through cheaper newsprint and more newspapers around the world.\textsuperscript{217} This newspaper account, and the multiplication of new newspapers, instinctively brings Benedict Anderson to mind. He argues that print capitalism helped form an imagined community among people who never met face-to-face, and yet sensed a horizontal comraderie.\textsuperscript{218} Issues such as nation and imagined community are, however, not of primary concern to this work, albeit questions of identity-formation lie as an undercurrent throughout the dissertation. Many people in Singapore, whether originating from Britain, China, India, or the Malay States, likely identified with several different communities.

As I am dealing with admission prices, costs of living, salary levels, and the affordability of cinematic exhibitions, a paragraph on the currency situation is required. In the 1890s, the Mexican silver dollar was the standard currency in Straits Settlements (as well as in the Philippines), and U.S. trade dollar, Japanese yen, and Hong Kong dollar were made unlimited tender. The Mexican dollar was the most common trade currency throughout Asia, but there was also a large circulation of other currencies. In the late 1890s, there was a depreciation of the value of silver, which led to some countries leaving the silver standard for the gold standard. In 1904, a Straits dollar, connected to the gold standard, replaced the Mexican dollar at the same value.\textsuperscript{219} Sumatra, belonging to the Dutch East Indies, used the silver

\textsuperscript{214} Chen (1991), 292-293; Milner, 90.
\textsuperscript{215} Adam, 48.
\textsuperscript{216} Roff (1972), 19.
\textsuperscript{217} In 1828 there were around 3,000 different newspapers in the world, and in 1900 there were more than 30,000. Bayly, 19-20.
\textsuperscript{219} Chai, chapter 2; Compton Mackenzie, \textit{Realms of Silver: One Hundred Years of Banking in the East} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 113-114, 189-190; George Cyril Allen and Audrey Gladys Donnithorne, \textit{Western Enterprise in Indonesia and Malaya: A Study in Economic Development} (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957), 183, 200-201; del Mar, 68. In Singapore, the Spanish dollar was initially used as currency, but in 1835 the East India Company decided that the rupee should be used in all its territories. In 1867, the silver dollar became the main currency. In 1905, the Straits dollar was fixed to the pound, at 2 shillings, 4 pence. Many European countries changed to the gold standard in 1873, but silver currencies were still used in international trade transactions (Hyde, 148). Asian countries followed, and changed to the gold standard as well. The Dutch East Indies changed in 1877, Japan in 1897, British India in 1898, Siam in 1902, and the Philippines in 1903.
standard as well, and was, as such, part of the same currency area as the Straits Settlements rather than Java, which used the guilder. A report from Bangkok in 1905 stated that the only currency used between European merchants, small Siamese traders, and Chinese traders (acting as the middleman) was the Straits dollar.220 This helped facilitate close ties between Sumatra, Siam, and the Straits Settlements, both in terms of trade, and in cultural practices, including travelling entertainment companies. When I refer to the dollar ($) throughout this work, I mean either (depending on year) the Mexican dollar or the equally valued Straits dollar. Other currencies that are frequently mentioned in this dissertation are guilder or florin (f) which was used on Java,221 and tical or baht which was used in Siam.222

Finally, a note on my use of geographical terms. For historical consistency I use the old geographical names, thus Siam, Dutch East Indies, and Batavia (instead of Thailand, Indonesia, and Jakarta). I use the modern spelling of the names though, such as Penang (Pinang) and Surabaya (Soerabaia). I sometimes refer to ‘British Malaya’, with which I mean all the British territories in Southeast Asia, thus including the Straits Settlements, the Malay States (later Federated and Unfederated Malay States), and northern Borneo.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation consists of four chapters that cover different aspects of early cinema and itinerant entertainment in Southeast Asia. The chapters follow a thematic division, and each chapter depicts the chronological development of respective theme. Broadly speaking, the first two chapters consider contextual aspects by examining the exhibition and distribution practices. In the following two chapters, we enter the venue for cinematic exhibitions and observe audiences and what programmes they experienced.

Chapter 1 deals with how new technological devices, such as phonographs, kinetoscopes, and cinematographs were introduced in Southeast Asia. The chapter particularly examines the development of early cinema exhibitions, and how rapidly there was a proliferation of film exhibitors and cinematic venues throughout the region. The chapter also discusses how

---


221 The exchange rate between the guilder and the Mexican or Straits dollar fluctuated during this period. I have decided to use $0.68 per guilder as the exchange rate for the period. See, for instance, Wright and Cartwright, 939; Scidmore, 7.

222 The exchange rate of the baht was fixed at $0.60 during the second half of the 1800s, although the rates became more volatile around the turn of the century. James C. Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand 1850-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 149-154; Compton Mackenzie, 196.
technology was considered a distinct symbol for Western progress and civilisation, and how having Asian cinematographic exhibitors muddled such binary notions.

Chapter 2 explores how imperial trade, shipping, and communication networks connected Southeast Asian countries. These connections, in turn, contributed to establish a circuit of transnational itinerant theatres, operas, circuses, vaudeville, and bangsawan groups. Early film exhibitors and film reels followed this circuit. The chapter also traces the development of film distribution from travelling exhibitors and agents to stores such as Levy Hermanos, and, significantly, Pathé Frères. The opening of the Pathé office in Singapore in 1907 changed distribution practices in the region, as Pathé also advertised and distributed films to the neighbouring countries. Finally, the Japanese Cinematograph is discussed, as they were also vertically integrated, and present throughout Southeast Asia.

In Chapter 3, I discuss who the film audiences were by examining the admission prices for cinematic exhibitions as well as other forms of entertainment. Prior to the arrival of cinema, the evening scene in Southeast Asia was very separated based on racial grounds, where Europeans spent most of their leisure time within the white-only social clubs. My research, based on early newspaper articles and reports, shows that early film audiences in Singapore and elsewhere were mixed, in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age, and that a majority of audiences non-European. I therefore propose that cinema, as well as the itinerant circuses, disrupted racial divisions and created more inclusive social spaces.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the exhibited films. The chapter demonstrates how individual films gradually became more significant within the film programmes. It demonstrates how film initially was advertised as an expensive Western novelty, whereas in later programmes individual films were promoted. Early cinematic images also brought views from all over the world to audiences in Southeast Asia. I attempt to assess what kind of worldview these images had and how their meanings were reproduced by audiences, by examining the exhibition of films from the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, and Hale’s Tours in 1908.
The cinematograph has been with us a good deal during the past few months, and the novelty of the thing has in a great measure passed away.1

(Bangkok, 1898)

Bangkok 1899, the century is reaching its end. The Victoria Parsee Theatrical Company led by Mr. Baliwali from Bombay is performing its version of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin, as well as Indian operas and comedies at the Mom Chow Alangkarn’s Theatre, a hall where the earliest cinematic exhibitions in Bangkok had been held two years earlier. A Siamese company performing and singing in Thai accompanies the Parsee Theatre. During the intervals in the programme, English songs are sung. Japanese lanterns light the hall, and the performances are under the patronage of the French Chargé d’Affaires and a Russian Minister. The programme is concluded with cinematographic pictures, including films from the Diamond Jubilee of the British Queen, which are warmly applauded by the large audience. The whole performance is a success, and the cinematograph is described as ‘the best of its kind ever brought to the East’. The Victoria Parsee Theatre had previously been to India, Burma, Straits Settlements, and Java, and was continuing to Ceylon.2

Many attempts have been made to categorise early film exhibitors. A useful division is made by Deac Rossel, who talks about four different types of film exhibitors that dominated the first decade of cinema exhibition: travelling fairground exhibitors, independent travelling showmen, theatrical travellers, and outsider entrepreneurs.3 These practices functioned as incubators

---

1 ‘The Cinematograph’, Bangkok Times, 6 June 1898, 2.
2 ‘The Parsi Theatre’, Bangkok Times, 5 June 1899, 2; Notice, Bangkok Times, 8 June 1899, 2; ‘Parsi Theatre’, Bangkok Times, 9 June 1899, 2; ‘The Parsi Theatre’, Bangkok Times, 10 June 1899, 2; ‘Parsi Theatre’, Bangkok Times, 13 June 1899, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 15 June 1899, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 16 June 1899, 3.
for the cinema, which used them as a stepping-stone in its development toward stand-alone exhibition. Cinematic exhibitions in Southeast Asia also fall into these categories, as demonstrated throughout this chapter. My discussion illustrates the diversity of the entrepreneurs who entered the region as exhibitors and cinema owners. Many entrepreneurs saw a possible profit in moving pictures, and came to Southeast Asia. Some early film entrepreneurs and proprietors were engaged in several different fields; cinematic exhibition was just part of an attempt to expand their business. Early film exhibitors and entrepreneurs included magicians, businessmen, and entertainment companies from the colonising countries, Japan, India, China, as well as other nationalities, which mirrored the transnational merchant community in the region.

An important part of the rapid increase of urban commercial amusements was the electrification of cities. Electrification enabled people to extend their days through street lamps, and brought a system of electric trams and cable cars, which made it cheaper and easier to go out in the evenings. Southeast Asia experienced an electrification of the main cities around the turn of the century with electric tramways and electric streetlights. This chapter covers the early film exhibitors in Southeast Asia. Before the cinematograph arrived in Southeast Asia, there were other popular forms of projected screen entertainment, which continued side by side with the cinema. Besides the traditional shadowplays (wayang kulit) which were not usually advertised in newspapers, there were magic lantern exhibitions in the 1890s and early 1900s arranged by photographic societies and travelling entertainment companies. These exhibitions were still fairly popular in the early 1900s, and the local press compared their exhibitions with the cinema. The advent of moving images, however, slowly phased out these earlier entertainment forms.

This chapter explores how the role of cinema in Southeast Asia developed during its first decade. The strand running through the chapter assesses the meeting between a new technology and a segregated colonial society. It


4 Toulmin (2010), 60.
starts by examining how the phonograph and the kinetoscope were introduced in Southeast Asia as a precursor to the cinematograph. I address who the early film entrepreneurs and exhibitors were, and how the exhibition format developed. Film was introduced to Southeast Asian audiences in a variety of ways and through different conduits: magic shows, circuses, and technical presentations in town halls. The meaning and role of the cinematograph changed depending on the context of exhibition. In some contexts it was introduced as a scientific machine and new technology, a new commercial entertainment, or as a virtual newspaper. I chart the development from cinema being a novelty and a sideshow, to becoming a venue that incorporated other entertainment forms. André Gaudreault labels the arrival of permanent movie houses, or nickelodeons, as a momentous event in film and entertainment history since cinema previously had not been able to ‘reign over the entertainment world because it had no kingdom from which to do so’. The chapter also considers how electricity was introduced and used in an entertainment context, and how technological malfunctions were addressed, especially in the light of technology being something Western. The final section examines the length and frequency of film programmes, as well as their musical accompaniment.

1.1 Reproducing Scenes ‘as the Phonograph Reproduces Sound’

The principal technological inventions used for public entertainment in the 1890s before moving images were phonographs, gramophones, and kinetoscopes. This section examines and maps how these devices were introduced in Southeast Asia. Mr. Arthur Hoare was reported to have exhibited the earliest phonograph in Singapore in late 1890. There are, however, not many traces from his exhibitions. In May 1892, the British professor Douglas Archibald arrived in Singapore with a phonograph. He stayed for a few weeks, and exhibited the phonograph at the Town Hall and the Regimental Theatre together with lectures explaining the technology. The programme was advertised as ‘a startling exhibition’, with sounds from ‘all parts of the world’ including recordings of songs by local amateurs and bands in Europe, United States, and Australia, music by Maoris, bag pipes, xylophones, pian-

---

8 ‘Edison’s Latest Phonograph’, Singapore Free Press, 2 May 1892, 2. I have been unable to locate any advertisements or notices about his exhibitions.
os, songs by the American Colored Jubilee Choir (also referred to as the American Negro Minstrels), a Gujarati song, and speeches by Mr. Gladstone, other politicians, maharajas, and bishops. The prices for the exhibitions were $2 and $1, and it was possible to pay an additional $1 after the show to get a private hearing.\(^9\) Audiences consisted mostly of Europeans, but the *Singapore Free Press* also recorded the reaction of the ‘native’ attendants:

As an example of the value of the instrument in the study of native music, the record secured by Mr. Archibald of a Gujarathi [sic] song was very striking. It was a treat to watch the faces of some of the native attendants as the *kana nun kana nun* of the song rang out as distinctly as if the singer himself was behind the curtain; and we are not sure they did not go to see if this was so.\(^{10}\)

Just as with Brian Larkin’s idea of the colonial sublime, and in line with the colonial discourse, this new technology was presented as something incomprehensible to the ‘native’ population, who were portrayed as the only ones who did not understand the new technology, in contrast to the European audience. Before Singapore, Douglas Archibald had been to Australia, India, and Ceylon, and after his performances in Singapore, he left for Java, where he exhibited the phonograph for a month. In Surabaya, he had serious technical difficulties with the device, which led to very negative reviews in the local press, and he was arrested after having assaulted the editor of *Soerabaija-Courant* because of the critical review.\(^{11}\) This technological failure, and the resulting negative press and arrest, can also symbolically illustrate the punishment of Westerners if they fail in their ‘whiteness’, by mishandling the technology.

In May 1892, the Robinson & Co store in Singapore advertised that they had received the Gramophone which was described as a ‘scientific novelty’.\(^{12}\) Six months later, between October and December 1892, Calabressini and Molbvlasini exhibited the phonograph around Java and at the Town Hall in Singapore together with a magic lantern performance and a magic show.\(^{13}\)

---


\(^{10}\) ‘The Phonograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 6 May 1892, 3.


\(^{12}\) Advertisement, *Singapore Free Press*, 16 May 1892, 2.

\(^{13}\) In Singapore, they were advertised as the Great Molbvlasini Troupe of Paris, whereas in the Dutch East Indies, J. Calabressini was reported to exhibit the phonograph and Molbvlasini...
In March and April 1903, James MacMahon, the manager of D’Ensem Doyle Company, exhibited the phonograph in Penang and Singapore. The phonograph was pronounced the main attraction of the programme, and local press described the device and possibility of hearing musicians and speakers from all over the world as a ‘marvel of physical science’, ‘a talking machine’, and ‘the most remarkable instrument the world has ever seen’. MacMahon started his exhibitions by giving a technological explanation of how the machine functioned, and then he played some sounds and a portion of a speech, followed by a demonstration of a recording of someone’s speech and an immediate reproduction of the recording. Afterwards, it was possible to pay fifty cents to go on stage and listen privately to the phonograph. The Singaporean press wrote that the exhibition was not as good as the one conducted by Professor Archibald. New technologies had thus made a mark, and exhibitions were remembered and used as a frame of reference even a year after they had taken a place. Later the same year, Professor P.M. Sers arrived in Singapore with a phonograph that he had previously exhibited in Manila, Hong Kong, Macau, Canton, and Saigon.

In 1895 and 1896, phonograph exhibitions became much more prevalent in Singapore and Penang. In January 1895, the phonograph was advertised as ‘Edison’s Phonograph as exhibited at the Chicago Exhibition [in 1893]’. The price of admission was $1, and the exhibition was held at the Eastern and Oriental Hotel in Penang for nine hours a day, from 2 to 11 p.m., where it played operas, military music, and speeches (Figure 1.1). In November 1895, there was yet another phonograph exhibition in Singapore with Mr. and Mrs. Dannbery as proprietors, where the device was exhibited for two weeks from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. next to the Adelphi Hotel, the location of the earliest film exhibition in Singapore a year and a half later. The admission was $1 for six musical selections (and twenty cents for one), including music by military bands, banjo music, comic dialogues, and speeches, mostly from the United States. The capacity of the audience was only fourteen people. The admission was later lowered to fifty cents for four selections. The attitudes toward non-European audiences had changed as well, and the local press recommended the phonograph to people of various backgrounds: ‘We do not address these lines to Europeans only. Hundreds of intelligent Ch-

---

15 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 16 October 1893, 2; Notice, Daily Advertiser, 16 October 1893, 3.
16 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 7 January 1895, 2.
17 Advertisement, Mid-day Herald, 6 November 1895, 3; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 8 November 1895, 5; ‘The Phonograph’, Straits Times, 11 November 1895, 2; ‘The Phonograph’, Mid-day Herald, 14 November 1895, 3; Advertisement, Mid-day Herald, 19 November 1895, 3.
nese ought to hear the phonograph." The Dannbery’s continued exhibiting the phonograph and renting it out during different social occasions, such as garden parties, social clubs (Tanglin Club, Masonic Club), on board ships (H.M.S. Mercury), and at private homes.19

In December 1895, the Central Delivery Company exhibited ‘the latest improved Edison’s Phonographs’ for a few days, and there was also a phonograph exhibition at the Convent Fancy Bazaar.20 Low Seah KoeK exhibited another phonograph in May 1896 from 8 p.m. to midnight. Tickets were initially $1 for 8 pieces, and 50 cents for 4 pieces, and later reduced to 60 cents for six pieces and 30 cents for three pieces.21 Having a Chinese exhibit the phonograph was significant, as it illustrated to audiences that white Europeans were not the only ones who could master the new technology. Finally, in September 1896, a new, improved phonograph (‘just arrived from New York’) with a, reportedly, larger musical selection and better sound was ex-

![Figure 1.1: Advertisement for Edison's Phonograph in Penang. Pinang Gazette, 7 January 1895, 2.](image)

---

20 Notice, *Straits Times*, 16 December 1895, 2; Notice, *Mid-day Herald*, 18 December 1895, 3.
hibited at Emmerson’s Tiffin Rooms during daytime and at Adelphi Hotel in the evening, at a cost of $1 for four selections.22

The kinetoscope is almost completely omitted from the historiography of motion pictures in Asia, and in Southeast Asia in particular. The kinetoscope did not receive much attention from the local press in Southeast Asia prior to its first exhibition. An article from 1894 is the earliest mention of the kinetoscope I have discovered: ‘Edison’s latest is the kinetoscope, and it is really almost as wonderful as the phonograph.’23 This comparison with the phonograph was used in later advertisements. The earliest kinetoscope exhibition in Southeast Asia I have found is by Dr. Harley in Singapore in July 1896. Dr. Harley had previously exhibited the kinetoscope in Calcutta, and probably elsewhere in the region as well, from late 1895.24

Dr. Harley, a conjurer and illusionist, exhibited the kinetoscope for two weeks at Robinson’s music store during daytime and at Stamford Hotel in the evenings, together with lectures, illusions, and lady artists, for the price of fifty cents. It was well received by the press, which described it as a technological marvel.25 The programme of the kinetoscope exhibition in Singapore included The Gaiety Girls, The Two Macs, The Butterfly Dance, A Fire Scene, A Blacksmith’s Shop, A Cock Fight and Bar-room Scene.26 It was also possible to engage the services of Dr. Harley and Edison’s Kinetophone, which was described as a combination of the Phonograph and Kinetoscope for private parties.27 Dr. Harley also performed and exhibited the kinetoscope and phonograph for the visiting King of Siam during the same period.28 He later went to Java where he stayed and performed for six months. In March 1897, he returned with his magic show to Singapore, and performed with Miss Lilian at the Town Hall. He was also reported to be a travelling salesman who offered Edison’s novelties, such as kinetoscopes and phon-
Two years later, in September 1899, Dr. Harley returned to Singapore with Harley’s Comedy Company, after touring Java, Australia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. In 1900, there were advertisements in Calcutta for Professor Harley’s illusions, in a programme that also included an exhibition of the American Biograph.

Most kinetoscope exhibitions were preceded by an introductory lecture by the operator or manager describing the technological process. The local press, who in previously reports on Edison had described the technology of moving images, frequently reproduced a description of the technological process used for entertainment. Early advertisements in Southeast Asia for moving images, both for the kinetoscope and cinematograph, stressed that the images had life and movement, and depicted real events. An early review of the kinetoscope read: ‘It should be understood that this is not an imaginary scene from the brush of an artist, but is an accurate photograph of a scene that has taken place.’ A later review stated that it contained ‘every motion of the body’ and, together with a phonograph, could produce ‘a complete representation and record…of any occurrence’. The technological process was thus of more significance than what was being exhibited.

I have only discovered a few more cases of printed publicity for the kinetoscope, or other peep-hole devices, in Southeast Asia. In November 1896, Grimm & Co exhibited a kinetoscope in Surabaya from 10 a.m. to noon and from 5 to 10 p.m. for one florin ($0.68), and half price for children, where it was advertised as Edison’s latest and biggest invention. It could be the same kinetoscope as the one Dr. Harley exhibited in Singapore, and the two exhibitions were advertised with the same phrase: ‘Reproduce Scenes as the Phonograph reproduces Sound.’ In March 1897, the kinetoscope returned to Singapore with exhibitions at the Waverley Hotel for a week (at 50 cents), together with a phonograph and called the kinetophone. The exhibitor also tried to sell the device, and advertisements for the kinetoscope read: ‘Machines for sale, great opportunity for right man.’ This was followed a few weeks later by programmes at the Town Hall, where the phonograph was

---

29 ‘Harley’, *Straits Times*, 15 March 1897, 3; ‘Dr. Harley’s Entertainment’, *Straits Times*, 2 April 1897, 2.
31 Mahadevan (2009), 295.
37 Advertisement, *Singapore Free Press*, 26 March 1897, 2. A week later, the advertisement read: ‘last days-owner leaving. Machines must be sold; rare chance for enterprising man.’ (Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 3 April 1897, 2)
exhibited before and during the intervals of the performance of Pollard’s Lilliputian Opera for 50 cents. In January 1899, the Robinson Piano Company in Singapore advertised the ‘highly entertaining’ Edison’s Parlour Kinetoscope [sic] and Gramophone [sic]. It is thus safe to assume there were many more kinetoscope exhibitions in Singapore during the period that were not advertised. The same year, both Katz Brothers and J.G. Boyd advertised the sales of phonographs. Katz Brothers sold a phonograph, including blank cylinders and cylinders with music for $60, and J.G. Boyd offered an Edison Home Phonograph, a Bijou Phonograph, and an A.N. Graphophone, including records and blanks.

The phonograph, or graphophone, continued being used for musical programmes in other social occasions, such as Mrs. Aptroot’s Art Needlework Class at the Town Hall and F.L. Irwin’s graphophone entertainment at the Marine Club. New models and variations of the phonograph were still advertised as public entertainment in the early 1900s, and often accompanied a film or vaudeville performance. The Polyphone, described as ‘Edison’s latest and most wonderful talking machine’, was exhibited at Hotel Europe in Bangkok in September 1900. The programme consisted of Siamese and European vocal and instrumental music, with an admission price of 1 Tical. These are the only stand-alone phonograph shows I have detected in Southeast Asia after motion pictures were introduced. The Grand Graphophon [sic] was advertised as ‘the biggest Talking Machine of America’ in December 1902, when it was exhibited with the Excelsior Vaudeville and the magic lantern in Taiping. It was, however, not well received, and the review noted that it was ‘not satisfactory’ and ‘squeaky’, and recommended that it would be excluded from future programmes. Another phonograph, advertised as the biggest phonograph of the world, was exhibited at the Gran Cinematógrafo del Oriente in Manila in August 1903. The first part of the pro-

38 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 20 April 1897, 2.
40 In 1904, there was a peep-show box at the Bangrak bazaar in Bangkok called Bangrak nickelodeon, which attracted a large crowd (‘A Bangrak show’, Bangkok Times, 17 August 1904, 2).
41 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 31 August 1899, 4; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 30 September 1899, 4.
43 Notice, Bangkok Times, 28 September 1900, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 28 September 1900, 3.
44 Advertisement, Perak Pioneer, 20 December 1902, 2.
gramme consisted of musical sequences by the phonograph; the second part of eight moving pictures.46

Other forms of technological inventions being introduced to the public included the X-ray. In February 1897, a few months before the earliest film exhibitions in British Malaya, the X-ray (or ‘the X rays system of photography’, as it was referred to in the local press) was introduced in Taiping. The President of the Perak Amateur Photographic Society, Mr Wray, demonstrated its functionality on a fish and on a person’s fractured hand.47 The newly-introduced technology does not, however, seem to have been used for public entertainment anywhere in Southeast Asia. A new medium that thoroughly changed the Southeast Asian scene for public entertainment was the projected moving images in the form of cinematographs, vitascopes, and projectoscopes, which are discussed in the next section.

1.2 ‘The Largest Life Pictures in the World’: Projecting Moving Images

Thomas A. Edison and his inventions were famous in Southeast Asia, and his name was frequently mentioned in the local press during the 1890s and early 1900s.48 The 1890s saw many technological inventions that were incorporated in the entertainment industry. Prior to the advent of the cinematograph, technological inventions, such as the phonograph and the kinetoscope, were exhibited as separate entertainment performances. Edison’s name was often used as a marketing tool: phonograph exhibitions in Singapore in 1895 was presented as ‘Edison’s great masterpiece’, and film exhibitions in Singapore and Bangkok in 1897 were advertised and described as ‘from the ingenious mind of Edison’ and ‘the great Wizard’s most astounding invention’.49 Lumière’s device for projected moving images, however, reached Southeast Asia before Edison’s device. In the late 1890s both Lu-

46 Advertisement, El Mercantil, 9 August 1903, 6.
47 Notice, Perak Pioneer, 10 February 1897, 3.
49 ‘The Phonograph’, Mid-day Herald, 14 November 1895, 3; ‘The Projectoscope’, Straits Times, 19 August 1897, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 25 October 1897, 2; Notice, Bangkok Times, 25 October 1897, 2.
mière and Edison apparatuses were exhibiting in Southeast Asia: Lumière’s Ripigraph, Giant Cinematograph, Scenimatograph, Kinematograph, and Parisian Cinematograph, and Edison's Vitascope, Kinetograph, and Projectoscope. In addition, the American Biograph and other devices were exhibited. In this chapter I discuss how cinema was introduced in the different Southeast Asian countries, when and where films were exhibited, and by whom.

As transnational entertainment networks had already been created and developed, the cinematograph quickly spread around the world. The Lumière Cinématographe had its commercial premiere in Paris on 28 December 1895, its London premiere on 20 February 1896, and its New York premiere on 29 June 1896 where it was advertised as ‘the greatest fashionable and scientific fad of London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin and the entire continent’.\(^\text{50}\) Lumière cameramen went around the world filming views and exhibiting films. Three of their operators travelled to Asia: Maurice Sestier went to India and Australia, François Doublier to India and China, and Gabriel Veyre to South America, Mexico, Japan, and Vietnam.\(^\text{51}\) The earliest film exhibition in Bombay was by Maurice Sestier at Watson’s Hotel in July 1896. A reviewer in *Times of India* connected the exhibition to other earlier art forms, describing the device as an advanced form of photography and magic lantern.\(^\text{52}\) The cinematograph came to Southeast Asia via India, just like many commercial products and itinerant entertainment companies had done. And it spread rapidly; by the time Gabriel Veyre arrived to French Indochina in 1898, the cinematograph had already been exhibited in all the countries of the region. The name of many devices, such as Cinematograph, Biograph, and Bioscope, quickly went from being a brandname to being used as a generic name for the film-viewing experience.

Film exhibition spread rapidly among the amusement-thirsty population. In 1896 and 1897 projected moving pictures were exhibited for the first time in Southeast Asia: in Batavia (Jakarta) through the Scenimatograph in October 1896;\(^\text{53}\) in Manila through the Kronofotografo in January 1897;\(^\text{54}\) in Sin-

---

\(^{50}\) Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner, 1990), 137.


\(^{54}\) Advertisement, *El Comercio*, 2 January 1897.
gapore through the *Ripograph* or *Giant Cinematograph* in May 1897;\(^{55}\) in Bangkok through the *Cinematograph* in June 1897;\(^{56}\) in Hanoi through the *Cinematographe* in September 1897;\(^{57}\) and in Taiping with the *Projectoscope* in December 1897.\(^{58}\) Around the same time moving pictures came to the neighbouring areas of India, China, and Japan. All these cinematographic exhibitions were very successful, and the exhibitions extended their initial planned stay of a few days. During the first years there was not a standardised term for cinematic exhibitions, and there was general confusion regarding the name of devices and manufacturers. The word ‘kinetoscope’, for instance, was inaccurately used many times to refer to projected images. In 1897, an article in the press used ‘kinetoscope’ to describe a new technology that projected moving images on a screen.\(^{59}\) There were also advertisements for the kinetoscope in Makassar (in the Dutch East Indies) in February 1899, and for the Grand Kinetoscope and the Oriental Kinetoscope in Penang in 1905, but it is clear that there is a confusion of terms, since they are advertisements for exhibitions with a projected image and not a peep-show box.\(^{60}\)

In Singapore, the earliest cinematographic exhibition was held between 12 and 26 May 1897 at Adelphi Hall under the names Ripograph and Giant Cinematograph, and the exhibited films included *Charge of Lancers, Loie Fuller’s Serpentine Dance* and *Li Hung-Chang in Paris*. It was exhibited for a supposedly sophisticated audience at the refined Adelphi Hall, where it was initially advertised as the greatest invention of the nineteenth century. In addition, advertisements claimed that it was brought directly from Paris at a cost of over $10,000 (Figure 1.2).\(^{61}\) The vocalist and comedian Arthur Sullivan exhibited it, with the Australian Tom J. Liddiard as proprietor. Arthur Sullivan (not to be mistaken for the musical composer) first came to Singapore in 1892 together with The Ada Maven Folly Company, a British minstrel and vaudeville show, where he performed as the Tambo and later toured as a free-lance entertainer.\(^{62}\) Tom J. Liddiard had previously been an actor in the Stanley Opera Company, and later became a theatrical manager and proprietor for Bijou Entertainers, Bijou Troubadours, and Liddiard’s Lillipu-

---

\(^{55}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 12 May 1897, 2.
\(^{56}\) Advertisement, *Bangkok Times*, 11 June 1897.
\(^{57}\) Advertisement, *L’Avenir du Tonkin*, 1 September 1897, 3.
\(^{59}\) Miscellaneous, *Straits Observer*, 29 June 1897, 3.
\(^{60}\) Advertisement, *Makassarsche Courant*, 17 February 1899, 7; Advertisement, *Straits Echo*, 4 August 1905, 5; ‘The Oriental Kinetoscope Co’, *Straits Echo*, 18 October 1905, 4.
\(^{61}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 12 May 1897, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 22 May 1897, 2.
The early advertisements stated: ‘pictures of every day life with LIFE movements’, and ‘marvellous living scenes’. Singaporean press described the exhibitions as a great success with ‘large audiences, who were loud in their applause,’ which ‘continues to draw crowded audiences and to give satisfaction’.

Harmston’s Circus was in Singapore during that period, and bought or leased the cinematograph and incorporated it in their circus. As with other stand-alone shows, the mammoth circus absorbed the show and presented it as a novelty sideshow. The cinematographic device proceeded to Java, as the Giant Cinematograph (‘groote Scenimatograph’) and Ripograph, in Harmston’s Circus tour in more than ten cities and towns on Java, including Blitar, Kediri, Mojokerto, Madiun, and Surakarta, from June to August 1897 (Figure 1.3).

The name Ripograph stayed in the public imagination in some

---


64 Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 May 1897, 2.


66 Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 14 July 1897, 3; Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 6 August 1897, 3.
parts of Java as a consequence of Harmston’s Circus tour with the Ripograph/Scenimatograph, and in 1918 there was a cinema in Malang (in eastern Java) called Emma Ripograph. It is noteworthy that there were at least three different cinematographic devices, two on Java and one in Bangkok, simultaneously in Southeast Asia in June 1897. In Bangkok, S.G. Marchovský exhibited the apparatus between 9 and 26 June as the Parisian Cinematograph together with the conjuring tricks of Professor Moris [sic], ‘the Great Magician of the West’, and a musical band at the Lakon Mom Chow Alangkarn theatre owned by, and named after, Prince Alangkarn. It was also screened for one night as a private arrangement at the Thai Royal Palace. Being embraced by the King (or the Governor for that matter), the amusements acquired prestige and endorsement, which was especially important for a new art and entertainment form.

In Surabaya alone there were two simultaneous cinematographic exhibitions in April 1897, one by Talbot’s Scenimatograph at Surabaya Theatre and one by the Kinetograph, with J. van der Lelij as manager, at Simpangsche Society (Figure 1.4). In advertisements Talbot warned newspaper readers: ‘Not to

---

67 Advertisement, Tjahaja Timoer, 27 November 1918, 3.
68 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 9 June 1897, 2; Notice, Bangkok Times, 23 June 1897, 2.
be confused with the advertised Kinaograph [sic] which uses the good name of our device to mislead the public. In other parts of the Dutch East Indies, the Kinetograph was advertised as the Kinematograph. In Makassar, it was advertised as much as the accompanying Graphophone, and ten days later another device called Cinematograph (or the same device with another name) was exhibited. In August 1897, the Kinematograph was exhibited in Surakarta (Solo) together with a graphophone, and the advertisement mentioned that it was an Edison device that had recently arrived from Europe. Advertising the phonograph together with, and as largely as the cinematic device was quite common, and it still happened in 1900, for instance, by the Cineorama (Biograph and Phonograph) in Surabaya.

The technological aspects of the new devices were immediately pointed out. When moving images started being projected on a screen, the size of the images was stressed in order to distinguish them from the moving images of the kinetoscope. Talbot advertised his Scenimatograph as ‘life-size representations’ of moving photography and ‘reproduction of animated photographs in life size’, and Sullivan advertised the Ripograph as ‘the largest life pictures in the world’. A review of the American Biograph in Singapore in

---

69 Advertisement, Thiem’s Nieu Advertentieblad, 17 April 1897, 3; Advertisement, Thiem’s Nieu Advertentieblad, 27 April 1897, 2. A similar warning in another paper, correctly names the other device, Kinetograph (Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 17 April 1897, 3).
70 Advertisement, Makassarsche Courant, 18 June 1897, 7; Advertisement, Makassarsche Courant, 28 June 1897, 7.
71 Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 2 August 1897, 2.
72 Advertisement, Bintang Soerabaia, 24 December 1900, 2; Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 24 December 1900, 7.
73 Advertisement, Thiem’s Nieu Advertentieblad, 17 April 1897, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 3 June 1898, 3.
74 Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 May 1897, 2.
1899 stated: ‘The biograph is an instrument capable of producing most remarkable life-size animated photographs’, and four days later the images were described as being ‘above life size’.

The Scinematograph and the Ripograph were also repeatedly advertised as ‘the greatest invention of the [19th] century’. Cinematographic exhibitions were also closely related to magic and conjury, which were sometimes stressed rather than the technological aspects. In Hanoi, for example, town musicians and amateur artists accompanied the cinematograph exhibitions in September 1897, whereas the October exhibition was combined with ‘Black Magic’ (Figure 1.5).

In contrast to Edison and his inventions, there was no mention of Lumière in the local press in British Malaya. One of the few occasions I have found that explicitly mentions the company is an advertisement for Gran Cinematographe Parisien in Manila, which mentions that their films came from the ‘Lumière factory’. The cinematograph was, however, frequently related to Paris and France. The earliest cinematographic exhibition in Hanoi was, understandably, introduced as having ‘huge success in Paris’.

As seen in Figure 1.2, the Ripograph in Singapore was presented as coming from Paris.

---

76 Advertisement, Thieme’s Nieu Advertentieblad, 17 April 1897, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 May 1897, 2; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 24 November 1897, 7; Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 11 August 1898, 3.
77 Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 1 September 1897, 3; Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 13 October 1897.
78 Advertisement, El Progreso, 10 December 1902, 3.
79 Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 1 September 1897, 3.
and in 1898 Talbot’s cinematograph was called ‘the only genuine French apparatus in the East’. The cinematograph was also called a ‘great European wonder’, and advertisements highlighted that it was a worldwide phenomena: ‘Unprecedented success in Europe, America, Australia and everywhere its been shown!’ The following year, when the cinematograph had also been exhibited in different parts of Asia, the advertisements read: ‘Unrivalled success wherever exhibited’.

L. Talbot exhibited the Scenimatograph around the Dutch East Indies in late 1896 and 1897, as well as filming different scenes. In January 1898, Talbot arrived in Singapore where his exhibitions at Adelphi Hall was described as an illustration of ‘the latest advance in photography’. He was also credited for the invention of the new technology: ‘The Scenimatograph, advertised to be exhibited in the Adelphi Hall this evening, was invented by M. Talbot. It is an improved method of displaying photographs depicting living creatures in motion.’ The Straits Times quickly corrected their statement the following day: ‘By an obvious slip yesterday, the Scenimatograph, now being exhibited at the Adelphi Hall, was described as M. Talbot’s invention. M. Talbot hastens to disclaim the honour, and to explain that he is the maker of most of the films he is now showing.’ The press reported that there were two main advantages of the Scenimatograph compared to previous exhibitions:

In the first place the oxy-ether light is steady and good, and the apparatus runs smoothly. In the second place M. Talbot is himself a photographer and has taken many of the films shown. These distinctly appeal to a local audience. The Javanese dancing girl is very good and better perhaps is the scene of a number of boys bathing in the Kali at Batavia, the water movement, and even the glisten of the fun on the moving bodies being shown. There are a number of films dealing with rehearsed scenes, an Attack on a sergeant in Acheen, Two’s company and Three’s none, and a café scene. There are also a number of very clever and amusing scenes from the Theatre Robert Houdin in Paris, and one of a railway station at Genoa. Two exhibitions are given per night, at 6.30 and 9 p.m.

81 Advertisement, Thieme’s Nieu Advententieblad, 17 April 1897, 3; Advertisement, De Nieuwse Vorstenlanden, 6 August 1897, 3.
82 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 17 January 1898, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 3 June 1898, 3.
84 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 17 January 1898, 3.
85 ‘The Scenimatograph’, Straits Times, 18 January 1898, 2. ‘M. Talbot’ was called ‘L. Talbot’ in the advertisements in Singapore Free Press during the same period, see Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 17 January 1898, 2 (same advertisement repeated 19 and 24 January).
Talbot thus filmed several different scenes, and also constructed short narratives (‘rehearsed scenes’). The following month, another cinematograph was about to be exhibited in the Town Hall, and the press called the pictures and the machine (‘almost noiseless’) superior than previous ones, and reported that it was ‘a distinct improvement upon all others of its kind now touring in the East’, thereby indicating that there were many devices touring the region. The cinematograph continued to Java, and the following month, Carl Hertz exhibited films at the Town Hall in Singapore, which is further discussed in the next chapter. Talbot, in turn, continued to Bangkok, where he exhibited Malay Native Life together with other films at the Oriental Hotel in June 1898 (Figure 1.6). The scenes from the Malay States were reported to have been ‘especially attractive’. The quality of the projection was also commented upon by the press: ‘There was not, perhaps, always the minimum amount of vibration, and sometimes the focus was a bit off; but these were merely incidental and are not likely to recur.’ The reviewer gave the impression that the cinematograph was merely a temporary fad: ‘The cinematograph has been with us a good deal during the past few months, and the novelty of the thing has in a great measure passed away’, and went on to imply surprise at the large size of the audience. The previous month there had been Kinematograph views, including the arrival of the King of Siam in Paris, at the Oriental Hotel, as part of a variety programme including a concert, graphophone exhibition, gymnastics, bicycling and instrumental entertainment. The programme was well received: ‘A number of Siamese were present and thoroughly enjoyed the kinematograph scene of the King’s arrival in Paris. This is undoubtedly the finest exhibition of the kind we have witnessed in Bangkok.’

Most devices that premiered and operated in Europe and North America also found their way to Southeast Asia. There was a time lag of around a year for a new technology or projector to arrive in Southeast Asia. The Vitascene had its commercial premiere on 23 April 1896 in New York, and one year later, there were hundreds of projectors across the country. In Southeast Asia, Edison’s Vitascene premiered at the Town Hall in Singapore on 18 October 1897, where it was successfully introduced in the performances

---

90 ‘The Cinematograph’, *Bangkok Times*, 6 June 1898, 2.
91 ‘The Concert’, *Bangkok Times*, 12 May 1898, 2; Advertisement, *Bangkok Times*, 9 May 1898, 3
92 C. Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat developed their phantoscope in the mid-1890s. Raff & Gammon who were in charge of the Edison kinetoscope partnered with Armat, and they promoted and commercialized the phantoscope as Edison’s Vitascene. Musser (1990), chapter 3 and 4.
of Elsie Adair, a multi-talented artist from the United States mostly known for her dancing, and her variety company. The Singaporean press, described the Vitascope as an ‘optical contrivance’ with many ‘American pictures taken specially for it’.\(^93\) Elsie Adair had previously been in China and Australia, and after one performance at the Town Hall, the company continued to Bangkok where they performed for two weeks, thereafter returning to Singapore and continuing to London and Paris.\(^94\) Exhibited films included scenes from the Diamond Jubilee Procession, _The Waves, The New York Fire Brigade Rushing to a Fire, An Express Train, A Burning Studio, The Falls of Niagara, Carnival Dances and Busy Street Scenes._\(^95\) Elsie Adair and her company first came to Southeast Asia in 1894 from Hong Kong, when they performed in Batavia and at the Town Hall in Singapore. She was advertised as ‘America’s Greatest Dancer’, and her _Serpentine Dance_ received much attention; in advertisements for the show, the exact time (10.45 pm) of when the dance occurred in the programme was mentioned. The programme was described as being ‘acceptable’ to both women and men,\(^96\) indicating that the question of moral appropriateness was raised in Singapore. When the company returned to Singapore two years later, in 1896, they advertised three new serpentine dances.\(^97\) Elsie Adair seems to have been particularly popular in Siam, where the company had a private performance at the King’s Court.\(^98\)

\(^93\) ‘Miss Elsie Adair’, *Singapore Free Press*, 16 October 1897, 2.


\(^95\) ‘Miss Elsie Adair’, *Singapore Free Press*, 16 October 1897, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 18 October 1897, 2; Notice, *Bangkok Times*, 25 October 1897, 2; ‘Miss Elsie Adair’, *Bangkok Times*, 28 October 1897, 2.


\(^98\) ‘Miss Elsie Adair’s Entertainment’, *Bangkok Times*, 7 December 1896, 2; ‘The Elsie Adair Company’, *Singapore Free Press*, 23 December 1896, 1. The performance was also reported to be under the patronage of the consuls of the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.
Edison’s *Projectoscope* was exhibited at the foot of Fort Canning in Singapore in August and September 1897. The programme included the films *Fitzsimmons-Corbett fight, A Cock-Fight, A Bull Fight, The Skirt Dance, The Kiss (The May Irwin Kiss), Umbrella Dance* (Raff & Gammon, Alfred Clark, 1895), *Clark’s Thread Mill* (Edison, James White, 1896), and films from the Diamond Jubilee Procession.\(^9\) The projectoscope was later exhibited at the Town Hall in Taiping in December 1897, and Mr Toh Khay Beng, head of the Sanitary Board, was so impressed by the show that he leased and exhibited it at the Chinese Theatre (where there was a fire that almost burned down the theatre).\(^10\) It is also very likely that the projectoscope was the same cinematographic device that was exhibited as the Vitascope in Singapore and Bangkok in October 1897 with Elsie Adair, as there are no traces of the projectoscope in the intervening months. Another Edison projector was the Animatoscope, which was exhibited by J. Naftaly at the Adelphi Hotel in Singapore and Manila in 1899, where it was advertised as ‘Edison’s Latest Triumph’.\(^11\)

Cinematographic devices were more than just another technological novelty used for entertainment purposes in Singapore and neighbouring countries. They were also a lens through which to view and record, literally and symbolically, colonial relationships. The next section continues examining the role of film exhibitors in the region.

1.3 ‘Or any other “Scope” or “Graph”: Proliferation of Film Exhibitors

The first years of the twentieth century saw an exponential increase in travelling film exhibitors in the region. There were around fifty travelling companies and entrepreneurs from around the world touring Southeast Asia with different cinematographic devices. Half of them had names which were associated with Britain, France, or the United States: London Bioscope, British Cinematograph, Queen’s Bioscope, London Chronograph, Barnesgraph, Royal Bioscope, Imperial Bioscope, Royal Cinematograph, Parisian Cinematograph, Parisian Biographe, Gaumont Chronophone, Gaumont’s Chromo-Biograph, French Cinematograph, Biograph Pathé, Grand Cinematographic devices were more than just another technological novelty used for entertainment purposes in Singapore and neighbouring countries. They were also a lens through which to view and record, literally and symbolically, colonial relationships. The next section continues examining the role of film exhibitors in the region.


graph Pathé Frères, American Biograph, Edison Cinematograph, American Bioscope and Phonograph, American Kinetograph, and Grand American Bioscope. In most cases, it is not clear who the proprietor was and what device was being used. The origin of the remaining apparatuses cannot be deciphered either; many of them were advertised simply as a cinematographic show. Others were called Java Biorama, Permainan Kinematograph, Moving Pictures Exhibition Company, Grand Kinetoscope, Oriental Kinetograph, Rosebud’s Biograph, Grand-Eastern Phono-Cinematograph, Photo-Rotoscope, and Cineorama. There were also a couple of different ‘Japanese Cinematograph’, which are discussed in the next chapter. Some early exhibitors, such as Talbot in 1898 and Barnes’ Entertainers in 1902, named the camera after their own name: Talbot’s Scinematograph and the Barnesgraph.

The American Mutoscope Company and their Biograph projector became the leading motion picture company in the United States in 1897. The Biograph projector premiered in London on 18 March 1897, and in continental Europe and Australia later that year. Two years later the company had eight sister companies in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Italy, and India. It did not reach Southeast Asia until April 1899 when it opened in Surabaya, and continued around Java and Straits Settlements where, positively received, it toured for many years. The films the American Biograph exhibited in Singapore included: *Dreyfus in the Rennes Military Prison* (and four other films about the Dreyfus affair), *The launch of H.M.S. “Formidable”*, *Cavalry of 1,500 French Curassiers, Panorama of Conway Castle N. Wales, A View of Niagara Falls, A Duel to the Death, Firing a 10-inch gun at Sandy Hook, Saved from the Sea, He and She in a Heavy Sea, A Boxing Scene, Playing at Doctor, A Supper for Two and A Railway Scene*. The company immediately tried to distinguish itself from its competitors. A lengthy advertisement (Figure 1.7), which claimed to present ‘the latest and best invention for the representation of animated photographs’ read: ‘The public of Singapore are kindly requested to note that in no respect is the American Biograph to be connected with the Cinematograph, Kinematograph, Vicograph, or other machines which have shown animated pictures.’

---

102 The Barnes Company toured and exhibited films in China, the Philippines, and the Straits Settlements (‘The Barnes’ Entertainers’, *Straits Times*, 30 May 1902, 4; ‘The Barnes Company’, *Straits Times*, 5 June 1902, 5).
103 Musser (1990), 145, 172, 176, 264.
This is yet another illustration of the prevalent confusion of terms, and using false marketing. In Manila, six months earlier, the name ‘Biograph’ was called an Edison device (Figure 1.8). The programme, which included stereopticon views, was described as ‘the most lively and startling spectacle ever seen in Manila’. Exhibited films included *Hula Hula Dance, Spanish Bull Fight, The Corbett-Courtney Fight* (Edison, William K.L. Dickson, 1894), *Muscle Dance* (Edison, William Heise, 1895), *Life in Cairo, Egyptian Dance* (Edison, William Heise, 1895), *Express Train*, and *Fire Department*. Moreover, Peter Pettitt claimed to be the proprietor of the American Biograph which toured British Malaya with the Beresford-Pettitt Comedy Company in 1899. In advertisements between 1900 and 1902, H. Salzwedel is mentioned as the proprietor of the American Biograph Company in Surabaya (Figure 1.9) and Singapore. Salzwedel was a photographer by training, who had his own photographic studio in Surabaya in the late 1890s, before he

---


ventured into cinematic exhibitions.\textsuperscript{109} It is likely that the American Biograph managed by Salzwedel was in fact a branch of the Dutch subsidiary, the Nederlandsche Biograaf Biograaf- en Mutoscope Maatschappij. There were also other Biograph exhibitions in Manila during this period, as part of vaudeville programmes.\textsuperscript{108} Furthermore, the Barnesgraph of the Barnes Company in 1902 was described as ‘a variety of the Biograph’.\textsuperscript{111}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 1.8:} Advertisement for the Edison Biograph in Manila. \\
\textit{Manila Freedom}, 18 May 1899, 7.
\end{center}

The Bioscope projector was developed in 1897 by Charles Urban and Walter Isaacs, and was marketed by the British Warwick Trading Company. The Bioscope reached Madras in southern India in December 1897 where the Cinematographe Company of Stevenson and Crowdën exhibited the device. Two years later, Hiralal Sen formed the Royal Bioscope Company in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{112} The Bioscope was not advertised in Southeast Asia until April 1900 when the Ada Delroy Company exhibited the London Bioscope with their show in Singapore.\textsuperscript{113} Ada Delroy Company toured throughout Asia with the Bioscope in 1900, and exhibited films from the Transvaal War, for instance, \textit{The Arrival of Lord Roberts and Kitchener to Cape Town} (Warwick Trading Company, 1900), \textit{Seafort Highlanders at Cairo} (1898), and \textit{Lancers Cross-}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{109} Advertisement, \textit{Soerabaiasch Handelsblad}, 23 March 1897, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Soerabaiasch Handelsblad}, 7 February 1901, 7; Advertisement, \textit{Bintang Soerabaia}, 11 February 1901, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 5 May 1902, 4. Ruppin (2014) has found that he was exhibiting his programme throughout Java as early as October 1900.

\textsuperscript{110} Advertisement, \textit{Manila Freedom}, 12 June 1901.


\textsuperscript{112} Hughes (2010), 160-161; Mahadevan (2009), 273.

\textsuperscript{113} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 4 April 1900, 2; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 6 April 1900, 2.
\end{footnotesize}
The lack of clarity concerning the names of the different devices can also be exemplified by Ada Delroy Company’s exhibitions in Manila, where the cinematograph was described as the highlight of the show, and was advertised as ‘cinematógrafo’ in Spanish papers and ‘London Bioscope’ in English papers. Entrepreneurs often named their exhibits after popular shows and innovations around the world. In December 1900 there was an advertisement for Cineorama Biograph-Phonograph in Surabaya. Earlier that year, the Cineorama (a 360-degree balloon view on a circular screen using ten projectors) had been exhibited at the Paris Exhibition, and now the same name was used to advertise a film exhibition. By this time, however, many of these terms were used in generic ways, and it is hard to ascertain what devices they were using. By using no trademarks, or wrong trademarks, exhibitors could also circumvent regulators, or take advantage of a situation where there were limited patent laws.

Figure 1.9: Advertisement for American Biograph and Java Biorama in Surabaya. Bintanga Soerabaia, 11 February 1901, 3.

115 Advertisement, El Progreso, 20 May 1900, 3; ‘Teatro Zorrilla’, El Progreso, 26 May 1900, 3; Advertisement, Manila Freedom, 1 June 1900.
116 Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 24 December 1900, 7; Advertisement, Bintang Soerabaia, 24 December 1900, 2.
Other Bioscopes in the region included the New Bioscope, Royal Bioscope, Imperial Bioscope, and a few years later, the American Bioscope. In 1901, another Indian film exhibitor, Abdulally Essoofally, entered and toured Southeast Asia with the New Bioscope. In 1901, another Indian film exhibitor, Abdulally Essoofally, entered and toured Southeast Asia with the New Bioscope. In 1901, another Indian film exhibitor, Abdulally Essoofally, entered and toured Southeast Asia with the New Bioscope. In 1901, another Indian film exhibitor, Abdulally Essoofally, entered and toured Southeast Asia with the New Bioscope. The Royal Bioscope went from Singapore to China and Japan, and then returned to Singapore in the second part of 1902, and then continued to Bangkok where it was exhibited as the Royal Imperial Bioscope. It is, however, hard to trace the routes of the Royal Bioscope. One reason being that there was more than one device, belonging to the same owner: ‘The other bioscope belonging to the same proprietors has just returned from a highly successful trip through China and Japan.’ In 1902, D.A. Busrai, who sold calendars, harmoniums and high-end office supplies such as pens (prices ranging from $3 to $10 each) and pencils (‘with a perpetual point’, at a cost of $1 each), was also the proprietor of the Royal Bioscope in Singapore. His vestiges into exhibiting films were not very successful, and within a year, in October 1903, his company went into bankruptcy. There are no indications in the papers why the company went bankrupt, whether it depended on a fire, technological malfunction, mismanagement, or lack of audiences. Around one year later, L. Wenzel and later C.H. Mason were managers of the Royal Bioscope in Batavia, as was A.A. Yojsoof in 1906. Again, it could be several parallel exhibitions with the same name, or they bought the devices from each other.

The importance of India as a ‘bridgehead’ to the Southeast Asian market can be illustrated with the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India, a subsidiary of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, which was incorporated in May 1899, and moved its office from Bombay to Calcutta in 1901. In 1901, the American Biograph once again proclaimed that they were in Singapore ‘for the first time’. Advertisements stressed their exceptionality (Figure 1.10): ‘The Biograph is the Biograph. It is not The Cine-

---

117 Advertisement, Deli Courant, 24 October 1901, 3.
118 Notice, Straits Times, 16 December 1902, 4; Notice, Straits Times, 15 January 1903, 5; ‘The Bioscope in Bangkok’, Bangkok Times, 3 February 1903, 2.
119 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 13 December 1899, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 9 March 1900, 2; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 16 November 1901, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 22 July 1902, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 11 September 1902, 6; ‘The Convent: Benefit Bioscope Performance’, Straits Times, 29 November 1902, 5; Notice, Straits Times, 4 December 1902, 4; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 2 October 1903, 2. As a result of the bankruptcy there was an auction of the remaining stocks, comprising gramophones, rollers, electric lamps, office furniture etc.
120 They were also referred to as L. Wentzel and H.C. Mason. Advertisements, Pembrita Betawi, 12 January 1905, 3; Advertisements, Pembrita Betawi, 18 July 1905, 3; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 26 July 1905, 3; Advertisements, Pembrita Betawi, 28 July 1905, 3; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 7 June 1906, 3.
121 Richard Brown and Barry Anthony, A Victorian film enterprise: The history of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1897–1915 (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 138-139. It is not clear whether the company functioned as a subsidiary or whether the Indian territory had been outsourced to an entrepreneur.
matograph, the Vitroscope, the Bioscope, the Biogen, the Warograph, or any other “Scope” or “Graph”.

These advertisements seem to have brought more confusion than clarity, especially as another company in Singapore at that time called itself the New Biograph Company, something we return to in the end of the section. Salzwedel’s Java Biorama toured the region as well, and in 1902 the company exhibited films on Sumatra after touring British Malaya (as American Biograph). The advertisements it used were more or less the same, which explains the English text in Figure 1.11.

When the Imperial Bioscope played in Bangkok in 1903, the reviewer in Bangkok Times wrote: ‘Most people have seen the bioscope, or the cinematograph, or whatever name it goes under, but its revelations are always fresh and enticing.’ This form of wording advertisements was still used in 1906, when the French Cinematograph advertised its show in Singapore: ‘The public of Singapore have had several opportunities of witnessing Biographs, Bioscopes, Chronos, and Cinematographs but the show which we promise to lay before them is The Real Cinematograph as it should be shown.”

---

**Figure 1.10:** Advertisement for the American Biograph in Singapore. *Straits Times*, 9 July 1901, 2.

---

122 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 9 July 1901, 2.
124 ‘The Bioscope in Bangkok’, *Bangkok Times*, 3 February 1903, 2.
125 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 2 October 1906, 5.
Another American Biograph came to the Straits Settlements from India and Burma in November 1903, and two years later the Nederland-Indische Biograph Company, with A.C. Warden as proprietor, exhibited films in Batavia. Finally, let us return to Singapore in July 1901, and the mix-up in having two different companies advertising themselves as the Biograph Company in the press. A letter by William Sundheimer, the Managing Director of the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India, published in Singapore Free Press tries to clarify the distinctions, as well market the company:

The Biograph Company which will open in the Town Hall on Saturday evening is a Company registered in London and has acquired all the rights of use of the new patented method of showing animated pictures. It is called the Mutoscope and Biograph Company of India, Limited, and has patents in most parts of the world. In yesterday’s paper was an advertisement of another performance to be given shortly, by the persons, under the name of the New Biograph Company, which is an infringement of the right of the registered Company no doubt made through inadvertence. The types of machines for showing pictures in rapid succession in order to produce the effect, through persistence of vision, of an actually moving object, and thus of reproducing the scene itself to the spectators have been called by many names, of which the Biograph is one, but the original Company having acquired the sole right to the use of that word, are naturally indignant at the use of it by others. They are the only proprietors of the instrument they use, which is very different from its predecessors; and although natives may be very well satisfied with the former class

---

126 ‘American Biograph’, Straits Echo, 13 November 1903, 5; Advertisement, Bintang Batavia, 6 November 1905.
of machine, which was to be seen in the Parsee Theatre not long ago; yet it is well that the public should recognise the fact that it is a very poor substitute for the great improvements that have been made by the Biograph company, which is not only very far in advance of all previous systems but is carried out in a very complete way in various parts of the world (one subsidiary company is now in Italy) at considerable expense.

W. Sundheimer, Managing Director

Besides illustrating the problem with false device names, Sundheimer’s letter also points toward a qualitative hierarchy, and can be read as a direct response to the effect of ‘natives’ exhibiting technological novelties. They might be able to emulate and imitate us, but their machine is still ‘very different’ and ‘a very poor substitute’, and the ‘natives’ are too foolish to realise the qualitative difference. The colonial gap is visible and seemingly insurmountable, or in the words of Bhabha again, ‘almost the same, but not quite’.

1.4 Western Technology and ‘Native Astonishment’

Cinematic technology, as well as other technological inventions that were introduced in Southeast Asia, can be viewed as ways of highlighting Western progress and development, and contrasting it to ‘native’ backwardness. Brian Larkin argued that technology became ‘a way of marking cultural difference’ in the colonial context. This is valid in Southeast Asia as well. Cinematograph exhibitions in Singapore were frequently preceded by a technological introductory lecture by the film operator or manager describing the film process. The technology of the projectoscope exhibition in Singapore in August 1897, for instance, was described as ‘wonderful in its realistic effects’, and continued by explaining the process: ‘The principle of course is the taking of a series of photographs with extreme rapidity and the reproduction by mechanical means so as to show a continuous series of movements in a manner that gives to them every appearance of life.’

In an exhibition of the Cinematograph at the Town Hall in Singapore in February

---

127 ‘The Biograph: An Infringement of Rights’, letter to the editor, Singapore Free Press, 11 July 1901, 3. My emphasis. This was the same Biograph device that had been exhibited in Calcutta in 1900, and then in Rangoon (‘The Royal Funeral by Biograph’, Singapore Free Press, 4 July 1901, 2).


130 ‘The Projectoscope’, Straits Times, 19 August 1897, 2.
1898, the manager commenced the show by describing the technological developments in the field of photography and motion pictures: ‘Less than a generation ago, it took five minutes to take a single photograph, while by modern appliances, such as were used to produce the forthcoming films thirty a minute were taken.’

In the projectoscope exhibitions in Singapore, the press again reported on the reactions of the ‘native’ audience: ‘Last night everything went off without a hitch, and the astonishment of the native portion of the audience at the life-like appearance of the pictures was something to remember.’

Such descriptions of the ‘natives’ being amazed and baffled by new technologies might be considered innocent, when looking at each comment individually. Together, however, they form a pattern, in line with the prevalent colonial discourse. The child-like and backward Asians are not able to grasp this new technology, in contrast to the civilised Europeans in the audience who quickly manage to comprehend the technology. Furthermore, the new technology from the West is a further illustration of the progress and industriousness of Europeans (and Americans), who manage to change our perception of time and space. As such these technologies function as a way to underline the differences between Europeans and Asians, widen the colonial gap, and partly justify colonialism. In addition, imagining that Asians are not capable of understanding and operating new technological devices was quite an anachronistic idea, as there were several dozen Asians owning and managing photographic stores in all major cities in Southeast Asia.

Again, as in the case of the phonograph, when an Asian company incorporates the cinematograph in their programme, the idea of the white man as the transmitter of technology and civilisation is put into question. The Victoria Parsee Theatrical Company was also one of the earliest groups to incorporate a cinematograph in their programme, which they did when they toured Burma, Straits Settlements, Java, Siam, and Ceylon in 1898 and 1899. The cinematograph was reportedly managed by an ‘expert artist’ from Jericho. The Victoria Theatrical Company from Bombay, consisting of ninety Parsi performers and with Khurshed Baliwala as proprietor, performed in Britain in conjunction with the Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London in 1885-1886, and later toured Europe and North America. Their programme in May 1898 included Malay songs by Mr. Baliwala, English songs by Mr. Rustam, plays and operas such as Aladdin, Solomon’s Sword, and Sangeen Bakavi (Love’s Sacrifice), as well as films from the Diamond Jubilee Pro-

---

131 ‘The Cinematograph’, Straits Times, 16 February 1898, 2.
132 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 7 September 1897, 1.
133 ‘Parsee Theatre’, Straits Times, 21 May 1898, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 18 July 1898, 3; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 18 July 1898, 2; Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 8 December 1898, 3; ‘The Parsi Theatre’, Bangkok Times, 5 June 1899, 2.
134 Notice, Perak Pioneer, 19 May 1897, 3; Notice, Perak Pioneer, 17 July 1897, 2; ‘Parsee Theatre’, Straits Times, 21 May 1898, 2.
cession, *Serpentine Act, The Soldier’s Courtship* (R.W. Paul, Alfred Moul, 1896) and *The Haunted Castle* (George Albert Smith, 1897).\(^{135}\) The ‘Western’ technology in the hands of Asians worked better than ever: ‘The instrument is a decided improvement on those cinematographs which have been exhibited in Singapore previously, and is almost entirely free from that “trembling” which is so tiring to the eye and fatal to the effect of the picture.’\(^{136}\)

Having an Indian, Chinese, Malay, or other Asian group or entrepreneur exhibiting new technologies was one way of deconstructing the idea of Westerners controlling new technology, and thereby decreasing the perceived distance between Asians and Europeans. Besides Victoria Parsee Theatre, A.A. Essoofally, and D.A. Busrai, many other Asians were involved in film exhibition in Southeast Asia: M.M. Rehmanji was the proprietor for the Grand American Bioscope in Penang, where H. Alibhoy was the contractor and H.R. Vagela the manager;\(^{137}\) Hadji Ebrahim, who had previously been the manager of Indra Bangsawan, was the proprietor of the Imperial Cinematograph in Medan;\(^{138}\) the Shahab brothers (two Arabs, in Batavia in November 1905 for General Bioscope) were the owners of the Central Bioscope and the General Bioscope in Medan (and later the owners of the Alhambra Theatre in Batavia);\(^{139}\) James Gurupatham was the proprietor of the French Cinematograph in Singapore;\(^{140}\) S.M. Aidid was the proprietor of Royal Optigraph in Batavia;\(^{141}\) and Hassan was the manager of the London Cinematograph in Batavia.\(^{142}\) In addition, two Indians, Said Rahman and Parit Khan, exhibited the Bangrak nickelodeon in Bangkok.\(^{143}\)

By the end of my research period, the landscape of exhibitors had changed further, and several film exhibitors and owners of itinerant film companies were Asian. There were several Chinese and Japanese proprietors whose exhibitions were highly regarded. An editorial in *Malay Mail* in 1907

---

\(^{135}\) ‘The Cinematograph’, *Straits Times*, 19 May 1898, 2; ‘Parsee Theatre’, *Straits Times*, 21 May 1898, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 21 May 1898, 2; Advertisement, *Singapore Free Press*, 26 May 1898, 2. These same films had been part of another cinematographic programme in Singapore three months earlier, see section 4.3.

\(^{136}\) ‘The Cinematograph’, *Straits Times*, 19 May 1898, 2.

\(^{137}\) Advertisement, *Straits Echo*, 4 July 1905, 5; Advertisement, *Straits Echo*, 12 July 1905, 5.

\(^{138}\) Advertisement, *De Sumatra Post*, 15 September 1906, 7; Advertisement, *Deli Courant*, 2 October 1906, 3; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 27 February 1903, 4. Ebrahim was also referred to as Ibrahim.

\(^{139}\) Advertisement, *De Sumatra Post*, 4 October 1906, 7; Advertisement, *Deli Courant*, 11 October 1906, 3; Advertisement, *De Sumatra Post*, 15 October 1906, 7. The Central Bioscope and General Bioscope could also be the same company, but under different names.

\(^{140}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 15 October 1906, 4. Gurupatham was also actively involved (Honorary Secretary and Treasurer) in the Indian Christian Association in Singapore (Notice, *Singapore Free Press*, 22 November 1910, 4).

\(^{141}\) Advertisement, *Perniagaan*, 6 August 1907, 4.

\(^{142}\) Advertisement, *Perniagaan*, 16 November 1907, 3.

\(^{143}\) ‘A Bangrak show’, *Bangkok Times*, 17 August 1904, 2.
reported on a comparison between British and Asian film exhibitors. A British engineer had compiled while working in the Straits Settlements and India: ‘One frequently finds a rough shanty, or even a canvas tent, rigged up for these shows, and as sure as one sees that it is run by an Englishman, we know it is not worth going to see. On the other hand, should the boss be a Chinaman or a Japanese, the show is Excellent.’ The English shows were ‘cramped for room’ and ‘shown in silence’, whereas the Japanese and Chinese shows had ‘fans, native music, steady pictures, and “appropriate noise” that is the crack of pistols etc.’ Film exhibitions led by Chinese proprietors were the Kinetoscope in Makassar where Teng Seng was the proprietor; the Grand Parisian Cinematograph in Kuala Lumpur, which had T.C. Siew as manager and Khoo Teng Hoon as agent; the British Cinematograph in Ipoh had Lim Boon Suan as proprietor; the Besan Cinematograph in Ipoh had Tan Yew Joo as manager; and Chieng Wat owned the Sam Yek Cinematograph in Bangkok. There were, of course, also exhibitors and proprietors from Britain, France, United States, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and other countries, many of whom have already been mentioned, and many who have yet to be discovered. In most cases I have not been able to determine their backgrounds, how their career developed, and not even where they went after exhibiting films for some weeks in one place.

Larkin argues that one of the main perceived differences between coloniser and colonised was the command of technology. He states: ‘The colonial sublime was an effort, by colonialists, to use technology as part of political rule and as evidence of the supremacy of European technological civiliza-

144 ‘Day by Day’, editorial, Malay Mail, 4 May 1907, 3 (Emphases in original). The editorial, however, disagreed, and claimed that they were on the same level.
145 Advertisement, Makassarsche Courant, 17 February 1899, 7; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 7 August 1906, 3; Advertisement, Times of Malaya, 2 May 1907, 5; Advertisement, Times of Malaya, 1 November 1907, 4; ‘The Sam Yek Cinematograph’, Bangkok Times, 9 September 1908, 5. I have not found out more information on who these early Chinese film proprietors were, and how long they were involved in the film industry. It is moreover hard to find more information regarding the people as the transliteration of Chinese names often differed.
146 They included: M.S. Collara and E. Correggioli exhibited a cinematograph in Singapore in February 1900; Alarios and Hernandez were the proprietors of Cinematógrafo Walgraph in Manila in July 1904; Jimenez, owner of Cinematógrafo Rizal and Cinematógrafo Luzon in Manila in August and December 1904; Paul Picard was the manager of the Paris Cinematograph in Singapore in December 1904; David Jamilly, manager of Paris Cinematograph in Singapore in March 1905; Mrs. Vinda de Cobarrubias, proprietor of Cinematógrafo Filipino in Manila in October 1905; Henri de Beaucourt, director of the Biograph Pathé and Grand-Eastern Phono-Cinematograph on Java in October 1905, and director of the Parisian Biograph and Concert in Bangkok in August 1906; Hamilton & Co, proprietor of the London Chronograph in the Federated Malay States in November 1906; M. de Lapommeraye, the operator for the Cinema-Theatre in Bangkok, Saigon, Hanoi, and Haiphong in October 1907; Ramos was the proprietor of Cinematógrafo Colon in Iloilo in January 1905, and later opened cinemas in four different parts of China: Hongkong, Shanghai, Tientsin, and Macao in 1909.
In light of viewing technology as the colonial sublime, technological failures during exhibitions can also be seen as form of a colonial failure, and having ‘natives’ in charge of technological equipment could in the same vein help dim the colonial divisions. This discussion has demonstrated how the new technological devices were embraced and exhibited by people from all nationalities in Southeast Asia, without any racial or national basis. The ‘astonished native’ understood and operated the new devices. The second part of this section examines technological complications in connection with the exhibitions.

Film advertisements suggested different technological difficulties film operators and exhibitors experienced, such as brightness, flickering film, old and used film copies, motor sound, and the cleanliness of the venue. The chronology of advertisements, therefore, functions as a reflection of the existing challenges for film exhibitors. In early 1898, when travelling film exhibition came to Singapore, the press commented that ‘the whirr – which in other instruments makes the entertainment so unpleasant to the ear – [is] reduced to a minimum’.

The following year, it was stated that ‘the objectionable flickering that has hitherto marred the representations of all other machines is entirely eliminated’. These problems were present everywhere, and during the whole period the quality of the projection and its flickering was something advertisements and reviews addressed. A review for the Royal Bioscope in 1902 commented that there was an ‘entire absence of flicker in their machine’.

A review for the American Bioscope in 1905 stated: ‘The bioscope is one of the best of all moving picture machines, the flickering, so noticeable in the majority of such machines being hardly perceptible.’ Reviews for the London Chronograph in 1906 stated that the films were ‘remarkably free from flickering’, they had ‘reduc[ed] the usual painful flicker to an almost imperceptible minimum’, and ‘there is none of that eye-dazzling vibration which so often spoils this type of entertainment.

Lastly, the flickering during the London Chronograph’s exhibition in Taiping ‘was due to the motor which operates the films being out of order and they therefore had to be manipulated by hand. As human muscles can never be so steady as the gliding constancy of

148 ‘An improved cinematograph’, *Straits Times*, 12 February 1898, 2.
mechanism, the performance on that account was not so perfect, as it might have been.\(^{154}\)

Many in the press had not been completely convinced of the benefits of the new technology. A magic lantern review from Taiping in 1902, for instance, stated: ‘The magic lantern show was very good, every view standing out clear and distinct, unlike the Cinematograph fraud we were treated to not long since.’\(^{155}\) The new technology was marred with incidents, fires, and technological breakdowns during the first few years of exhibition. Many cinematic exhibitions had to be cancelled for these reasons.\(^{156}\) In line with Larkin’s arguments these breakdowns can be read as a failure of the Western civilisation, and in showing cracks in the white European infallibility. Newspapers never assigned any blame, unless non-Europeans had been involved, then the recklessness and inability of the ‘natives’ was stressed. When the Barnes Company exhibited the Barnesgraph in Singapore in 1902, some of the films were not working, and the local press reported the reason: ‘A careless coolie had allowed the films to drop into the sea when landing, and there was not time to get them back in condition.’\(^{157}\) In one of the earliest exhibitions in Taiping, at the Chinese Theatre in December 1897, an explosion occurred. A Chinese man, Toh Khay Beng, leased the exhibition for some nights, and the results were disastrous:

After the first two exhibitions in the Town Hall the projectoscope was shown for four nights in the Chinese theater which so narrowly escaped being burnt down the other day. By the bye there seems to be a fatality attached to this old time honored structure for again, as is detailed below, it has had another narrow escape. One particular scene so tickled the fancy of our townsman and Sanitary Boarder, Mr. Toh Khay Beng, that he leased the show, and to the credit of his business acumen be it remarked that he has had no cause to repeat his venture, and has also gained some valuable experience by a close study of the scene referred to in its every feature. On the third night of the show there was an unusually large number of spectators, and the ricketty female gallery rendered more unsafe by the heavy waterfall tanks was crowded with ladies of all nationalities. Suddenly there was a crash of glass, and sundry pieces of bottles were seen flying in the air, one piece descended on the back of the head of a Kling woman and laid open the scalp, while two other pieces gashed the arms of a Chinese lady and a little girl. The commotion and stampede that naturally followed the explosion was very great, and but for the presence of mind of two gentlemen of the P.W.D. [Public Works Department] the consequences would have been serious. They pluckily secured the exit at the stairs, and held it against the rush of excited women and so a crush was avoided. The women for the moment were frenzied, but luckily our friends managed to re-


\(^{156}\) Notice, Singapore Free Press, 23 August 1897, 1; ‘Wayang Ayesha’, Perak Pioneer, 4 January 1907, 5; Notice, Malay Mail, 27 February 1907, 2; Editorial, Straits Times, 24 July 1908, 6; ‘The Sam Yek Cinematograph’, Bangkok Times, 9 September 1908, 5.

store order before any serious accident occurred. The explosion was caused by a bottle of acid igniting owing to the close proximity of a lamp.\textsuperscript{158}

Ten years later, fires during cinematic exhibitions still broke out. In order to decrease people’s concerns, the Parisian Biograph in Saigon, and others, reported that they had fireproof safe planks, and that there was no need to worry about fire.\textsuperscript{159} Powering new technological inventions sometimes caused problems.\textsuperscript{160} Several different power supplies were used to project moving images, such as carbon arc lamps, kerosene, limelights with gas cylinders, and electricity. Electric arc lamps gave a steadier and brighter light than limelight. Technical difficulties were still encountered in film exhibition in the 1900s, as can be gathered from this 1902 \textit{Perak Pioneer} editorial, which may have been the first editorial in Southeast Asia about cinema:

\ldots what went we to see? The Cinematograph! Of all the graphs save us from the Sinnah’s graph. We have heard of the Phonograph, the Biograph, the Chronograph, the Heliograph, the Lithograph, the Cryptograph, the Heptograph, the Photograph, the Stenograph, the Telegraph, with sundry other graphs, Scops or Scopes, but if what we went to see on Saturday was one of the graphs, we never knew them to jump about like that or to look at you from the north and south simultaneously\ldots \ldots] The pictures were there right enough a la magic lantern thrown farther out, and were very good in themselves had the clouds kept away and their dancing ceased. The “intention” of our entertainers was irreproachable, but their ‘execution’ was lamentable. We went to see a Cinematograph, but were treated to a Nebulograph instead, in a \textit{tremolo} stage of transition. \ldots To our friends of the matter-o-that-graph wherein they sinned (unintentionally let us concede) against us, we would say. ‘If at first you don’t succeed. Try, try, try again.’ But, until your trials have ceased, pray spare Taiping another experience of a Differing Saturday.\textsuperscript{161}

The next section continues exploring the history of cinematic exhibitions in the region, and how exhibition venues developed from tents and town halls to movie houses, which was an important part of the institutionalisation of cinema. The gradual electrification of cinematic exhibitions is also discussed.

\textsuperscript{158} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 22 December 1897, 3.
\textsuperscript{159} ‘The Cinematograph Show. Fire causes serious damage.’, \textit{Malay Mail}, 22 November 1906, 2; ‘Le biographe parisien’, \textit{La France d’Asie}, 19 April 1906, 2.
\textsuperscript{160} The first kinetoscope exhibition in Madras was, for instance, based on a steam engine and a coal burner that ran two smaller engines. The exhibition was cut short due to problems with the power supply. (Hughes (2010), 154).
1.5 ‘Run By Electricity’: Exhibition Venues and Electric Power

Cinematographic exhibitions were at times stand-alone shows, and in other cases it was seen as a sideshow to the main event, or as part of a larger entertainment programme. This is a parallel to the way acrobats, magic shows, and *tableaux vivants* had been side entertainments to circus and vaudeville programmes. The development from travelling film exhibitions to permanent stand-alone shows in Southeast Asia followed a similar trajectory and timeframe as in Europe and North America. Early film exhibitions were held both in tents that were moved from one location to the next, and in indoor locations such as theatres, town halls, and business locales. Cinema entered many social spaces, including circus tents, theatres, town halls, and hotels, but it took around a decade for it to gradually receive a permanent home. The so-called town hall exhibitor, described earlier in the chapter, created the practice among audiences of going to an entertainment venue to watch moving images as the main event, and not as a ‘novelty attraction’, which laid the foundation of permanent, stand-alone movie houses.\(^{162}\)

Permanent movie houses were gradually established in business districts, in residential areas, near markets, and in city outskirts. Southeast Asian cities with a significant number of movie houses around 1910 were Manila which was reported to have more than twenty movie houses; Batavia had around fifteen; and Singapore and Bangkok had around ten each.\(^{163}\) The actual number of movie houses was considerably higher. An editorial in *Bangkok Times* in 1908 stated that ‘there are far more cinematograph shows flourishing in this town than the average foreign resident has any idea of. One substantial building is known to everyone, but cinematograph shows are also given in canvas erections and in buildings from which there would be little hope of escape if anything serious were to happen.’\(^{164}\) This snippet of news illustrates the rapid spread and ubiquity of cinematographic exhibitions; it also puts into question the emphasis on permanent purpose-built movie houses. Moreover, in Singapore there were semi-permanent tents on Beach Road that had been used for cinematographic exhibitions for over two years.\(^{165}\)

The issue of whether the venues were purpose-built movie houses, theatres that were taken over by film exhibitions, or semi-permanent tents used for film exhibitions, is not central to this work. Some questions that arise, though, are if it still can be called a permanent movie house if it is showing in a tent that has been raised for an indefinite period, and if permanent film

\(^{162}\) Toulmin (2010), 60, 73.

\(^{163}\) H. Frankel, ‘The Apolo Theater, Manila’, *Moving Picture World*, 3 December 1910, 1304; and newspaper advertisements.


venues are measured by time or by the construction material? And although the films are being exhibited in a permanent, purpose-built film venue, in a semi-permanent tent, or at the town hall, the projector can still be moved for exhibitions elsewhere. To illustrate the issue of permanent building and semi-permanent tents, let us turn to Australia and FitzGerald’s Circus. Gillian Arrighi describes the FitzGerald Brothers’ Circus technologically up-to-date, newly constructed 6000-seat building with electricity and gas installations in 1901 as a symbol of modernity, which enabled the circus to become associated with wealth and development rather than ephemeral entertainment. Arrighi argues that this form of modernity was an international phenomenon, and that itinerant entertainment companies were instrumental in spreading it.\textsuperscript{166} It seems, however, that it was not a building, but rather a semi-permanent tent. Four years later, an advertisement for FitzGerald Brothers’ Circus in Singapore reads: ‘The largest Tents ever erected in Singapore. A Beautiful Snow-white Marquee. 6,000 people comfortably seated on Saturday night.’\textsuperscript{167}

Cinema, circus, and other entertainment forms prospered side by side during the first decades of cinema. Matsuo’s Cinematograph Show and Spampani’s Circus were both drawing good houses every night in 1907 in their two spacious tents opposite each other in Ipoh.\textsuperscript{168} Many new theatres were built and renovated in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States in the early 1900s. In Singapore, the Town Hall was renovated, and a new theatre was built next to it, the Victoria Theatre. In Penang, the King Street Theatre renovated its hall to provide electric lights, fans, and new seats.\textsuperscript{169} Many of these renovations were likely due to increased competition from travelling entertainments that provided up-to-date and sophisticated tents. Several theatre buildings, however, were gradually being taken over by cinematographic exhibitions in the early 1900s. Wayang Kassim and another Malay theatre group, for instance, could not come to Taiping and perform as the theatres were leased by the cinematographs, which prompted Perak Pioneer to suggest that the theatre group should lease the cinematograph and combine the theatre with cinema.\textsuperscript{170}

This was around the same time electricity became more widespread in Southeast Asia. Bangkok had its first electric tramway system in 1893, Jakarta in 1899 (before the Netherlands), Calcutta in 1902, Hong Kong in 1904, Singapore, Penang, and Tokyo in 1905, Rangoon and Manila in 1906,

\textsuperscript{167} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 25 July 1905, 5.
\textsuperscript{168} Notice, \textit{Times of Malaya}, 16 February 1907, 4.
\textsuperscript{169} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Echo}, 30 October 1905, 5.
\textsuperscript{170} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 7 January 1910, 4.
and Saigon in 1912. In Singapore, the Government House was provided with electric fans in 1904, and in 1906 the central parts of the city received electric street lighting and electricity replaced oil-lamps in many private homes. Singapore was, however, ‘far behind its tropical sister-cities’, such as Batavia and Bangkok, which were reported to have ‘electric light almost everywhere’. The lack of electricity in Singapore was also a reason for failed exhibitions, and the papers compared with neighbouring countries. After a failed exhibition at the Town Hall in Singapore in 1904, for instance, the manager informed the papers what had caused the problem:

The pictures were not all they might have been; but the manager has called on us and has explained, for the benefit of those who were present, that the disappointing nature of the display was to be attributed solely to the poorness of the light, and this in turn was due to the damp weather affecting the lime sticks, causing them to crumble and break. In Bangkok, where electric light was available, the photographs are reported to have been excellent, and the management expresses regret that it was not possible to give an equally good display here.

Having electric light would thus solve many problems for the exhibitors, and another paper reporting from the same exhibition wrote: ‘We understand that at the Teutonica Club where electric light was available the pictures went very well.’ Electricity or other power sources were needed in the exhibition space, whether it was a tent or a theatre hall. It was common to use gas-lights, but gas had the downside in that it consumed oxygen and increased the room temperature. When electric lights, or other uses of electricity, were introduced in the exhibition site, it was heavily advertised. As early as 1899, the American Biograph stated that their ‘tent is lighted with electricity’. When the American Bioscope was in Penang in 1905, a reviewer in the local press wrote: ‘The Hall is not only lit with electricity but electric fans are supplied to every part of the house.’ Electricity, instead of kerosene lamps, also made it easier to turn the lights on and off between projections. Three different cinematic exhibitions in Kuala Lumpur in 1906

---

171 Howard W. Dick and Peter J. Rimmer, Cities, Transport and Communications: The Integration of Southeast Asia since 1850 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 70. As a comparison Calcutta built a system of electric tramways in 1902, Hong Kong in 1904, and Tokyo in 1905.  
173 ‘A Criticism of Singapore’, Bangkok Times, 2 March 1903, 3.  
174 Notice, Straits Times, 29 January 1904, 5.  
175 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 29 January 1904, 2.  
177 Advertisement, Straits Times, 11 November 1899, 3.  
178 ‘American Bioscope Co’, Straits Echo, 7 July 1905, 4.  
stressed the presence of electricity, and the increased safety therewith: the Grand Parisian Cinematograph’s advertisement stated ‘Lighted throughout with Electric Light’; the London Chronograph advertised their show with the words, ‘Electric Illuminations’; and the advertisement of the Japanese Cinematograph read, ‘Run by electricity’. A review for the Grand Cinematograph at Taiping describes the use of electricity during, and around, the exhibition:

Some little distance away was situated the machinery and dynamo for an electric installation which worked splendidly. Tiny incandescent lamps in two rows illuminated the entrance while the interior of the tent was pervaded by a soft light given out by ten such lamps. These were turned off when the pictures were thrown on the scene and turned on again during the interval. The superiority of this light over kerosene lamps manipulated by hand whenever such shows were given in our Town Hall was never more clearly demonstrated.181

Many exhibitions also started mentioning the presence of electric fans, as a respite from the heat.182 The London Chronograph in Kuala Lumpur did whatever it could to prevent the heat: ‘Paper fans are provided and there are several small electric fans going, while the sides of the tent are raised during the performance, so that at no time does the heat become oppressive.’183 The fans could also pose problems if they were too noisy. The Chronomegaphone Gaumont at the Philharmonic Hall in Hanoi had a phonograph accompanying the films. When there was a song played on the phonograph, they stopped all the thirty fans in the hall in order to make the sound of the singing audible.184 Electric lights were also used outside the entrance of the cinema to attract the audience. The Royal Cinematograph in Singapore in 1907 was advertised as a ‘specially built cinematograph emporium’, and had an electric sign ‘R.C. [Royal Cinematograph] by its entrance.185 Audiences were met with technological innovation already before entering the show. The electric lights and illuminations signaled the technological and scientific progress of the era. At the same time there were practical non-technological arrangements in order to make the exhibition even better. The London

---

180 Advertisement, Malay Mail, 7 August 1906, 3; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 19 September 1906, 3; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 3 December 1906, 4.
184 ‘Au Chronomegaphone Gaumont’, Le Courrier d’Haiphong, 22 May 1908, 2.
185 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 12 February 1907, 2; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 18 February 1907, 2.
Chronograph in Singapore, for instance, used black cloth, and urged the audience not to smoke:

In order to obtain clear and distinct pictures the sides of the tent will be draped in black cloth. We may here mention that the public are particularly requested not to smoke in the tent during the performance. It has been found from experience that tobacco smoke has a tendency to obscure the pictures thrown upon the screen, consequently prospective patrons are asked to refrain from smoking during the exhibition.186

In order to improve the quality of the movie houses and theatres, managers gradually added restrooms and beautiful decorations, upgraded the seats, inserted electric fans or some other form of air-conditioning, introduced ushers, and used live music. Itinerant film exhibitions in tents also improved their quality through similar measures. In Manila, and most likely elsewhere, different cinematic venues decorated their lobbies and exhibition stages with art works, frescoes, and panoramic images of current views.187 These changes raised the esteem of cinema as it copied the physical environments of opera halls and other bastions of what was considered high culture. Many exhibition venues, such as Gran Cinematógrafo del Oriente and Cinematógrafo Cervantes in Manila, and Bangrak Cinematograph also had bars where they served sandwiches, pasta, beer, and other refreshments, whereas other venues complained about the lack of a bar.188 The Alhambra Cinematograph in Singapore also offered its visitors a motor car garage, bicycle stands, and a ladies cloak room.189 Cinematic exhibitions also started moving beyond ‘life-size images’, and making the projections even larger. The Japanese Cinematograph was reported to have ‘an exceedingly powerful lens, which projects pictures larger in size than any we have seen in shows of this kind hitherto’.190 The London Chronograph, in turn, was reported to have a screen which ‘is the largest this side of Port Suez’.191 Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères claimed to have ‘The Largest Picture ever Projected in the East’.192 It is, however, hard to ascertain the size of the screen. The most

188 Advertisement, El Progreso, 30 August 1903, 4; Cinematografos’, El Mercantil, 16 May 1904, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 12 February 1908, 3. A review for the Grand Cinematograph in Taiping stated: ‘On the whole it was a pleasant two hours evening’s entertainment and if the management would only have a bar and allow a sufficient interval to sample the refreshments we are sure it would meet with greater patronage from the communities that generally fill the first class and reserved seats.’ (‘The Grand Cinematograph’, Perak Pioneer, 20 July 1906, 2).
189 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 30 November 1907, 2.
190 ‘The Cinematograph Exhibition’, Straits Echo, 26 September 1905, 4.
192 Advertisement, Straits Times, 20 September 1907, 6.
frequent projection size that was mentioned in the press was using 22-foot screens.\textsuperscript{193} A cinematograph at the Hanoi Exhibition in 1902-1903 had an even bigger screen, and was reported to be thirty-five feet high.\textsuperscript{194} In 1908, Raffles Hotel in Singapore created a Music Hall from its Billiard Hall, where they exhibited Edison films on a 32-foot high screen.\textsuperscript{195} However, as early as 1897, the images from the Ripograph/Cinematograph with Harmston’s Circus on Java were reported to be thirty feet in size.\textsuperscript{196}

The advent of electricity did not create stronger racial divisions; instead the many Asian entrepreneurs that exhibited new technologies once more challenged the idea of technology being something from the West. As early as 1897, the aforementioned Victoria Parsee Theatrical Company was reported to have erected their own theatre in Penang, and it was ’lighted with electricity’.\textsuperscript{197} Ten years later, cinematic exhibitions were still highlighting the presence of electric light and fans in their advertisements.

1.6 Film Programming and Musical Accompaniment

By 1906, most Southeast Asian capitals had become places rich in evening entertainment. Singapore continued having several different exhibitors. In July that year, the London Chronograph had two shows each evening, at 7 and 9 p.m., the Japanese Cinematograph had shows at 7.30 and 9.30 p.m., Harmston’s Circus at 9 p.m., and musical performances were held at Hotel l’Europe at 5.30 p.m. and 11 p.m.\textsuperscript{198} In addition there were several cinematic exhibitions and local theatres that did not advertise in the local papers. During the first few years of film exhibition, different exhibitors tried to distinguish themselves by pointing out their picture quality in terms of lack of flickering and clarity of pictures, as well as the sound level of the power generator, the presence of ventilation, and electric light. As the picture quality improved, competition turned into other fields, such as film programme and musical accompaniment. This section does not examine the film programmes themselves; rather, it discusses two contextual aspects of film programming. It starts by looking at the length of the cinematic exhibitions,

\textsuperscript{194} ‘The Hanoi Exhibition (From Our Special Correspondent)’, \textit{Straits Times}, 18 December 1902, 5.
\textsuperscript{196} Advertisement, \textit{De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden}, 6 August 1897, 3.
\textsuperscript{197} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 17 July 1897, 2.
\textsuperscript{198} Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 18 July 1906, 3.
what time they started, and how many exhibitions each venue had per day. Secondly, the section considers the musical and sound accompaniment of the film programmes. These were the different ways exhibitors tried to stand out, before individual films started being the primary draw.199

The early Ripograph exhibitions at the Town Hall in Singapore in May 1897 had new sessions every hour, with shows starting at 6.15, 7.15, 8.15, and 9.15 p.m. After ten days, the 7.15 show was cancelled, probably due to people having dinner around that time.200 The programme was thus less than one hour, and was exhibited three to four times a day. When Edison’s Projectoscope exhibited in a tent at Fort Canning three months later, there was just one exhibition per day. The original plan of having three exhibitions per night (at 6.30, 8.30, and 9.30 p.m.) was quickly changed, after a technical failure the first night, to having one exhibition per night (at 9 p.m.), and two exhibitions per night (at 8 and 9.15 p.m.) during the weekend.201 There is seldom any mention of the length of the programme for these early exhibitions, but based on the time of exhibition, the programme probably only lasted around one hour, with a chance of having the last programme longer with possible re-runs of some of the short films. In January 1898, Talbot exhibited the cinematograph at the Adelphi Hall twice every evening (at 6.30 and 9 p.m.) where the programme was possibly slightly longer.202 The Ani-matoscope at Adelphi Hall in August 1899 also had two programmes per night, at 8 and 9.30 p.m., whereas the American Biograph a few months later only had one exhibition at 9 p.m. each night.203 In Hanoi, there was one exhibition per night (at 8.45 p.m.) when the cinematograph was introduced in 1897. The programme at Salle du ‘Chat D’Or’ that also included ‘Black Magic’ lasted until 11 p.m.204 In Bangkok, the exhibition started around 8.30 p.m. (or, rather, doors opened at 8 p.m.).205 L. Talbot and J. von Geyer’s film exhibitions on Java consisted of one per night, at 7 p.m. in Batavia and Suraba-

200 Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 May 1897, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 22 May 1897, 2.
201 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 21 August 1897, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 23 August 1897, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 10 September 1897, 2.
204 Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 1 September 1897, 3; Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 13 October 1897.
205 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 9 June 1897, 2.
ya, and at 9 p.m. in Surakarta.\textsuperscript{206} The Ripograph that toured together with Harmston’s Circus was shown three times a night in Surakarta.\textsuperscript{207} In Medan in 1897, Talbot maximised his short stay and exhibited films at Witte Societeit between 7 and 8 p.m., and at Club Bindjei at 9.15.\textsuperscript{208}

There was, in essence, two different ways of programming. One was to have a long programme lasting the whole evening; the other was having a short programme with several exhibitions per day. The first alternative was more common in smaller cities and towns, which is understandable considering the relative dearth of entertainment. In Medan on Sumatra, for instance, the New Bioscope, Java Biorama, and the Cinematographic Exhibition all had one programme per night, starting at 9 p.m. in the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{209} A few years later the Imperial Cinematograph had a programme lasting from 9 p.m. to midnight, including bangsawan performances.\textsuperscript{210} The following month, the General Bioscope arrived, and they had one exhibition per night except on Wednesdays and Saturdays when they had two (at 7 and 9 p.m.).\textsuperscript{211} In Penang, the Cinematograph Show also only had one session, lasting until around midnight.\textsuperscript{212} In Taiping, the Grand Cinematograph had one two-hour exhibition per night, as did the Besan Cinematograph in Ipoh.\textsuperscript{213} Bangkok, despite being a populous city, did not have as many cinematic exhibitions as Manila, Singapore, and Batavia. It was, therefore, common that the programme lasted longer. The Grand Cinematograph in Wat Tuk exhibited their films between 8.15 and 10.45 p.m. every night.\textsuperscript{214} The Queen’s Bioscope at Seekat Ban Moh had an even longer programme, lasting from 8 to 11 p.m.\textsuperscript{215} The few examples I have from Hanoi also show one exhibition per evening, at 9 p.m.\textsuperscript{216}

In Kuala Lumpur in 1906, the London Chronograph show on Petaling Street lasted from 9 to 11.30 p.m., whereas in Singapore earlier the same

\textsuperscript{206} Advertisement, \textit{Bintang Barat}, 8 March 1897, 3; Advertisement, \textit{De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden}, 29 March 1897, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Thieme’s Nieu Advertentieblad}, 17 April 1897, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Thieme’s Nieu Advertentieblad}, 27 April 1897, 2; Advertisement, \textit{De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden}, 2 August 1897, 2.

\textsuperscript{207} Advertisement, \textit{De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden}, 6 August 1897, 3.

\textsuperscript{208} Advertisement, \textit{Deli Courant}, 17 November 1897, 7; Advertisement, \textit{Deli Courant}, 24 November 1897, 7.

\textsuperscript{209} Advertisement, \textit{Deli Courant}, 24 October 1901, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Deli Courant}, 21 July 1902, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Deli Courant}, 14 January 1903, 3.


\textsuperscript{211} Advertisement, \textit{De Sumatra Post}, 15 October 1906, 7.

\textsuperscript{212} ‘The Cinematograph Show’, \textit{Straits Echo}, 9 October 1905, 4.


\textsuperscript{214} Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 3 March 1906, 3.

\textsuperscript{215} Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 16 April 1906, 3; ‘The Queen’s Bioscope’, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 27 April 1906, 3.

\textsuperscript{216} Advertisement, \textit{Le Courrier d’Haiphong}, 27 May 1908, 4.
year, the company had two exhibitions per night, one between 7 and 8.30 p.m., and one between 9 and 11 p.m. As film exhibitions became common, there were more sessions per day. The French Cinematograph had two daily exhibitions, except Sundays, on Petaling Street, at 7.30 and 9.30 p.m. in 1907. Cinematic exhibitions in Surabaya and Batavia, on the other hand, had more sessions. When the Cineorama Biograph-Phonograph exhibited films in Surabaya in late 1907, there were two sessions per night, one between 7 and 8 p.m. and one between 9 and 10 p.m.

In 1903, the Permainan Kinematograph had two exhibitions per night in Surabaya at 7 and 9.15 p.m. In Batavia, the Cineograph in 1905 had one exhibition lasting from 7 to 8.30 p.m., and one from 9.15 to 11.15 p.m. In 1907, the different exhibitors had three sessions per night, each lasting around one hour: The Royal Optigraph at 7, 8, and 10 p.m., and the Excelsior Bioscope and the Flying Bioscope at 7, 8.30, and 10 p.m. Surprisingly, the N.V. de Java Cineo-...
grammes in 1904 at the Malay Theatre on Victoria Street.\(^{228}\) In Singapore in 1905, the American Kinetograph initially had three one-hour sessions per evening (from 8 to 11 p.m.), but during their last days they arranged only exhibition per night in their tent at the foot of Fort Canning, lasting from 8.30 to 10.30 p.m.\(^{229}\) The Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères was more exact, and offered an 86-minute show.\(^{230}\) In 1908, the Japanese Cinematograph had a continuous programme lasting around five hours, and with a single ticket one could stay for the whole exhibition.\(^{231}\) The Alhambra Cinematograph allowed people to stay for two sessions for the price of one.\(^{232}\) The expensive programme at Raffles Hotel lasted two hours and combined live variety acts with Edison films.\(^{233}\) Other exhibitions usually lasted around three hours. Most programmes at the Town Hall started at 9 p.m., with carriages waiting outside at midnight.\(^{234}\) When the Ada Delroy Company performed at the Town Hall, and the programme went beyond midnight, the management assured that it would not happen again, and the paper commented: ‘Singapore people, living mostly at a distance from town, prefer to leave before that time.’\(^{235}\)

The demands of the audience increased gradually. Reviews regarding early projectoscope exhibitions in Singapore in 1897 expressed delight that ‘there were no tediously long waits between the different pictures’.\(^{236}\) In February 1900, reviews of a cinematograph show at the Town Hall in Singapore complained about the length of the programme: ‘it was too short a programme, and the intervals between the pictures too long’.\(^{237}\) The interval between the films was initially a few minutes, but that gradually declined, and in 1905 the Paris Cinematograph advertised that exhibitions had become more efficient: ‘90 Seconds interval between each film only.’\(^{238}\) Music was

\(^{228}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 24 November 1904, 3; ‘A cinematograph show’, *Straits Times*, 25 November 1904, 5; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 8 December 1904, 3; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 21 January 1905, 1.

\(^{229}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 6 June 1905, 4; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 18 August 1905, 3.

\(^{230}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 9 September 1907, 6.

\(^{231}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 6 August 1908, 1. The longer programmes probably repeated several of their films. The programme of the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore, for instance, comprised of only ‘22 beautiful, coloured and varied pictures’, yet they promised a five-hour programme.

\(^{232}\) ‘The Alhambra Cinematograph’, *Straits Times*, 25 May 1908, 7.

\(^{233}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 6 June 1908, 8; ‘Ben Hur in Singapore. Capital Variety Entertainment at Raffles Hotel’, *Straits Times*, 8 June 1908, 7.

\(^{234}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 4 April 1900, 2.

\(^{235}\) ‘The Ada Delroy Company’, *Singapore Free Press*, 6 April 1900, 3. In other cities, such as Manila, city regulations did not allow exhibitions after midnight. (‘En el Cinematografo del Oriente’, *El Mercantil*, 6 August 1904, 2; ‘Cinematografo Walgraph’, *El Mercantil*, 19 September 1904, 2).

\(^{236}\) ‘The Projectoscope’, *Straits Times*, 14 September 1897, 3.

\(^{237}\) ‘Cinematograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 19 February 1900, 19.

\(^{238}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 24 March 1905, 5.
one way to fill in the space between the pictures. The Alhambra Cinematograph advertised that a ‘Pathe compressed air Gramophone’ would provide music between the films.\textsuperscript{239}

Besides the exhibited films, the accompanying music played a central role to the cinematic experience. It was common that a phonograph or gramophone accompanied cinematographic exhibitions, as it did with the kinetoscope. During the following decade, musical accompaniment was a way to market a cinematographic exhibition and distinguish it from other exhibitions. The Royal Bioscope in Singapore in 1902 was accompanied by a phonograph which was reportedly ‘turned on’ when the films were exhibited.\textsuperscript{240} The Moving Pictures Exhibition screened films at the New Theatrical Hall in Singapore together with the ‘largest Gramophone yet seen in the Straits and States’, and played English, Chinese, and Malay music and songs.\textsuperscript{241} The Chronomegaphone Gaumont at the Philharmonic Hall in Hanoi, and many other exhibitions, also had a phonograph accompanying the films in 1908.\textsuperscript{242} Phonographs, however, gradually lost their appeal, and audiences wanted live musical accompaniment.\textsuperscript{243} Piano was the most common live accompaniment to film exhibitions, especially if the exhibition took place in the Town Hall rather than in a tent. When Peter Pettitt was exhibiting the American Biograph at the Town Hall in Singapore, Miss E. Wood accompanied him on the piano.\textsuperscript{244} The Royal Bioscope was accompanied by a piano at their exhibitions at the Town Hall in Singapore in 1902, and when the company moved to a tent on Beach Road, a phonograph provided the accompanying music.\textsuperscript{245} The Gaiety Stars developed the concept further, and performed with ‘illustrated songs’, where a singer accompanied the films with suitable songs which the local press described as a ‘novel experience’.\textsuperscript{246}

In addition, many orchestras and bands were created in British Malaya around the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{247} These musical bands played at balls, par-
ties, dinners, dances, and funerals. The Penang Band reportedly charged $60 for a five-hour performance (dances and funerals), and $30 for two-three hour dinners and garden parties, excluding transportation costs. Many of these bands were later engaged by cinematic exhibitions. The London Chronograph in Singapore accompanied its film programme with the Volunteer Band. The Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore was reported to have ‘appropriate music’ accompanying the whole programme. Later it renewed itself by constantly attracting new live musical accompaniments (‘imported at great expense’), which was especially important on the popular Saturdays. During a period of five weeks, the films in the programme were accompanied by a Manila band, the Batavian Troupe Orchestra, and the Santa Cecilia orchestra. When the new Alhambra Cinematograph opened in Singapore in 1907, it had its own orchestra (Alhambra Band) consisting of twelve musicians. A year later, it increased its efforts by bringing in an orchestra from Calcutta, ‘to provide really good music, which visitors to local cinematograph shows ought to consider a long-felt want’. The Japanese Cinematograph replied immediately with an advertisement that read: ‘Our Orchestra The BEST in Singapore.’ And when the Alhambra Cinematograph arranged a special exhibition, the musical accompaniment stood out as well: ‘A word of praise is due to the excellent string orchestra which was quite a welcome change from the music one is accustomed to hear at similar shows.’

Outside of Singapore, the American Bioscope in Penang had ‘sweet music at intervals’ presented by a harmonium. One night, a grand piano replaced the harmonium to the subdued excitement of the reviewer: ‘the music was not unenjoyable’. Most existing orchestras in the region accompanied cinematic exhibitions at some point. In Kuala Lumpur, the Selangor Band supplied the musical accompaniment to the exhibitions of the Grand Parisian Cinematograph and London Chronograph in Kuala Lumpur, and a string

---

248 *Straits Echo*, 30 August 1906. Another band, the Italian Quintet, which was a Surabaya-based musical group, charged 85 guilders per night (equivalent to $34). In 1891, they were engaged by Komedie Stamboel for 50 guilders per night ($20) to accompany their shows (Cohen, 53).


253 Notice, *Straits Times*, 16 November 1908, 6; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 16 November 1908, 6; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 17 November 1908, 6.

254 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 21 November 1908, 1.


band accompanied the French Cinematograph on Saturdays. In Manila, the Pasig band played during the intermission at Gran Cinematografo del Oriente, and an orchestra played between films at Cinematografo Parisien. The Andalusian String Orchestra accompanied the General Bioscope in Medan. In Batavia, the London Cinematograph claimed to have its own string orchestra. The orchestras became so entwined with cinematic exhibitions that by 1910 one could hear live music familiar from cinematic venues at Chinese funerals and Tamil weddings in British Malaya.

Adding sound effects to moving images seems to have been a relatively new phenomenon in 1905. The undertaking was not positively received. When the Bioscope Company performed at the Town Hall in Taiping, the press wrote: ‘Attempts were made to add realism to the moving pictures by throwing chairs about, blowing a whistle, smacking the lips, etc. behind the curtain. This we consider wholly unnecessary and might well be omitted from the programme.’ There are only a handful of comments about the sound effects accompanying film exhibitions, but apparently it became much better: ‘the sounds which accompany the movements of the figures in each set of views aid much in making them life-like. The splashing of the swimmer in the last set of views was plainly heard all over the tent and was only one of the features of the entertainment which took the spectators right into the spirit of the scenes.’ In Singapore, the Russo-Japanese War films were accompanied by the beating of tins to reproduce the sound of guns. The projected sound was so loud that there were complaints to the police.

After ten years of cinematic exhibitions in tents, town halls, stores, private homes, theatres, etc., cinema had been firmly established in many places throughout Southeast Asia. Cinematographic exhibitions changed the way people spent their evenings, particularly in places that were too small for visiting entertainment companies, which had been lacking public amusements. The cinematograph was not dependent on a troupe of entertainers,
but on a steady supply of film reels and a camera operator. As the number of exhibitors continuously increased, different exhibitors had to compete through various aspects of the arrangements. An advertisement for the Grand Cinematograph Exhibition in Singapore at the very end of my research period, in December 1908, sums up the many ways of marketing and competing beyond the price level: ‘Hall-Brightest and Best; Light-Brightest and Steadiest; Pictures-Costliest and Latest; Music-Sweetest and Softest.’ This chapter has also examined the movement from European and North American exhibitors bringing the latest technology from the West to a situation where exhibitors from all parts of Asia carried a cinematographic device and toured the Southeast Asian region. Technology had been one of the most obvious distinctions between white Europeans and ‘native’ Asians, where Europeans were carriers of new technology as a symbol of the progress of Western civilisation. This distinction had started to become blurred.


266 Advertisement, Straits Times, 19 December 1908, 1.
The Way to Get a Fortune is to buy an Electric Cinematograph. A few days’ receipts repay all your costs. The Cinematograph has had an enormous success all over the world.¹

(Singapore, 1905)

The magician Carl Hertz toured Southeast Asia twice in the 1890s, and claimed to be the first to show cinematographic pictures in many parts of Asia, as well as the first to exhibit films at sea (on S.S. Norman from Southampton to Cape Town). Hertz started his career with a travelling circus, and toured large parts of the United States on the railway. He went to Britain with the intention of staying for a few months, but remained there for three years, and also toured other countries in Europe. After being back in the United States for a few years, he went on a new tour to Australia and New Zealand, then he bought a cinematograph and went on a new world tour. He toured with the cinematograph in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Ceylon in 1896 and 1897. After India, he went to Rangoon and Mandalay in Burma, to Singapore for a week, Manila for two weeks, back to Singapore for a week, to Java and Borneo, back again to Singapore, Saigon for a week, Hong Kong, Shanghai for two weeks, Japan, Hawaii, and San Francisco, which is a good illustration of the movement of itinerant companies in the region. His programme in Singapore in March 1898 included magic acts, songs by Miss D’Alton, and films from the Greco-Turkish War and the Diamond Jubilee Procession of Queen Victoria.² Ten years later, after a decade of cinematographic exhibitions, cinema included magicians as part of their show rather than the other way around.

Entertainment companies had a joint circuit of cities they toured, which were connected by shipping and railway lines. As railways and steamships developed, travelling became cheaper and faster, and Southeast Asia experienced an increase in itinerant entertainment companies. Entertainment companies followed the infrastructure of transportation and communication sys-

tems, thereby creating recognized routes linking cities and towns through steamships and railways. The structure in Southeast Asia followed that of India regarding transportation and communication development. Port cities in the region, such as Rangoon, Singapore, Penang, Batavia, Surabaya, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Manila, were better connected than routes between a port city and the inland, and hence travel and trade was easier between ports. The building of the Suez Canal made trade with Southeast Asia easier, and Singapore expanded its role as a regional trade centre. This development also made colonial ports even more important as entrepots, and the trade of lesser ports declined. Asian ports gradually became more important in world trade, especially Singapore and Hong Kong. Trade, both imports and exports, in all Southeast Asian countries multiplied between 1890 and 1910. Singapore became the centre for transhipments; most ships thus went via Singapore, and it became less common with direct routes between other Southeast Asian ports. The turn of the century saw a huge increase in shipping, and it led to the creating of cartels, or so-called conferences, to keep freight rates from falling.

Due to its central role in shipping and trade, Singapore was guaranteed a steady flow of entertainment. Singapore often had several different exhibitions, for instance, the Parsee Theatre Company, Willison’s Circus, and Harmston’s Circus were playing simultaneously in Singapore in 1896. That two or more film companies (or circus companies) were there at the same time is a sign that merchants and wage earners had money and time to spend on leisure activities. Smaller cities and towns did not have such an abundance of entertainment. When Warren’s Circus performed in Taiping in 1901, the review stated that considering the lack of entertainment in the town during the past year, ‘any entertainment, however poor, would be accepted as a welcome relief’. This was, however, to change a few years later by which time cinematographic shows were ubiquitous. In this chapter, I trace the development of distribution from travelling film exhibitors and agents

---

5 The Straits Outward Conference was formed in 1879, the Straits Homeward Conference in 1897, and the Batavia Freight Conference in 1900. After forming the Homeward Conference freight rates increased with around thirty-five per cent. Many merchants in Singapore were against the conferences, as it limited competition and made shipping more expensive. For more on Singapore’s role in shipping and on shipping conferences, see W.G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 4.
7 A limitation with smaller towns such as Ipoh and Taiping was that it could be hard to accommodate these bigger companies in hotels. ‘Harmston’s Circus’, *Times of Malaya*, 11 May 1907, 5.
until film distributors such as Pathé arrived. During the period of my study, it was more common to use agents or distributors rather than open foreign offices. Asia was considered a market where profit from film exhibition was limited, and European and U.S. film companies frequently distributed used film copies there. Film distribution practices had not yet been standardised, and it is hard to find distribution contracts for Southeast Asia.

The chapter starts with a section on how the world became more interconnected in the late 1800s through developments in transportation and communication. Imperial ambitions were also connected to technological development, communication networks and trade, which are issues the first section focuses on. These communication networks were used by itinerant entertainment companies. An illustration of the transnational nature of the region follows, by having a case study concerning Charles Barney Hicks, manager of Harmston’s Circus, which was the most popular itinerant entertainment company in the region. Furthermore, I present more than one hundred different itinerant entertainment companies that toured Southeast Asia around the turn of the century, where they were from, and their popularity. The chapter continues with a section on the trends, practices, and patterns of film distribution in the region. Singapore, which was a focal point for trade to neighbouring countries, became a centre for regional film distribution, especially with the opening of a regional Pathé office in 1907. Finally, the Japanese Cinematograph started exhibiting and distributing film throughout Southeast Asia from 1904, and after the Russo-Japanese War they expanded their scope.

2.1 Communication Networks

This section describes the communication infrastructure and its development during the late 1800s, how it compressed the concept of time and space, and brought the world closer. It starts with a description of the impact of the Suez Canal on shipping, followed by the development of the railway infrastructure and telegraph cables in Southeast Asia. In this section I assess the transnational circulation of amusements in Southeast Asia by examining entertainment notices and advertisements in Southeast Asian newspapers, and discuss how itinerant entertainment companies entered Southeast Asia, and what routes they followed. The earliest international itinerant entertain-

---

9 Frank Swettenham, for instance, wanted to open up British Malaya by 'high-class roads, railways, telegraphs, waterworks'. Frank Swettenham, British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya (London: John Lane, 1907), 294. And the railway lines symbolically replaced the flag in a Malay Mail editorial entitled: ‘Trade follows the line’ (Times of Malaya, 5 March 1910, 4).
ment companies performed exclusively in the main shipping ports because of their easy accessibility. As transportation networks, particularly the railway system, developed, entertainment companies started going to more remote inland towns as well. In the 1890s, Harmston’s Circus had a schedule where they travelled with the railway throughout all the towns of Java. There thus seems to be a connection between the development of the railway system and the geographical spread of professional entertainers.

During the early and mid-1800s, long-distance shipping was not very profitable, as most cargo capacity of the ships was used for coal. Shipping lines were dependent on mail contracts and government subsidies to be profitable which, in turn, enabled them to serve regular long-distance routes. The mail played an important role as they provided a regular link between Europe and the colonies. Most shipping lines operating between Europe and Asia or within Asia during the second half of the century, whether British, French, Dutch, or Japanese, started with the help of, or were sustained by, mail contracts. Building and sustaining communication networks was thus a very explicit strategy in order to increase influence and trade. By mid-century there were several improvements in shipping which made it possible to carry more commercial goods. Technological development made transportation faster and lowered the cost of insurance and inventory, which made trade significantly cheaper. In 1887, night travel was made possible when ships introduced electric headlights. This cut the transit time of the Suez Canal and increased its capacity. Local newspapers in Southeast Asia fre-

12 Wood was replaced by iron, and later by steel, in the ships, which made the ships faster, more cost effective, safer, and allowed more cargo. Other innovations in the 1850s and 1860s included the screw-propeller, the iron hull, the surface condenser, and the compound engine. In the 1870s, steamships replaced sailing ships. Fletcher, 556-563; Headrick (1981), 142-144, 165-166; Headrick (1988), 24-25.
14 Headrick (1988), 26-27. The Canal was also made deeper and wider.
sequently reported the opening of new shipping lines both within Asia and to other parts of the world in the first decade of the twentieth century.\(^\text{15}\)

The free port status of Singapore with trade without tariffs, monopolies, and duties and open for Asians as well as Westerners was new in Asia, and instrumental for the city’s success and growth. The city became an entrepot port where goods from neighbouring countries and the West came before they were shipped to other places around the world. Singapore’s trade with its neighbouring countries was far larger than its trade with Britain and other European countries, and the share was gradually growing. Examining the shipping traffic of Singapore around the turn of the century gives us clues of distribution patterns of amusements and film reels. In 1897-1899, around half the trade of Singapore was with other countries in Southeast Asia with the majority being with the Dutch East Indies and the Federated Malay States.\(^\text{16}\) Fifteen large ships (with a capacity over fifty tons) entered Singapore per day in 1904 and 1905. Around seventy per cent of those ships came from other Southeast Asian countries, and the statistics were similar for ships leaving Singapore. Around 35 per cent of the ship traffic was with the Dutch East Indies, and 25 per cent with the rest of British Malaya.\(^\text{17}\) For many years in the late 1800s, the Dutch East Indies imported more from Singapore than from the Netherlands, and Dutch goods came to the region primarily via British and German steamships. Around two thirds of the export of the Outer Islands of the Dutch East went to Singapore.\(^\text{18}\) In 1890, the Royal Dutch Packet Company (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, KPM), received the mail contract for the Dutch East Indies, which had previously belonged to a British-controlled Dutch East Indian Company. KPM was successful in winning back much of the Dutch East Indian trade to Java, and in 1902 they opened a line to China and Japan. The role of Batavia and Su-

\(^\text{15}\) Between Bangkok and Singapore; between Manila and San Francisco via Honolulu and Guam; between Saigon and Bangkok; and from Seattle to Manila, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Moji, Kobe, Yokohama, Victoria, and Tacoma. ‘A New Line. Between Bangkok and Singapore’, Malay Mail, 9 July 1901, 3; ‘The Pacific Trade’, Straits Times, 28 November 1903, 5; Bangkok Times, 17 April 1905, 3; ‘Trans-Pacific Trade. Two New Steamers to Run from Seattle to the East’, Straits Times, 10 October 1907, 8.


\(^\text{17}\) Huff, 123-126. The share in terms of tonnage was different though, as ships that came all the way from Europe, Japan, or United States were much larger. Looking at the nationality of merchant vessels clearing Singapore shows that slightly more than half the ships were from Britain, followed by ships from the Netherlands and Germany.

\(^\text{18}\) There were no good steamship connections between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, nor any Dutch trading houses and credit institutions in Southeast Asia. As a result, non-Dutch merchants controlled a large portion of the trade of the Dutch East Indies. (Kuijtenbrouwer, 153-154; Huff, 51).
rabaya increased again, and Java regained its role as a commercial focal point. In 1890, most Chinese ships had their base in Singapore, but twenty years later, due to the activities of KPM, they had their base somewhere in the Dutch East Indies. Singapore partly lost its dominance as an entrepot port for transhipment by competition from Java and Hong Kong.

Railways opened up new regions for settlement, and symbolised the economic progress of the age and modernity. Railways were widely developed in Southeast Asia in the late 1800s. An important reason to expand the railway system was to make trade easier, and connect mines and agricultural lands to export areas. Railway-building, in particular, often became the main way, and the most capital intense, to promote and develop colonial areas (and access natural resources), increase trade, as well as giving European powers commercial advantages. Ronald E. Robinson called the railways a symbol for (as well as a real physical extension of) empire-building. Table 2.1 below illustrates the development of the railway infrastructure in Southeast Asia. British Malaya, Dutch East Indies, Indochina, and Siam all multiplied the length of their railways between 1890 and 1900, and again between 1900 and 1910. This followed the same pattern as elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, where China and Japan experienced a similar development, as did India and Australia earlier in the 1800s. By assessing the length of the railway one can see which areas had a more developed transportation infrastructure. The railways in British Malaya developed quickly in the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century when several new lines developed for economic reasons to provide for the tin and mining industry, and connected inland centres to port cities. The Dutch East Indies, likewise, had an expanding railway infrastructure. In 1888 there were eight railway lines on Java, connecting the fifteen largest cities and towns (Figure 2.1), including the towns on Java visited by Harmston’s Circus in 1897. As the railway network developed, the number of entertainment companies reaching small towns increased as well.

---

19 Kuitenbrouwer, 188, 250; Allen and Donnithorne (1957), 217-218.
22 For a state-by-state account of the development of the railways, see H. Conway Belfield, Handbook of the Federated Malay States (London: Edward Stanford, 1902), 60-62, 80, 91; Chai Hon-Chan, The Development of British Malaya, 1896-1909 (Kuala Lumpur and London: Oxford University Press, 1964), chapter 5. The railways in the Federated Malay States were connected to Singapore and Penang around 1903, largely because of the rubber and tin industries (Huff, 67).
Itinerant entertainment companies and variety artists in Europe and the United States frequently followed the railway, and toured city after city, often going along similar routes. Turn-of-the-century itinerant entertainment companies adopted the same practice in Southeast Asia, where they could travel more easily within the Malay States and the Dutch East Indies than in Indochina, Philippines, and Siam. The volume of passengers and freight traffic multiplied as well, and confirms how widely used the railway system was. In terms of passenger traffic on railways, the Dutch East Indies was by far the country with the most used railway. The number of passengers was 20 million in 1895, 38 million in 1900, and 50 million in 1905.24

*1892; ‘1898; •1901

Table 2: Length of railway (km)23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1905</th>
<th>1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Malaya</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>225*</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>1,516•</td>
<td>2,755</td>
<td>8,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch East Indies</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>2,098</td>
<td>3,574</td>
<td>4,728</td>
<td>5,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Indochina</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>1,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>26,400</td>
<td>31,329</td>
<td>39,834</td>
<td>45,524</td>
<td>51,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2,349</td>
<td>3,783</td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td>7,793</td>
<td>8,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>196*</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>206</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siam</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>896</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1892; ‘1898; •1901

23 Mitchell, 723-725, 728.
24 Mitchell, 761-764. In comparison, British Malaya had four million passengers in 1903 and five million in 1905, Siam had two million in 1905, French Indochina had eight million in 1907, and the Philippines had two million in 1910. The population of the Dutch East Indies was, however, considerably larger.
The telegraph made communication immensely faster. Previously, correspondence had to rely on the time-consuming postal service, which in the case of Asia meant using shipping lines. In the early years of the telegraph, a telegram between London and India took almost ten days; in 1870, it took around five hours. In the 1890s, telegrams from London to New York took three minutes, to Bombay thirty-five minutes, to Hong Kong eighty minutes, and to Sydney a hundred minutes.\textsuperscript{25} As early as 1859, telegraph cables opened between Singapore and Batavia, which facilitated the faster spread of news in the Malay archipelago. Telegraph cables connecting Europe with Bombay, Madras, Penang, and Singapore were finished in 1870. In 1871, a cable linked Singapore with Saigon, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, a second line connected Singapore with Batavia and Darwin, and a third line connected Singapore and Sumatra.\textsuperscript{26} In 1883, Hué and Haiphong in Indochina were connected to other Southeast Asian countries, and in 1890 Hanoi was connected to China.\textsuperscript{27} Prices for sending telegrams were very high, and albeit the rates decreased, it was still too expensive for private use. Telegraph messages were mostly used to share and send news, as well as price quotations on different goods and materials.\textsuperscript{28} The number of telegraph messages doubled in Dutch East Indies and Malay States between 1900 and 1910.\textsuperscript{29} The telegraph also made the planning of itinerant entertainment companies easier.

The telegraph strengthened the British Empire. By 1870, Britain was in direct communication with the world, while other world powers were still working on their domestic lines. It was important with an integrated line, and Britain used marine cables rather than overland routes through other countries. The inter-connected British telegraph cables created a strong informational empire, and Britain received vital commercial and political news before other European countries.\textsuperscript{30} The telegraph also limited the power of the man on the spot, due to faster informational exchange with Britain. In 1892, Britain had two thirds of the world’s total cable length. Their share continued to diminish, as other countries started building their telegraph cables, and in 1908 the British share was 56.2 per cent.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} Jorma Ahvenainen, \textit{The Far Eastern Telegraphs: The History of Telegraphic Communications between the Far East, Europe and America before the First World War} (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1981), 19; Brown, 16; Farnie, 185-186; Kuitenbrouwer, 56.
\textsuperscript{27} Ahvenainen, 60-64; Headrick (1991), 53-54.
\textsuperscript{28} Telegraph rates for messages within the Federated Malay States cost 3 cents per word, 13 cents to Singapore, 98 cents to India, and $2.28 to Europe. H. Conway Belfield, \textit{Handbook of the Federated Malay States} (London: Edward Stanford, 1902), 15.
\textsuperscript{29} Mitchell, 830-833. Comparable statistics are not available for neighbouring countries.
\textsuperscript{30} Headrick (1991), 39, 94. For comparative purposes, in 1892, United States had 15.8%, France 8.9%, Denmark 5.3%, Germany 1.9%, and other countries 3.7%. In 1908, United States had 19.5%, France 9.4%, Denmark 3.8%, Germany/Netherlands 7.2%, and other coun-
This section has surveyed how the shipping industry developed and considerably increased its speed, how trade within and outside Southeast Asia multiplied, how new railway lines were built and their usage increased, and how the telegraph made communication even faster. All these developments increased the movement of people, goods, technologies, and ideas. The following two sections assess how these communication networks facilitated the spread of itinerant entertainment companies.

2.2 Charles Barney Hicks: From Georgia Minstrels to Harmston’s Circus

This section is a case study of what was probably the most popular entertainment company in Southeast Asia, Harmston’s Circus, and their African-American manager, Charles Barney Hicks. Charles Hicks played an important role in developing the Southeast Asian entertainment circuit as a manager and advance representative of Harmston’s Circus. Before arriving in Southeast Asia, Hicks was part of the earliest successful African-American minstrel troupe, the Georgia Minstrels, in the United States, and was involved in almost every major minstrel troupe there. Charles Hicks was a balladist and comedian who joined the African-American entertainment group, Brooker and Clayton’s Georgia Minstrels in 1865, and later became the group’s manager and one of its proprietors. They toured the United States and later Panama, singing ballads and performing plantation material. Their show transgressed racial barriers by opening up theatre seats that had previously been reserved for white people. Hicks was an African-American minstrel artist and manager who toured in North America, Europe,

tries 3.9%. Britain was so dominant that the Netherlands, for instance, were dependent on Britain for telegraph connections with the Dutch East Indies until 1901 when they entered an agreement with Germany (Kuitenbrouwer, 257).


Australia, and Asia. In his history of African-Americans in show business, Henry T. Sampson writes: ‘Charles B. Hicks deserves the credit of being the man who first introduced Blacks into the mainstream of American show business.’ Hicks used entertainment to unlock white-only establishments, thereby negotiating racial relations and creating common social spaces for black and white audiences. He continued to do this in colonial Southeast Asia a quarter of a century later.

In 1870, the Georgia Minstrels toured Germany and Britain, where they did not meet any success, and after a month they disbanded the group and joined a struggling white-owned minstrel group, on tour in Sam Hague’s Great American Slave Troupe, in Britain and Ireland. The following year, Hicks returned to the United States and regrouped the Georgia Minstrels: ‘Having returned from their great European tour where they have appeared before the Royal Families of Great Britain and Germany.’ This is an early example of Hicks’ marketing acumen. The show became a huge success, with the resulting difficulty that many white theatre owners refused to deal with an African-American manager. From the early 1870s, it became more common that white managers usurped successful African-American minstrel groups. Discrimination made it increasingly difficult for African-American managers to have their own companies, and profits stayed with white owners and managers. Hicks, however, was determined to manage his own companies and circumvent racial prejudices.

In 1877 Hicks and the Georgia Minstrels went to Australasia, where other minstrel groups had been successful and where there was less discrimination against African-Americans. The Georgia Minstrels performed in New Zea-

35 Waterhouse, 49-53. Advertisement can also be found in *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 26 October 1871; Pickering, 26; Southern, 164-166.
36 Toll (1974), 199, 203; Matthew W. Wittman, *Empire of Culture: U.S. Entertainers and the Making of the Pacific Circuit, 1850-1890* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of American Culture, University of Michigan, 2010), 276. Southern, 166-167: ‘The wonder is not that Hicks lost his minstrel troupe, but that he managed to hold on to it for seven years in the racist climate of the United States after the emancipation of the slaves.’ As a result Hicks worked as the business manager of a minstrel troupe owned by Charles Callendar (Toll (1974), 203).
37 Robert Toll opines: ‘No other black minstrel and few other black men were so dreaded as business competitors by important white men.’ (Toll (1974), 212). Ike Simond described him as ‘a dangerous man to all outside managers and they all were afraid of him’. (Simond, 13).
38 Waterhouse, 57. The year before another group calling themselves Georgia Minstrels had come to Australia. Waterhouse further claims that in the United States almost all black minstrel groups called themselves Georgia Minstrels.
land for three months, and then for three years all over Australia. Hicks became familiar with Asia during this tour as the Georgia Minstrels also went to Java, China, Japan, and through the Suez Canal to Britain. Hicks advertised them as a company that had performed throughout the United States and Europe, appeared before the Prince of Wales and the Emperor of Germany, initially emphasising the slave origins of the troupe. After seeing their fortunes turn, Hicks returned to the United States, worked for different travelling amusement companies, and toured Europe with another troupe, but in a limited role. He later formed the Hicks-Sawyer Minstrels with A.D. Sawyer, and toured the United States in 1886-1887, followed by a tour in Australia from 1888 to 1891 where, again, he did not seem to have any difficulty with white management and theatre owners. In 1890 they changed their name to ‘The Hicks Minstrel and Variety Company’, and the following year Hicks left the company to join Harmston’s Circus as their manager and advance representative. The majority of the members of the troupe and later, African-American performers decided to stay in Australia due to more opportunities and less discrimination. After a year with Harmston’s Circus, Hicks went back to the United States for the last time in 1894, where he formed the Oriole Troupe of Vaudeville Performers, and toured Asia. After another year, he re-joined Harmston’s Circus and took most of the Oriole troupe with him. Hicks spent the rest of his life touring Asia and Australia with Harmston’s Circus, until he died from cholera in Surabaya in 1902 at the age of sixty-one.

Harmston’s Circus was the most successful travelling show in Southeast Asia in the 1890s, and early 1900s. William Batty Harmston ran the circus until he died in Singapore in 1893, whereafter his wife, Jane Harmston Love, ran the circus together with her second husband, Robert Love. She, in turn, passed away in Calcutta in 1912. In the coming years, they performed throughout the region, calling themselves ‘the largest and best circus in the East’. They visited Bombay, Madras, Colombo, Calcutta, Singapore, Saigon, Hanoi, Macau, Kowloon, Manila, Penang, several places in Java, and for the rest of their career were based primarily in Asia. Harmston’s Circus was a

---

40 Waterhouse, 64-65. This mirrored his advertising strategy in the United States (Toll (1974), 200-202). In 1912, Leavitt listed Hicks as the only African-American among the best known advance agents of the previous fifty years (Leavitt 1912, 273).
41 Waterhouse, chapter 6 and epilogue.
43 The equestrian, William Harmston, and the Stoodley family formed the Stoodley and Harmston Circus in the mid-1800s in Britain. In 1880, his son, William Batty Harmston, left the company and formed Harmston’s Circus. In 1886, the circus had a bad season and went bankrupt, but the circus quickly reformed under the same name with new artists. In 1889 they travelled to and performed in Southeast Asia for the first time.
multi-national travelling troupe of forty to seventy artists, depending on the season and the performers, as well as a menagerie. The group of artists continuously changed: in one instance it was noted that the circus consisted of artists from the ‘leading Circuses of Europe, America and Australia’; other occasions a troupe of French acrobats was highlighted; and at another time a total of eighteen European women performers were mentioned. Harmsont’s Circus was very popular in Southeast Asia; they frequently had crowded, sold-out, tents and positive reviews in the newspapers, which referred to their good reputation, calling them ‘old favourites’. A review from 1904 in Singapore sums up their success:

There must be some magnetic attraction about Harmsont’s Circus that has yet to be explained. Other troupes and companies come regularly to Singapore, exhaust all their arts and… go empty away. But no sooner has Harmsont’s people pitched their tent than there is a rush from all sides to view the wonderful menagerie […] the blasé youth who scornfully spoke of his far-forgotten schooldays when a circus was an event is to be found hugging himself in the front seats.

Hicks was a skillful publicist who knew how to get positive press. He had worked extensively on promoting his entertainment companies and writing advertisements since his early years with the Georgia Minstrels. A reason minstrel shows were very popular in Australia was their advertising methods with posters and planted stories in the local press, and Hicks was one of the managers who employed these methods. Harmsont’s Circus and its advance representative, Charles Hicks, used extensive embellishment in its marketing. In 1895, Hicks described Harmsont’s Circus’ programme as ‘superior to any that has been seen in Penang and History will record on its bright amusement pages the name of Harmsont, for future generations as the one great organization perfect in every detail that makes good all promises to the Public’ (Figure 2.2); and the following year Hicks called them the ‘Diamond of Singapore amusements without a flaw’. The hyperbole continued the

---

44 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 8 March 1905, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 18 October 1907, 3; Notice, Malay Mail, 9 May 1907, 2. According to an arrival list in Singapore in 1894, the company consisted of 46 persons. ‘Passenger List: Arrivals’, Straits Times, 12 May 1894, 2. It was reported that the menagerie included three lions, four tigers, four elephants, two panthers, three bears, fifteen monkeys, ten geese, two kangaroos, one llama, thirty-five cockatoos, fourteen horses, and nine ponies; Advertisement, De Nieuwe Voorstenlanden, 6 August 1897, 3.

45 See, variously, ‘Harmsont’s Circus: Better than ever’, Straits Times, 23 May 1900, 2; Notice, Bangkok Times, 22 November 1900, 2; ‘Harmsont’s Circus’, Bangkok Times, 6 March 1905, 3; ‘Harmsont’s Circus’, Straits Times, 6 July 1908, 7.

46 ‘Harmsont’s Circus’, Straits Times, 12 May 1904, 5.

47 Toll (1974), 212; Southern, 167.


49 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 17 October 1895, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 29 May 1896, 2.
following years: ‘It is as far above the ordinary Circus Show as the Stars are above the Earth’, and even after his death: ‘The Colossal show. The Leviathan Show. Where other Circus Entertainments try to give you ounces, We Give Tons.’

Hicks was instrumental in making hyperbole common practice in entertainment advertisements in Southeast Asia, which mirrored the advertisements of P.T. Barnum’s aptly named, ‘Greatest Show on Earth’. Hicks’ strategy worked: the local press wrote about Harmston’s Circus weeks before they

---

50 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 16 May 1901, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 13 May 1905, 4.
51 Barnum used advertisements such as: ‘Centralization of All That Is Great in the Amusement Realm’ and ‘A Colossal World’s Fair by Railroad. 20 Great Shows Consolidated! 100,000 Curiosities! Five Railroad Trains, Four Miles Long!’ (Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 253, 259). The issue of advertisement and promotional strategies is further developed in section 4.1.
arrived, and they regularly updated their readers on the success of Harmston’s Circus elsewhere in Asia. Harmston’s Circus incorporated the cinematograph as a sideshow in their exhibitions as early as 1897, thereby bringing moving images to many cities and towns for the first time. The circus used different spectacles and novelties to constantly renew itself, and lure and awe the audience. In that respect early exhibitions of moving pictures as part of a circus show can be likened to other attractions and novelties they were offering their audience, such as daring bicycle tricks and lion tamers. The films themselves were not the main attraction, although in some advertisements the full film programme was listed (Figure 2.3).

2.3 Circuits of Entertainment: From Circus to Cinema

In total, there were more than one hundred different itinerant entertainment companies in Southeast Asia during a twelve-year period around the turn of the century, which means around nine new companies per year. Most itinerant entertainment companies were popular, since they focused on markets where there was a lack of amusements. As new railways and shipping lines were created, new places were included in the touring schedule of these entertainment companies. It was, in essence, a process of experimentation, and if visits to some cities and towns were successful, other entertainment companies followed, thereby gradually creating an established entertainment route. These companies strengthened the transnational connections in the region while following the paths of commerce and shipping. This development also mirrors the one described by Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, who called the development of transnational networks an informal process without a grand design that gradually transgressed national boundaries and helped create a world market, with regional hubs. In this section I examine which itinerant entertainment companies came to Southeast Asia, and map their routes, as well as assessing their profitability.

---

52 The circus showing motion pictures in Southeast Asia was a similar development as was seen in the United States where many circuses added motion pictures to their repertoire in 1897.
No Southeast Asian city was large enough to support a permanent circus troupe, and circuses thereby became important in creating and developing a Pacific and an Asian entertainment circuit. Circuses were particularly popular, as they appealed to audiences across ethnic and linguistic barriers. During a time span of ten years around the turn of the century, twenty-eight different circus companies can be identified that toured Southeast Asia. Around two thirds originated from Europe (Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Russia, and Italy) or the United States. Of the remaining ten, six originated from India, two from South Africa, and one from the Philippines. Most circuses had multi-ethnic troupes consisting of around forty to ninety artists and performers reflecting the increased internationalisation of Southeast Asia. The troupes regularly changed between seasons in order to include the latest spectacles, and it became increasingly hard to put a national label on the entertainments. Large circuses often integrated other exhibitions in their programmes, and it was common for performers to move between different itinerant entertainment companies. Many performers from itinerant European and U.S. companies decided to stay in the Australasian region, for instance, Charles Barney Hicks, and joined other itinerant entertainment companies. Entertainment companies touring extensively in Asia employed a growing number of local performers, such as Filipina tightrope walkers and Malay-speaking clowns. The changing nature of each company’s performers and programme made them a novelty each time they came to a city.

At the turn of the century there were around fifty different itinerant opera, theatre, and variety companies touring Southeast Asia. The proportions

---

55 The touring circuses included Harmston’s Circus, Warren’s Circus, Ott’s Circus, Bostock’s Circus, Bartelle’s Circus, Pacific Circus, Circus Abell, Apollo Circus, Cooke’s Circus, Great World Circus, Hippodrome, Bose Circus, Willison’s Circus, Wallezz’s Circus, Royal Italian Circus, Spampani’s European circus, Circus Ibanez, Russian Circus, Fitzgerald’s Circus, Wirth Brothers’ Circus, Frank E. Fillis’ Circus, Chatre’s New Indian Circus, Krishna Rao’s Bombay Circus, Indian Sandow’s (Professor Ramamurti) Circus, Prof. Deval’s Indian Circus, Parasram Rao’s Circus, Paul’s Great Indian Circus, and Filipino circus.

56 See, variously, (‘El circo Ruso’, El Progreso, 10 January 1902, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 February 1905, 4; ‘Warren’s Circus’, Bangkok Times, 14 November 1905, 3; ‘Harmston’s Circus’, Straits Times, 10 July 1906, 5; ‘The Opera Indra Zabba’, Straits Echo, 17 August 1905, 4; ‘Harmston’s Coming’, Straits Times, 9 October 1905, 5; Straits Echo, 4 December 1906; ‘The Wayang Kassim’, Perak Pioneer, 16 February 1909, 4.

57 ‘El circo Spampani’, El Tiempo, 5 February 1908, 3; Cohen, 18.

58 The companies included Star Opera, Willard Opera, Bandmann Opera, Bandmann Comedy Co, Bandmann Dramatic Co, Bandmann Comic Opera Co, Merry Little Maids Opera Co, Italian Opera, Dallas Opera, O’Connor Opera, Pollard’s Lilliputian Opera, Straits Opera, Jovial Opera, Grand Opera, French Opera, Frawley Comedy, Stanley Opera, Bijou Entertainers, Wayang Kassim, Malay Opera, Malaya Opera, Wayang Ayesha (or Aishah), Wayang Yap Chow Thong, Wayang Stamboul, Opera Indra Jaya, Opera Indra Permata Theatrical Co of Selangor, Opera Indra Zabba, Klimanoff Company, Indra Bangsawan Theatrical, Gulzar-e-Nekay (Bombay Theatrical Co), Parsi Theatre Co, Burmese Theatre, Flying Jordans, José Zappala’s Opera, Ada Delroy Co, D’Arc’s Marionettes, Australian Vaudeville, Malay Theat-
were similar as for circuses: slightly more than half originated from Europe (Britain, France, Spain, and Italy) or the United States. Of the remaining twenty-two, eleven were of Malay origin (Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States, and the Dutch East Indies), four originated from India, three from Japan, two from Australia, one from New Zealand, and one from China. It is, again, hard to give them a particular national identity as the companies were internationally mixed ensembles of ever-changing performers. Most Malay itinerant entertainment companies were bangsawan groups. As Malay was the lingua franca of Straits Settlements, the Malay States, and the Dutch East Indies, it was easier for Malay-language theatre groups to tour the region. The Malay bangsawan troupes were also multi-ethnic. The Opera Indra Permata and many of them consisted of a mix of Malay, Eurasian, and European artists. 59 Wayang Kassim was a Singapore-based travelling entertainment company and the most prominent bangsawan troupe in the region. The company was founded in 1883 by S. Kassim (also spelled Kasim) in Penang, and advertised itself as ‘the only Malay Theatre that is patronised by all members of the community’. 60 Wayang Kassim consisted of between fifty and eighty artists, including a number of European actors who performed with English songs and comedy acts. Moreover, Wayang Kassim performed plays from different origins to attract an ethnically diverse audience. Wayang Kassim also toured Java, Sumatra, and Siam, where they performed for King Chulalongkorn. 61 S. Kassim bought a cinematograph in January 1905, and included it in Wayang Kassim’s theatrical exhibitions. They toured with the cinematograph for more than a year in the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and on Java, under the name, Paris Cinematograph. In 1906, the cinematograph was referred to as ‘an up-to-date...
Paris Cinematograph’, which probably referred to new films rather than a new device.62

Many popular Japanese artists, often acrobats, toured Southeast Asia as well, either as stand-alone acts or as part of an international circus. The Japanese Tamakichi Troupe, consisting of eighteen acrobats, from Tokyo performed in India, Hong Kong, Indochina, Dutch East Indies, and Straits Settlements in the early 1890s.63 The Wallett’s Circus, also called Wallett’s Equestrian Enterprise, had a special Japanese exhibition, which can be read as a reflection of the burgeoning interest in Japan as well as the Western desire to capture and frame the Other. What was being advertised as a ‘Japanese Exhibition’ was in fact Japanese acrobats, magicians, jugglers, and contortionists.64 Moreover, the Japanese Infantile Company of acrobats, juggler, dancers, and singers performed in several venues in Manila for a few weeks around Christmas and New Year of 1901 with advertisements in both English and Spanish, and the Japanese Imperial Acrobatic Company performed in Manila in 1903.65 In 1906, there was a variety entertainment for the Singapore Volunteer Infantry Corps, and as part of the programme there was a Jiu-Jiutsu performance by Professor Hakishima.66 The Japanese Magic and Comedy Company, led by Professor Kikugoro and consisting of twelve artists, toured Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States for a few months in 1908, on their way to Europe.67 Advertisements highlighted the fact that the show was patronised by the Japanese Emperor and Empress.

Based on research in the region’s newspapers, I have documented and mapped how travelling entertainment groups moved between Southeast Asian countries, thereby creating paths of distribution. Mapping these routes confirms the communication developments described in the previous section, and six clear trends can be discerned. First, the most common way to enter Southeast Asia was via India.68 In addition to European entertainment companies, Parsi theatre companies frequently came to Southeast Asia starting in the 1880s. Another, less usual, way was the Pacific circuit, where entertainers would come from the West Coast of the United States, through Hawaii, 

63 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 18 March 1893, 2.
64 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 25 April 1895, 2; ‘Wallett’s Circus’, Singapore Free Press, 4 June 1895, 2.
65 Advertisement, Manila American, 31 December 1901, 3; Advertisement, Manila American, 1 January 1902, 3; Advertisement, El Progreso, 25 June 1903, 3.
67 Advertisement, Straits Times, 8 May 1908, 1; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 18 May 1908, 4; Advertisement, Times of Malaya, 15 July 1908, 4.
68 Another common route was via Colombo (Ceylon), from where it took around six days to Singapore. Walter del Mar, Around the World through Japan (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), 38-39.
or via Australia. When the Philippines became a U.S. colony in 1898, it became more frequent to use the Philippines as a stepping-stone to Southeast Asia. Second, Straits of Malacca had completely overtaken Straits of Sunda as an entry point to the Malay Archipelago and Southeast Asia. Third, the companies often travelled back and forth between India, Southeast Asia, and the Far East (Hong Kong, China, and Japan). Fourth, Singapore was the hub of the itinerant entertainment companies. Most companies returned to Singapore two or three times during their Southeast Asian tour. As a transshipment port, most cities had direct shipping lines to Singapore; it was therefore not uncommon for an entertainment company to have an itinerary following a certain pattern, for example, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Java, Singapore, Saigon, etc. Fifth, shipping was used to a much larger extent than railways, which is intuitive considering the archipelago nature of Southeast Asia. British Malaya and Java were the places where the entertainment companies frequently used railways, which is not surprising considering the development of the railway lines. Finally, and connected to the previous few points, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and the Dutch East Indies, were the most toured places for several reasons. The infrastructure was well developed there; distances were short which saved companies time and money; the railway network was developed; and the area was at the intersection of, and thus connected, India, Australia, and China/Japan. Daily steamships went between Singapore and Batavia, which took around two days. Moreover, a common lingua franca, Malay, connected the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya, which facilitated the process for itinerant companies.

Another factor in planning distribution routes was the climate, which provided difficulties for the exhibitors, as it could be excessively hot or very rainy. Paper fans and electric fans were provided in most venues to cope with the heat. Furthermore, in the tent exhibitions, the sides of the tents were raised to provide additional respite from the heat. The region frequently experienced torrential downpours during their rainy season, and many travelling entertainments had to cancel or postpone their shows because of heavy rain, or they faced small crowds. Most entertainment troupes avoided coming to Southeast Asia during the rainy season; itinerant companies performing in tents were, therefore, initially seasonal. The rainy season varied slightly from country to country in Southeast Asia which, in turn, naturally affect-
ed the routes of the companies. Later, the tents became rainproof, and around 1905 many entertainment companies started advertising their rainproof tents, indicating that their performances would take place regardless of weather conditions. There were still risks in challenging the weather though, which the London Chronograph in Taiping experienced: ‘The wild weather of the last few days completely wrecked the large tent which was brought, and compelled it to seek shelter in a more substantial erection. This was procured in the Chinese Theatre, in which building, it will be nightly in operation for some time.’

Cinematic exhibitions followed a similar pattern of movement. Many travelling entertainment companies also included moving images as part of their exhibition, for instance, Harmston’s Circus, Victoria Parsee Theatre, Ada Delroy Company, Carl Hertz, Beresford Pettitt Comedy Company, Simon’s Panopticum, Bijou Entertainers, Wellington Barracks Theatre, the Gaiety Stars, and the Corrick Family. Other travelling entertainments in Southeast Asia around the turn of the century included magicians, illustrated lectures, musical concerts, *tableaux vivants*, panoramas, and dioramas. Most of these entertainment forms continued when motion pictures arrived. *Tableaux vivants* were popular in Southeast Asia: The Orioles’ Company showed a different series of ‘living pictures’ as part of their variety programme in Singapore in February 1895; Willard Opera included living pictures in their show in Penang in May 1895 which, a reviewer called, the ‘highlight of the program’; there were *tableaux vivants* in Taiping in December 1896; Komedia Stamboel frequently had living pictures as part of their programme throughout the 1890s; and Harmston’s Circus included *tableaux vivants* in their programmes in the mid-1890s, for instance, their ‘Statuary Act’ featured women posing as classic statues wearing tights. I have, however, not found any discussion in the local press in the 1890s and early 1900s about the nature and possible moral objections to these shows, in contrast to the debates that arose in North America.

Successful stage magicians, such as Carl Hertz, had their own shows and toured internationally. In total, there were around ten different travelling

---


stage magicians in Southeast Asia with their own shows. The fortune of magicians gradually declined with the advent of cinematic devices, and ten years after the earliest film exhibitions, magicians were advertising in newspapers for engagements. The magician Professor Ryder wrote: ‘Society Entertainer. Premier Card Manipulator, and Magician. Open to Private Engagements’. Two days later, he was performing at the Harima Cinematograph. And just as the circus had absorbed small variety acts in their programme, cinematic exhibitions did the same. The Alhambra Cinematograph, Harima Cinematograph, Theatre Royal Grand Cinematograph, and others had variety acts, such as magicians, wrestlers, weightlifters, dancers, clowns, etc., together with their film programmes. In ten years, cinema went from being a sideshow to the circus to having its own side attractions, who in many cases moved between different cinematic venues. In Manila, many cinematographic venues included zarzuelas, operettas, amateur singers, and vaudeville acts in their programmes. Vaudeville acts went from one cinema to another, as did the film reels. The movement of the cinematograph as a sideshow and magic device for conjurors such as Carl Hertz and Professor Moris in the 1890s to being a venue to incorporate magicians was completed.

Notwithstanding all these entertainment companies, Straits Times complained about the lack of theatre plays in 1905: ‘Singaporeans can boast many pastimes, but play-going cannot be said to rank as foremost – it is a luxury which is given us only occasionally, and by only one company [Dallas Company].’ There were, of course, dozens of different theatre groups in

76 Carl Hertz, The Great Zamoni, Alva the Great, Professor Jackson [Jakson], Marvellous Dante, Professor Scalfi, Thurston Magic, Professor Kartar, Professor Ryder, and Professor Krishna Moorti Row.
77 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 29 December 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 31 December 1908, 1.
78 See, variously, Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 March 1908, 6; ‘Alhambra Cinematograph’, Straits Times, 26 May 1908, 7; ‘Harima Cinematograph’, Straits Times, 17 October 1908, 7; Notice, Straits Times, 7 November 1908, 6; ‘The Theatre Royal’, Straits Times, 9 December 1908, 7; Advertisement, Straits Times, 31 December 1908, 1.
79 Some acts that had been at Parisien Cinema one week could be found at Rizal Cinema or Walgraph Cinema the next. See, variously, ‘En el Cinematógrafo Rizal’, El Progreso, 1 December 1903, 3; El Cinematografo Oriente’, El Mercantil, 3 December 1904, 3; ‘De Teatros-Cinematografos. En El Oriente’, El Mercantil, 15 February 1905, 2; ‘En el Walgraph’, El Mercantil, 29 July 1904, 2; ‘Buen Cinematografo’, El Mercantil, 28 June 1905, 2; ‘De Teatros-Cinematografos’, El Mercantil, 12 August 1905, 2; ‘El Walgraph’, El Mercantil, 23 October 1905, 2.
80 ‘The Dallas Company. First Night Performance: “A Country Girl”’, Straits Times, 8 February 1905, 5. Wright and Cartwright sums up the entertainment scene, suitable for Europeans, in British Malaya: ‘In Singapore occasional concerts are given by the Philharmonic Society, composed of local amateurs, and theatrical plays are sometimes presented by the Amateur Dramatic Club. Touring theatrical companies and circuses visit the town at intervals, but seldom stay more than a few nights. The only permanent places of amusement are cinematograph shows and a Malay theatre, where English plays are rendered in the vernacular. In
Singapore, both based in Singapore and itinerant ones, but the only theatre that counted was the European one. Newspaper editorials and reports throughout Southeast Asia complained about the dearth of good amusements, with which they meant Western entertainment companies. With permanent cinematic exhibitions a few years later, some sections of the population were still craving local (European) plays. An editorial in *Times of Malaya* in 1910 stressed the need of an Amateur Theatrical Society in Ipoh: 'It would be pleasant for the public to be able to rely on having a really good play to see at regular intervals, say every two months, as Ipoh can, at times, be deadly dull, and even the perennial Cinematograph palls.' In Bangkok, however, they felt that they were outside the circuit: ‘Singapore and Hongkong have a plethora of entertainments to brighten their lives and drive dull care away, but Bangkok pursues its solemn leaden course content to be neglected by the whirligig of amusements. Occasionally, however, the peripatetic showman decides to give Bangkok a visit.' There was also a rivalry between different port cities in Asia, which is visible in the press discourse: after one month of performances in Bangkok, *Bangkok Times* reported that Harmston’s Circus left for ‘Hongkong and other undeserving spots’ in late December 1900.

Within ten years of film exhibition in Southeast Asia, cinema was firmly established and widely popular. In Kuala Lumpur in 1906, the shows were filled before they started. In Penang in 1905, the American Bioscope repeatedly had an audience of 2,000 persons per night. Even a town such as Taiping, with around 13,000 inhabitants, which had previously lacked regular entertainment programmes, had two permanent cinema exhibitions in Pinang they have a Choral Society and an Amateur Dramatic Club, and there are dramatic societies also in the chief town of the Federated Malay States. Europeans have therefore, to a large extent, to make their own amusements; hence almost every house has its tennis court. Dinner and card parties are frequent, and informal dances are often given. The usual round of private social functions is supplemented by the amusements provided by numerous organisations. Cricket, football, tennis, hockey, golf, rowing, swimming, and other clubs and places of resort, where billiard handicaps and chess, bridge, and other tournaments afford varied forms of recreation.'


81 ‘Miss Elsie Adair’s Entertainment’, *Bangkok Times*, 7 December 1896, 2; ‘D’Arc’s Marionettes’, *Bangkok Times*, 4 May 1901, 3; Editorial, *Bangkok Times*, 11 October 1902, 2; ‘The Chronograph Show’, *Perak Pioneer*, 31 December 1906, 5; *Straits Echo*, 24 June 1907. The lack of amusements often resulted in a prolonged stay by the performers, which was also a publicity and marketing ploy on the part of the entertainment companies. D’Arc’s Marionettes, for instance, stayed two weeks instead of three days in Penang ‘owing to the unprecedented and enormous success (Advertisement, *Pinang Gazette*, 7 March 1895, 2).


83 ‘The Bioscope in Bangkok’, *Bangkok Times*, 3 February 1903, 2.

84 ‘The Circus’, *Bangkok Times*, 21 December 1900, 2.


1910 that drew crowded houses.\textsuperscript{87} Other towns, such as Ipoh, continued to have travelling film exhibitions in tents in the early 1910s: ‘The Kinta Cinematograph Co. continues to draw full houses at their tent in the New Town.’\textsuperscript{88} A cinematic building was being erected in Taiping by ‘a rich Japanese planter’, and yet, the local paper asked for more cinema shows from Singapore: ‘Since Singapore is suffering from a surfeit of cinematograph why doesn’t one of the shows come to Taiping. There is money in it for somebody.’\textsuperscript{89} All itinerant entertainment companies were, however, not successful despite the relative dearth of entertainment as the costs of travel and accommodation were significant, and profits were not guaranteed. Travelling across oceans was not an easy endeavour since it was difficult to transport personnel, animals, and equipment. The London Lyric Company, for instance, only managed to fill twenty-five per cent of the seats when they performed in Penang.\textsuperscript{90} An editorial in \textit{Perak Pioneer} went further, claiming that the majority of itinerant entertainment companies in Southeast Asia became bankrupt: ‘For the last quarter of a century it has been our experience that the majority of the Theatrical and Musical Hall Variety Companies visiting the Far East, invariably wind up by hopelessly coming to grief financially, in plain words being properly “stranded,” with the usual result of many of the members having to be assisted by the community...’ \textsuperscript{91}

Transportation costs in Southeast Asia were quite high, and one third-class ticket between Batavia and Singapore was reported to cost 15 guilders ($10).\textsuperscript{92} Steamship tickets between other destinations further apart were more expensive. Salary costs were more substantial. Local artists were reported to receive between $8 and $40 depending on how important their role was.\textsuperscript{93} Costs for salaries, as well as for travelling, become sizeable considering that the troupes consisted of 40-50 performers, and although the company could get reductions when buying fifty steamship tickets, the outlay for transportation was sizeable. For itinerant companies performing in theatres and town halls, there were costs for renting a hall and costs for advertisements. These costs varied depending on whether it was a local or an international entertainment company. The cost for renting the Town Hall in Singapore, for instance, was $55 a night excluding the cost of gas for international compa-

\textsuperscript{87} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 5 December 1910, 5.
\textsuperscript{88} Notice, \textit{Times of Malaya}, 6 June 1910, 4.
\textsuperscript{92} Van Bemmelen and Hooyer, 204-205. Third-class tickets between Singapore and Surabaya cost twenty guilders, and Batavia-Surabaya ten guilders. First-class tickets were five times as expensive, and there were also fourth-class tickets.
\textsuperscript{93} Cohen, 54, 93, 406; \textit{Straits Echo}, 4 December 1906. As it was common for entertainers to move between different companies, managers often gave the performer an advanced salary with monthly repayment instalments to keep the performer for a longer period.
nies, and $30 for local entertainments.\textsuperscript{94} There were also considerable electric costs for the companies performing in tents.\textsuperscript{95} That Singapore could charge more for international entertainment companies is an additional illustration of its importance as an entertainment hub and its centrality as a location. In other locations, the policy was the opposite. In the Dutch East Indies local entertainments had to pay a permit fee, whereas it was free for European companies. Permit fees were 80 guilders (around $54) for female troupes, \textdollar60 ($41) for male troupes, \textdollar50 ($34) for puppet companies, and \textdollar20 ($14) for Chinese shadow puppetry shows.\textsuperscript{96} When putting up a tent in Singapore, rather than renting a hall, the Singapore Land Office was responsible for granting the land area. The rent for the land, as well as the necessary police charges, was higher in Singapore than elsewhere in Asia.\textsuperscript{97}

The income of itinerant entertainment companies varied depending on where they performed and how big their audience was. There were, in essence, three different ways an itinerant company could go about conducting its affairs and performances: being hired by a local agent or theatre owner for a certain number of performances for a fixed sum; making all the arrangements itself; or a combination of the two, where the venue providers and the entertainment company shared the profits. In the first instance, the local agent or theatre owner took the financial risk and profit. For instance, the Filipino Circus was hired to perform for a week in Ipoh for $1,000. After one performance, the local agent had already recouped half of the outlay.\textsuperscript{98} It is, however, not clear whether the $1,000 included the travel expenditure for bringing the circus to Ipoh. Wayang Kassim received one thousand dollars for a one-week contract in Taiping, a sum that was cleared in two days. For Saturday night the box-office result was $600, despite Chinese and Tamil plays being exhibited elsewhere.\textsuperscript{99} In like manner, a Chinese merchant in Taiping offered Wayang Kassim $3,000 to perform for a month there, but they demanded $4,000.\textsuperscript{100} The Zig-Zag Variety Company received 5,000 Ticals ($3,000) for ten performances in Bangkok, and 3,900 Ticals ($2,400) for another series of performances, of which they received 1,000 Ticals ($600) in advance.\textsuperscript{101} Many itinerant companies used different practices in different places. Komedie Stamboel, for instance, was reported to receive a fixed amount for some performances, and an income-based one for others. Contracts that were dependent on income generated from the exhibitions could be risky, due to the possibility of dishonesty and corruption among

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{94} Notice, \textit{Straits Times}, 23 March 1903, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Editorial, \textit{Straits Times}, 24 July 1908, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Cohen, 172–174.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Notice, \textit{Straits Times}, 6 April 1893, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 25 August 1906, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{99} ‘Wayang Kassim’, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 5 October 1906, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 8 January 1910, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{101} ‘The Zig-Zag Co.’s Visit: Contract Enforced’, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 16 March 1907, 2.
\end{itemize}
organisers. In the second instance, where the itinerant entertainment companies made all arrangements, the risk was larger but so were the potential profits. Harmston’s Circus made its own arrangements, often through its advance representative, Charles Hicks. The financial success of itinerant entertainment companies continued after the arrival of cinema. In 1910, Harmston’s Circus was reported to bring in more than $2,000 per night in performances in Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, and Ipoh. In Kuala Lumpur, they broke the record regarding attendance (around 3,000 people) for the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, which reportedly led to a gross income of $2,763.40 for one night’s performance. When Harmston’s Circus arrived in Surabaya by ship, the Royal Packet Company dropped part of the loop used for their famous bicycle trick into the sea. Harmston’s Circus demanded 2,000 guilders ($1,360) in compensation for every night they could not perform the trick.

This section has illustrated that national circuits did not exist in Southeast Asia, and in like manner, national entertainment companies did not really exist either. Most entertainment troupes consisted of people from several different countries, and performers continuously moved between companies. Southeast Asia was quite interconnected, and had much cross-border movement. Most groups viewed the whole region as their stage, and travelled with ship and rail back and forth between cities and across countries. The following two sections assess the gradual establishment of a distribution route for cinematic devices and film reels.

102 Cohen, chapter 2 and 3.
103 ‘Harmston’s Circus’, Straits Times, 8 August 1910, 6.
104 ‘Harmston’s Circus. A Bumper House’, Malay Mail, 8 August 1910, 7; ‘Harmston’s Circus’, Malay Mail, 10 August 1910, 7.
105 Notice, Malay Mail, 8 July 1907, 3. The spectacle of ‘looping the loop’ is discussed in Chapter 4.
2.4 Distribution Patterns and Practices

To follow the routes of itinerant film exhibitors in Southeast Asia is quite difficult, for several reasons, and the results are limited as the exact routes of early film exhibitors are unclear. Usually only one, two, or three of their stops can be found, but in many cases there is no information on who the exhibitor was which makes it harder to establish routes.\(^\text{106}\) It was common for itinerant companies to travel back and forth within the Malay archipelago in particular. L. Talbot, for instance, whose routes have been traced by Dafna Ruppin, exhibited films throughout Java, on Sumatra, in Singapore, and Bangkok between 1896 and 1898.\(^\text{107}\) Other examples of routes include the Victoria Parsee Theatre that went from India to Batavia, Singapore, Bangkok, and back to India in 1898 and 1899 with a cinematograph, as described in section 1.4 in the previous chapter, and Harmston’s Circus in 1897. Another travelling cinematograph was reported to be on ‘an Eastern tour’ from Rangoon to Singapore to Java and back to Singapore in 1898.\(^\text{108}\) The Ada Delroy Company toured with the London Bioscope as part of their exhibition, and went from Madras to Calcutta to Rangoon, and then continued to Penang and Singapore in March 1900. From Singapore they left for Hong Kong, and afterwards they performed and exhibited films in Manila.\(^\text{109}\)

Many of the above examples illustrate that the usual way for films to enter Southeast Asia was via India. Most film companies stayed between one and two weeks in each location during the first phase. The chosen route depended on the availability of venues in different cities and towns for exhibiting films. At times itinerant exhibitors had to redraw their travel routes if they could not find a facility to perform in their next stop, or if they stayed longer or shorter at a location due to an exceptionally good or bad performance. After a few years of cinematographic exhibitions, it was no longer relevant to identify India as the bridgehead, since there were various film exhibitions in the region travelling in different directions, as itinerant com-

\(^{106}\) For instance, a bioscope left from Singapore to Batavia in 1901, and Jansen and Ancona travelled with a cinematograph from Bangkok to Singapore in January 1904. It is not clear where either of these exhibitors went afterwards, and where they had been previously. (Notice, \textit{Straits Times}, 29 August 1901, 2; Notice, \textit{Straits Times}, 20 January 1904, 4).


\(^{108}\) ‘An improved cinematograph’, \textit{Straits Times}, 12 February 1898, 2; ‘The Cinematograph’, \textit{Singapore Free Press}, 18 February 1898, 3. There is no information on who the owner was.

panies exchanged between India in the west to Hong Kong, Manila, and Shanghai in the east. When the Philippines became a colony of the United States in 1898, film exhibitors also started coming to Southeast Asia via Manila. The Barnes’ entertainers and their Barnesgraph, for instance, went from China to the Philippines, and then continued to Singapore and Penang between April and June of 1902.¹¹⁰

Film distribution in Southeast Asia before 1908 can roughly be divided into three phases. The first phase covers the period from 1896 to 1903, and is characterised by itinerant film exhibitors buying film reels from Europe and North America and travelling from city to city in Southeast Asia exhibiting the films. The second phase begins around 1904 when different corporations and commercial stores in Southeast Asia started selling film reels, thereby initiating an inter-Asian film trade. The third phase, which is dealt with in the next section, starts 17 August 1907, when Pathé Frères opened a subsidiary in Singapore. The cinematograph quickly was presented as a lucrative industry, and as early as 1900 there were advertisements in the local press for cinematographic devices. An advertisement in Surabaya read (Figure 2.4): ‘Cinematograph (Biograph). For Sale: Complete device, which can be used immediately. Daily earnings of f50-200 [$34-136].’¹¹¹ There is no mention of a price, but the promised daily profits are considerable, and it seems that the sale was successful. Three days later there were advertisements for Cinéorama at the city square (aloon aloon) in Surabaya; an entertainment described as the Biograph-Phonograph exhibiting films twice a day (7-8 p.m and 9-10 p.m.) for two weeks.¹¹²

![Figure 2.4: ‘Cinematograph (Biograph) For Sale’ in Surabaya.](image)

Straits Times, 30 May 1902, 4; ‘The Barnes Company’, Straits Times, 5 June 1902, 5. There were, moreover, many examples of films coming from Shanghai and Hongkong to Manila (‘Cine-Filipino’, El Mercantil, 22 August 1908, 1).

¹¹⁰ Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 21 December 1900, 7. This advertisement continues highlighting the confusion regarding different devices.

¹¹¹ Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 21 December 1900, 7; Advertisement, Bintang Soerabaia, 24 December 1900, 2; Advertisement, Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 7 January 1901, 7.
In the early 1900s there were several sales advertisements in the local Singaporean press for cinematographic devices. The earliest I have found is in 1901, and, by now, it should be no surprise that the seller of this new technology was an Asian company, the Straits Chinese photography company, Wah Fong & Co. The advertisement for photographic equipment included the line: ‘Also Cinematographs for sale complete with machine and films.’

The same advertisement was repeated occasionally for around nine months, which indicates that the skeleton of a film market had been established. It was also common to order apparatuses and films directly from London, Paris or New York.

In 1903, an advertisement read: ‘For Sale. Edison’s Cinematograph in good order, and complete apparatus, with canvas tent at moderate price.’ Possibly, the machine was bought and exhibited for two months, and two months later another advertisement appeared: ‘For Sale: Edison’s Cinematograph in good order. Complete with apparatus, and very little used. Price moderate.’

Some advertisements also highlight the interconnectedness of the Southeast Asian region, as illustrated by Figure 2.5, which is an advertisement in Straits Times regarding cinematographic devices on Java. Buying the cinematographic device and film reels was, however, not enough. Another large cost was buying a generator, as an editorial in the Straits Times in 1908 noted: ‘It means a heavy initial expenditure for each of the cinematograph companies to put in its own generator, so that men of moderate means are unable to operate what seems to be one of the most lucrative branches of the entertainment trade.’

![Figure 2.5: Cinematograph For Sale. Straits Times, 15 March 1903, 3.](image)

113 Advertisement, Straits Times, 10 October 1901, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 26 November 1901, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 14 July 1902, 6.
114 At times including engines, dynamos, and limelight plants. Notice, Straits Times, 29 September 1902, 5.
115 Advertisement, Straits Times, 2 March 1903, 3.
116 Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 May 1903, 4.
117 Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 August 1903, 3.
118 Editorial, Straits Times, 24 July 1908, 6.
During the second phase of film distribution, corporations and commercial stores, particularly Levy Hermanos, started selling film reels in Southeast Asia. A majority of them were traders that imported several different commodities; thus there was an early connection between trade in film and other goods. Advertisements selling equipment started mentioning the names of individual films that were offered for sale, which illustrates how the film industry developed, and is further discussed in Chapter 4. One advertisement in 1904, for instance, reads: 'For sale: One new “Bioscope” showing moving pictures, such as the “Launch of the Oceanic,” “the winning of the Derby,” and many other views to suit different tastes complete with generator for lime light, limes, retorts, and large screen. Very suitable for private or public entertainments, can also be worked as a magic lantern. The whole is a splendid piece of workmanship.' Film distribution expanded, and new film reels and devices constantly arrived in Southeast Asia from all directions and by different ships. When a film arrived in a Southeast Asian country, it usually was exported to the neighbouring countries after it had been exhibited. This explains why the internal Southeast Asian trade of film was still much larger than the film trade with the United States and Europe according to statistical reports in the 1920s, although the vast majority of films originated in Europe and North America. In the regional trade centre of Singapore (Straits Settlements), only five per cent of the films were directly imported from the United States and one per cent from Europe.

Levy Hermanos was the first company that started selling film equipment and film reels on a regular basis in Southeast Asia. In 1898 they opened a store in Manila, followed by stores in Iloilo (in the Philippines) and Singapore in 1904. They also had stores in Bombay, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tien-

---

119 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 26 October 1904, 2. Also 25 November 1904, 4.
120 For instance, S.S. Aratoon Apcar, S.S. Butuan, S.S. Satsuma, S.S. Kurany, Hye Leong, S.S. Nile, the French mail steamer, the English mail steamer, the German Mail, P&O Delta, S.S. Prinz Eitel Friedrich, and S.S. Muttra. See, variously, ‘The Barnes Company’, Straits Times, 5 June 1902, 5; Advertisement, El Mercantil, 13 October 1903, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 August 1905, 3; ‘Dos artistas para el Cinematógrafo’, El Tiempo, 17 October 1905, 3; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 21 April 1906, 2; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 18 September 1906, 3; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 29 September 1906, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 30 November 1907, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 17 January 1908, 8; Notice, Straits Times, 10 April 1908, 6; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 17 April 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 25 April 1908, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 1 May 1908, 8; Notice, Straits Times, 21 September 1908.
121 Straits Settlements, the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, Dutch East Indies, and Siam all imported more films from their neighbouring Southeast Asian countries than from the United States and Europe. In British Malaya around twenty per cent of the films were imported directly from the United States and five per cent from Europe. British Malaya: Return of Foreign Imports and Exports for the year 1926, 390-393; Return of Foreign Imports and Exports for the year 1927 and comparative figures for 1925 and 1926, 462-466.
122 Straits Settlements: Return of Imports and Exports during the year 1924, 146; Straits Settlements: Return of Imports and Exports during the year 1925, 152; Straits Settlements: Return of Imports and Exports during the year 1926, 164.
The brothers, Fernando and Rafael Levy, founded the company in Paris in 1873. The Singapore branch became an agency of Pathé Frères, and was under the management of F. Dreyfus, who later became the representative of Pathé Freres, and B. Engelke. Levy Hermanos, as they were called throughout Southeast Asia, is also known as Levy & Company, famous for their world-class photographic slides of actuality scenes from all over the world. There were regular advertisements for Levy Hermanos in the local press in Manila and Singapore, where they advertised watches, jewellery, musical instruments, gramophones, and cinematographs. Their advertisements often focused on technological novelties, and having the best equipment from Europe. Levy Hermanos quickly became successful in Singapore, and within a year (in March 1905) they moved their premises to the business centre (No. 3 Battery Road) of Singapore (Figure 2.6). The new premises and its decorations were described as ‘bright’, ‘modern’, and ‘in real Parisian style’, and the displays of silverware, fancy goods, and jewellery in the store were highlighted. F. Dreyfus gradually brought them closer to the film industry. In late 1904, it was possible to buy tickets for the Paris Cinematograph at Levy Hermanos. Film reels seemed to have become the most lucrative part of their business by the second half of 1905, when there were several large front-page advertisements in local papers selling film reels. New films arrived each month, and they were advertised as ‘[t]he finest assortment of films ever seen in the East’. 

123 Wright and Cartwright, 702; The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906 (Singapore: Fraser & Neave, 1906), 144.
125 Advertisement, Manila Freedom, 14 January 1899, 3; Advertisement, Libertas, 31 December 1903, 1; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 13 July 1904, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 23 September 1904, 3.
126 Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 September 1905, 3.
Films, and their potential to create a profit, started being more heavily advertised in the early 1900s. In December 1905, Levy Hermanos had several advertisements in Singaporean papers, one of which stated (Figure 2.7): ‘The Way to Get a Fortune is to buy an Electric Cinematograph. A few days’ receipts repay all your costs. The Cinematograph has had an enormous success all over the world. For a Complete Installation apply to Levy Hermanos.’ This was an effective way of advertising to capture the interest of entrepreneurs and businessmen, and a form of advertisement which Pathé adopted two years later. The Pathé cinematographic apparatus was sold for $1,650, and was advertised as an assured path to wealth (Figure 2.8): ‘Do You Want To Make Money? If So... Buy Pathe Freres. Complete Cinematograph Installation.’ There is no information on the prices of the earlier machines that were advertised. There were also early cases of different European film

---

130 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 21 December 1905, 4.
131 Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 September 1907, 8. The price included a motor and dynamo 8 h.p. arc lamp, and other accessories.
manufacturers having agents in Asia. Mr. E. Wallace, for instance, was the agent and had the sole rights for the Gaumont Chronophone in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. Moreover, Julian Frankel, who later became the manager of the Alhambra Cinematograph, was an itinerant film distributor who sold films and cinematographic devices in 1906: ‘For Complete Cinematograph Installations. Pathe, Gaumont, Urban and Edison. Films from all makes. Pathe films in Stock. Tents of all descriptions. Arrangements made for hire of films. Prices-Cheapest.’

Levy Hermanos offered Pathé cinematographs and films in February 1906, a daily advertisement that appeared for more than six months. Pathé was initially not a very established brand in Southeast Asia, and was even referred to as ‘Pathi’ in some advertisements. An observation of the prominence of the brandname Pathé is obvious in how the design of the advertisements

---

133 His address was ‘Room 17, Hotel Van Wijk’. Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 7 September 1906, 5 (a daily advertisement that was repeated for around two months); Advertisement, Straits Times, 2 December 1907, 6. Before being engaged in the film industry, Julian Frankel was working with the family company A. Frankel selling furniture (Public notice, Eastern Daily Mail, 11 May 1906, 2).
134 Advertisement, Straits Times, 7 February 1906, 2.
developed; initially the focus (based on font size) was on the words ‘Cinematographs’, ‘Films’, or ‘Levy Hermanos’, whereas in later advertisements ‘Pathé’ was highlighted. The trademark Pathé gradually became strengthened and a well-known name. When the London Chronograph opened in Singapore in June 1906, they advertised their exhibition as: ‘The Films are from the well known Manufacturers Messrs. PATHE FRERES of PARIS.’

Weill & Zerner, who were primarily jewellers and watchmakers, also sold and advertised cinematographs, particularly Pathé films (sold at ‘home prices’) in 1907, a few months before Pathé opened their branch office.

2.5 Pathé: ‘The Pioneers of Cinematography in Singapore’

Pathé Frères was the dominant film company in the first decade of the twentieth century. Pathé started producing films in France in the late 1890s, and within a few years had become the world’s leading film company. Vertically integrated, Pathé produced, distributed, and exhibited films, and quickly expanded by opening offices and agencies worldwide. In addition, Pathé was a company that constantly provided new films to its agencies around the world. The company gradually shifted its focus to the distribution side of the film industry, and in 1907, it had branch offices and agencies all over Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and Central America.

Pathé opened offices in Calcutta in 1907, and a regional Southeast Asian office in Singapore the same year, which solidified Singapore’s position as a regional film distribution centre. Even if Pathé opened branch offices, they still had an agent that acted as their sole distributor in Singapore, F. Dreyfus, who

135 See, for instance, Advertisement, Straits Times, 8 February 1906, 2 (daily advertisement); Advertisement, Straits Times, 1 May 1906, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 17 July 1906, 3; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 28 July 1906, 4.
136 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 14 June 1906, 2.
138 Richard Abel, The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). In 1905, Pathé produced two hundred film apparatuses (projectors and cameras) per month, as well as printing 12,000 metres of positive film stock per day. The following year, the numbers were 250 and 40,000.
had previously imported Pathé films. The Pathé branch office in Singapore opened the possibility for other film companies to see the advantages of having a presence in the region.

From 1905 there were regular advertisements for film reels in local newspapers. The earliest film reels advertised using brand names were films from Pathé Frères, sold by Levy Hermanos. Films from the Russo-Japanese War were sold for one Straits dollar per metre. One month later, another set of films was advertised for the price of 90 cents per metre in Singapore, as well as British Malaya. Pathé was instrumental in lowering the price of film reels. Pathé sold the films at this stage, since the process of renting film reels had not yet become standard. The price they charged for film reels when they opened a subsidiary in Singapore in 1907 was 43 cents per metre. Cheaper films were, however, available, and Pathé issued a warning against the cheaper film reels: ‘Do not be misled by Cheap Prices.’ In December 1907, another company, C. Dupire & Co, advertised newly-arrived Pathé films for 39 cents per metre. Pathé and its sole agent, F. Dreyfus, did not appreciate the competition, and advertised the same month: ‘Films shown with trade mark are genuine Pathe Freres’ Films. Look well before you leap, and avoid the middleman’s profit.’ The regularity, size, placement (sometimes on the front page), and the sheer number of advertisements by film distributors illustrate the popularity and profitability of the film industry. A small price war on film reels ensued in 1907 and 1908. In March 1908, C. Dupire & Co. lowered their prices for Pathé films to 35 cents per metre. This was followed by an advertisement the next day from Pathé stating: ‘Avoid the Middleman’s Expenses and Profits’, without mentioning the price level. Second-hand Pathé films started being advertised, again by C. Dupire & Co., in early 1908, for 27 cents per metre.

---

140 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 17 August 1907, 3.
143 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 17 August 1907, 3; Advertisement, *Times of Malaya*, 24 August 1907, 4; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 10 October 1907, 8; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 6 January 1908, 8.
144 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 14 November 1907, 8. Regular advertisement.
145 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 13 December 1907, 1. C. Dupire & Co were merchants, specialising in technological equipment such as dynamo motors, motor cars, and motorcycles (Advertisements, *Straits Times*, 20 February; 20 March; 30 May; 13 September 1905, 1). Previously they had been primarily involved in commercial produce (Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 23 April 1903, 1; ‘Beurre d’Isigny’, *Straits Times*, 11 June 1903, 5). The company originated from France, and worked mostly with mining companies, rubber plantation companies, and motor cars, and was established in Singapore in 1897 (Wright and Cartwright, 674).
146 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 27 December 1907, 8.
147 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 26 March 1908, 1.
148 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 27 March 1908, 8.
By the time Pathé opened an office in Singapore in 1907, they were thus already a well-known brand from the press and through their films. Many Pathé advertisements also included a large picture of their trademark rooster (Figure 2.9). The earliest mention of Pathé I have found in the press is from a film and variety exhibition in Batavia in August 1905 with Pathé films and French variety artists. Pathé also sold gramophones and many other types of mechanical equipment. An advertisement for Pathé in Straits Times in 1907 stated that the company distributed films to The Straits, Burma, Java, Sumatra, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Siam (Figure 2.10). Four days later, an advertisement with the same words was repeatedly printed in Bangkok Times. From Singapore, the films were distributed to the neighbouring countries in the region. Films exhibited in Singapore, therefore, also act as a good indicator of which films were exhibited in other countries in Southeast Asia. Pathé’s Singapore office was also frequently advertised in French Indochina. There were daily advertisements in, for instance, Haiphong and Hanoi, where the films were sold for 1.25 francs per metre [40 cents] (Figure 2.11). Two years later, in 1909, a Pathé branch, under the Singapore office, opened in Kuala Lumpur, supervised by Conway C. Sarre at Empire Hotel, from where it was possible to buy cinematographic equipment and films.

---

149 Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 23 August 1905, 3.
150 Advertisement, Straits Times, 17 August 1907, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 21 August 1907, 3.
151 And the dominance of Singapore continued According to Kristin Thompson more than seventy per cent of films imported to Siam in 1916-1917 came from Singapore. Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34* (London: BFI Publishing, 1985), 76.
152 Advertisement, Le Courrier d’Haiphong, 2 October 1907, 5 (repeated every day); Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 6 November 1907, 3.
The high regard for Pathé films can be further illustrated by the fact that new films from other makers were sold at the same price as second-hand Pathé films.\textsuperscript{154}

Figure 2.10: Advertisement for Pathé Frères. \textit{Straits Times}, 17 August 1907, 3.

Edison products were also available and advertised in Southeast Asian papers in the early 1900s. In Manila, it was more common to see advertisements for Edison products. An advertisement for J. Sullivan’s store on Escolta, which was the commercial centre of Manila, called Edison’s phonograph the ‘best and cheapest phonographs in Manila’\textsuperscript{155}. An advertisement for the Pathé phonograph in 1907, sold by Weill & Zerner, mirrored the language of the Edison phonograph advertisement from earlier in the decade, ‘Phonograph Pathe. The Best and Cheapest Talking Machines’\textsuperscript{156}. When Pathé opened their office and F. Dreyfus became the sole distributor, Pathé separated the distribution of the phonograph in Singapore from the cinematograph. Later in 1907, Pathé Phono-Chine, who sold phonographs, compressed air machines, and records, opened in Singapore with Paul Le Bris as manager. By this time, the Pathé name and trademark had become recognised as a guarantor of quality, and was heavily used in advertisements: ‘When you see this name on a machine and purchase it you may be sure you are getting the full value for your money from us.’\textsuperscript{157} Other advertisements for the Pathé Phonograph listed reasons why it was the ‘King of talking machines in the East’ and ‘the Best in the world’, including better sound quali-
ty, stronger and better material, largest stock of records (40,000), and cheaper prices.\footnote{158}

Two weeks after opening an agency, the vertically integrated Pathé also started as an exhibitor. Pathé changed the pattern and practices of film distribution in Southeast Asia, and their advertisements reflected their perceived self-importance: ‘Grand Cinematograph Pathe Freres! The Pathe Cinematograph, King of Living Picture Machines. The Pathe Freres Films. The Best the “World” can Produce: - “It is the Theatre, the School and the Newspaper of to-morrow.”’\footnote{159} One month later, they called themselves ‘the Pioneers of Cinematography in Singapore’.\footnote{160} By this time, the importance of the film programme was also larger, and on their opening night, Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères advertised the whole programme (Figure 2.12).\footnote{161} Within six months of opening the Pathé office, an advertisement of Alhambra Cinematograph read: ‘Only Pathe Freres’ Films’.\footnote{162}

\footnote{158} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 25 March 1908, 2; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 18 April 1908, 2. 
\footnote{159} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 28 August 1907, 9. 
\footnote{160} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 27 September 1907, 6. 
\footnote{161} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 31 August 1907, 6. 
\footnote{162} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 7 January 1908, 8.
2.6 ‘Look for the Japanese Flag’: The Japanese Cinematograph

In Japanese political discourse in the late 1800s there were two opposing forces that came to the forefront around the same time as the advent of cinema. One stressed the Asianness of Japan and aimed to create a pan-Asian collaboration. The other was imperial, and wanted to distinguish Japan from its Asian neighbours in order to be viewed on par with Western colonial nations. For Japan to be more influential, it had to ‘leave’ Asia and become more westernised. During the Boxer Rebellion around the turn of the century, for instance, Japan sided with the Western nations against China.\(^\text{163}\) Japan also developed its commerce during this period. It was estimated that around ninety per cent of Japan’s trade in 1885 was controlled by foreign companies. During the following years, the commercial structure of Japan started

\(^{163}\) In the late 1800s, Japan employed more than five hundred advisors from different Western countries to learn and integrate the best and latest developments from Europe and North America regarding industry, communication technology, military, medicine, management techniques, and education. Japanese imperial ambitions were also reflected in economic and cultural efforts, such as newspapers, trade, and education. Akira Iriye presents a good summary of the political discourse in Japan in the late 1800s, and prevalent ideas presented by politicians, academics, journalists etc. Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1994 [1972]), chapter 2; B.L. Putnam Weale, *The Conflict of Colour: The Threatened Upheaval throughout the World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 145-146.
taking form with new companies, shipping lines such as Nippon Yusen Kaisha, and government support. Japanese shipping lines started using the Suez Canal continuously in the 1890s, and quickly became the seventh biggest shipping country in terms of Canal tonnage. Before the end of the century, Nippon Yusen Kaisha had started lines to the Philippines, China, India, North America, Australia, and Europe. The Japanese Cinematograph can also be viewed as a reflection of these two forces, as it both could be seen as an aim to spread the idea of ‘Asia for Asiatics’, as well as a way to liken Japan to other Westerners exhibiting and distributing films in Southeast Asia. Films and cinematographic apparatuses were also described as an entry-point to the west, and a way to understand the customs, science, and situation of Western Europe. The strategic presence of the Japanese Cinematograph in Southeast Asia can be viewed as part of the imperial ambitions of Japan, which is what this section covers. The Japanese Cinematograph systematically exhibited and distributed films throughout Asia in the early 1900s.

Cinematographic exhibitions and Japanese films were explicitly used to promote Japan’s trade and its image. The Japanese Association for the Development of Foreign Trade was established in 1906 with the aim to promote and market Japanese industries primarily by exhibiting Japanese films in Europe and North America, which received publicity in the Singaporean press. There were also collaborations between cinematographic exhibitions and corporations. When the Japanese Cinematograph in Bangkok celebrated its fifth anniversary in November 1908, the Dai Nippon Brewery Company distributed their beer. This is the first explicit commercial cinematic collaboration I have found in Southeast Asia. In fact, it was the four-year anniversary (it entered its fifth year). In November and December 1904, the Japanese promoter Watanabe Tomoyori exhibited films in Bangkok from the Russo-Japanese War that he had bought in Japan. He then toured the neighbouring regions of Straits Settlements, Borneo, and Sarawak, before returning to Bangkok in 1905 where he opened a permanent cinematic theatre, which was the earliest one according to Barmé. In 1907, he sold it to another Japanese.

164 Hyde, 155-162; Farnie, 453.
166 ‘The Development of Japan’s Foreign Trade. Cinematograph pictures of Japanese industries to be exhibited in the West’, Eastern Daily Mail, 22 October 1906, 4. Japanese products, though, were still considered as inferior imitators by many European merchants in Asia, who complained about cheap and inferior Japanese products, and the local press noted: ‘The Japanese talent for imitation and counterfeiting has led to their flooding the Far Eastern markets with spurious European products.’ (Notice, Straits Times, 28 November 1907, 6).
167 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 4 November 1908, 5.
168 Barmé (2006), 44-45, 60.
The earliest Japanese Cinematograph advertisement I have found in the Singaporean press is from January 1905 when they exhibited films from the Russo-Japanese War. The same company likely continued to Penang in late January and February 1905, where they exhibited, at Chulia Street, showing Russo-Japanese War in particular. Later that year, before the ‘Japanese Cinematograph’ had developed their brand name, the Japanese Biograph Company was playing to ‘crowded houses’ in Seremban, Federated Malay States. In October and November 1905, the Japanese Cinematograph returned to Penang, after having exhibitions on Sumatra. By the end of the year, in December 1905, advertisements for the Japanese Cinematograph read: ‘A Novelty in Singapore’. The following years, the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore was repeatedly reported to be drawing large crowds and filling its tent. In 1906, the company was so established in Singapore that their advertisements read: ‘Look for the name before you buy your ticket’, ‘Look for the Japanese Flag on the tent’, or some variation thereof. The Japanese flag was something frequently mentioned in the printed advertisement as well, sometimes with a picture of the flag. The flag became a symbol of the Japanese cinematograph, and when they moved their tent to other parts of the city, the audience would find and recognise the company. In 1907, the local press referred to them as the ‘old and well-known Cinematograph Show’ where one feels at home. The Japanese Cinematograph also emphasised their large-scale operations and ambitions by calling themselves ‘the largest show of the kind traveling East’, ‘The Barnums of the East’ and ‘The Barnum of Cinematographs’ (Figure 2.13).

169 Advertisement, Straits Times, 19 January 1905, 5.
170 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 27 January 1905, 4; Notice, Straits Echo, 7 February 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 25 February 1905, 5.
171 Notice under heading Negri Sembilan, Straits Times, 6 June 1905, 3.
172 Notice, Straits Echo, 30 September 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 8 November 1905, 4.
173 Advertisement, Straits Times, 7 December 1905, 1.
175 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 15 December 1906, 3; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 15 December 1906, 3; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 15 December 1906, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 June 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 28 August 1908, 1.
176 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 16 April 1906, 2; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 16 April 1906, 2; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 4 January 1907, 3.
178 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 14 May 1906, 5; Advertisement, Times of Malaya, 1 March 1907, 4.
The so-called Japanese Cinematograph seems to have been at least two different companies with separate owners and branches. If we examine the press in Southeast Asia in 1906 and 1907, there are several visits of the ‘Japanese Cinematograph’. In May 1906, the Japanese Cinematograph had three different itinerant exhibitions, in Penang, Sumatra (newly opened), and Singapore.\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 14 May 1906, 5.} An advertisement for the company a few months later stated: ‘We run 3 Shows, Singapore, Seremban & Rangoon’, and two months later Seremban was replaced with Kuala Lumpur in the advertisement.\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 27 October 1906, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 15 December 1906, 3.} In December 1906, the ‘Japanese Cinematograph Show’ exhibited in Kuala Lumpur (on Rodger Street) until the end of the year, after arriving from Seremban. It is clearly stated in advertisements that it is a branch from Singapore with K. Harima as proprietor. The Japanese Cinematograph was later called Harima’s Japanese Cinematograph, and finally Harima Cinematograph.\footnote{See, variously, Notice, \textit{Malay Mail}, 28 November 1906, 2; Advertisement, \textit{Malay Mail}, 7 December 1906, 4; Advertisement, \textit{Malay Mail}, 27 December 1906, 4; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 1 May 1908, 8.} Harima expanded his cinematographic empire in the region, and in 1910, there

\textit{Figure 2.13: Advertisement for Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph. Times of Malaya, 1 March 1907, 4.}
were reports from Taiping about ‘Karimo’, described as a ‘Japanese Millionaire’ and ‘rich Japanese planter’, who was building a new cinematic building.\textsuperscript{182} Having many different branches enabled the company to experience economies of scale by having a large stock of films which moved between the different branches.

The ownership structure of the Japanese Cinematograph is not clear, but several different proprietors are mentioned. As described in the previous chapter, there was frequently a confusion regarding the names of different manufacturers and cinematographic devices. The Japanese Cinematograph was, likewise, not a single company, but had several different owners and went under various names: Shikishima Cinematograph, Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph, Grand Japanese Cinematograph, New Japanese Cinematograph, and Japanese Biograph. An exhibition in Singapore in September and October 1906, for instance, listed Y. Kaneichi as proprietor, but it is not clear whether it is a branch of Harima’s Japanese Cinematograph or a separate company.\textsuperscript{183} In November 1907, S.M. Martin and Shibata were reported to be the managers of the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore, and they were also reported to produce their own films.\textsuperscript{184} The previous year, S.M. Martin was the manager of the London Chronograph that toured the Federated Malay States.\textsuperscript{185} Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph exhibited films in Singapore in 1906, and their ambitions were high, as demonstrated by the following advertisement:

\begin{center}
We are no False Alarms. Our Words are Backed by Deeds. Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph claims to be the largest and best organized show of the kind travelling East of Suez. Remember we make our own films, we also get films from every known maker in the world, and remember, friends, that in this part of the world, \textit{i.e.}, the East, there is a land called Japan where films are also manufactured. We do not quote newspaper clippings that bear no facts to subjects we handle. All our pictures are the earliest copies of those shown in the greatest theatres of England, America, and the Continent. We claim to be the Barnum of Cinematographs. By the old invention called “darkness” we will shortly show matinee performances. $100 in Local Currency will be given to any show in Singapore who can claim (and back it) to have 5,000 Films in stock. Our tent has more seating capacity than any other Cinematograph tent erected in this island. Special Pictures. This Race Week. New. New. New. Ask for the Big Show.\textsuperscript{186}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{182} Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 24 October 1910, 5; Notice, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 15 November 1910, 5. It seems plausible that K. Harima and Karimo are the same person, as there are no traces of any ‘Karimo’ in Singaporean documents and press.

\textsuperscript{183} Advertisement, \textit{Singapore Free Press}, 4 September 1906, 1; Advertisement, \textit{Singapore Free Press}, 1 October 1906, 1.

\textsuperscript{184} Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 20 November 1907, 5.


\textsuperscript{186} Advertisement, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 21 May 1906, 3.
Matsuo is undoubtedly also the exhibitor of several earlier exhibitions by the Japanese Cinematograph in Southeast Asia. A certain ‘Matsuno’ was, for instance, exhibiting Russo-Japanese War films in Medan in August 1905.\(^{187}\) In January 1907, Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph is reported to be arriving in Ipoh after successful stops in Penang and Deli. It was exhibited from early February to mid-March in Ipoh, before it proceeded to Penang.\(^{188}\) The exhibition was interchangeably referred to as ‘Japanese Cinematograph’, ‘Matsuo’s Show’, and ‘Matsuo’s Cinematograph’.\(^{189}\) In mid-February 1907, another ‘Matsuo’s Grand Japanese Cinematograph’ advertised its opening in Kuala Lumpur (on Petaling Street) after arriving from Penang. The cinematograph exhibited films there for around a month.\(^{190}\) Matsuo’s Grand Japanese Cinematograph and their travels from January to March 1907 is another illustration of how interconnected the entertainment world of Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States, and the Dutch East Indies was. Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph went from Penang (in Straits Settlements) to Deli (northern Sumatra) and other parts of Sumatra, and then to Ipoh (Federated Malay States), from where they returned to Penang.\(^{191}\) In September and October 1907, there was also a Shikishima Grand Japanese Cinematograph in Taiping, which was on its way to India for a long tour (‘will not probably return until the lapse of some years’).\(^{192}\) It does not mention who the proprietor of these exhibitions was. In September 1908, there are two advertisements of exhibitions by the ‘Japanese Cinematograph’ next to each other in the paper. One is by the Japanese Cinematograph at Harima Hall on North Bridge Road, and the other by the New Japanese Cinematograph on Beach Road.\(^{193}\) In addition, there was a ‘Japanese Cinematograph’ in Bangkok throughout this period.

It is hard to find the ‘Japaneseness’ of the Japanese Cinematograph. The films were from many different manufacturers, and the company advertised


\(^{192}\) Advertisement, *Times of Malaya*, 13 September 1907, 4; Advertisement, *Times of Malaya*, 19 October 1907, 5. The company name was likely homage to Shikishima warship that was used during the Russo-Japanese War.

\(^{193}\) Advertisements, *Straits Times*, 18 September 1908, 1.
‘arrangements with leading manufacturers for fresh supply of films weekly’. Exhibited films were advertised as European, American, English, German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, and Italian films received from agents in Europe. The Japanese Cinematograph also underscored that their films came from many different film producing companies, and makers such as Gaumont, Pathé, Monopoly, Urban, Lubin, and Elge were named in advertisements. The Japanese Cinematograph seemed to have its own distributors for film, and reported that they received films, as well as a new motor, by the P&O Mail, French Mail, S.S. Muncaster Castle, and S.S. Muttra. In one newspaper report it was stated that the company had ‘ordered from Europe several thousand dollars’ worth of new films’. The Japaneseness of the exhibitions was instead visible in the periphery and the setting, including many Japanese flags. There were, moreover, special events targeted at the Japanese population in Southeast Asia. When a Japanese training squadron visited Singapore in 1908, the Japanese community was encouraged to go to the Japanese Cinematograph and welcome the group. In another instance it was reported that the first-class seats of the cinema were fully occupied by passengers from the Japanese mail. The Japanese Cinematograph also made their own films, which was mentioned in the advertisement, but none of the reviews have commented upon their own productions. As such, they were to some extent vertically integrated, as they produced films, exhibited films, and distributed films between their different branches. An advertisement for the Harima Cinematograph in 1908, for instance, mentions that new films had arrived from the Rangoon branch by the S.S. Muttra. The press was impressed by the Japanese Cinematograph, and called the company ‘quite a superior exhibition of its kind’, especially the ‘enormous stock of films’ which was well appreciated by the press, as well as audienc-

195 See, variously, ‘The Japanese Cinematograph’, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 12 December 1906, 3; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 26 February 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 9 April 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 24 April 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 4 June 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 12 June 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 10 November 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 16 November 1908, 1.
199 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 22 February 1908, 1.
202 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 1 May 1908, 8.
In an advertisement, the Japanese Cinematograph thanked its many patrons: ‘Go to the Jap Show. All Go There. N.B. We take this opportunity to thank our numerous patrons of various Nationalities for their kind patronage towards us during our long stay here.’ This takes us to the next chapter where cinema audiences are assessed.

This chapter has examined how Southeast Asian entertainment was developed and strengthened in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Communication networks such as steamship lines, railways, and telegraphs were spread and built, which also facilitated the movement of itinerant entertainment companies. This paved the way for over one hundred different itinerant circuses, opera companies, bangsawan troupes, magicians, acrobats, and travelling film exhibitors. These companies were transnational and ethnically mixed, both in terms of their organisers and their performers, and they moved between India in the West and China and Japan in the East. Many of them toured specifically in, or returned more frequently to, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and the Dutch East Indies. With the arrival of the cinematograph, distribution gradually moved from entertainment groups going from one place to the next, to film reels being imported, particularly from Europe. When Pathé opened a subsidiary in Singapore in August 1907, the pattern of regional film distribution altered. Within a few weeks of the opening of the Singapore office, the availability of the films in Singapore was advertised throughout Southeast Asia. The price of film reels gradually declined, more film exhibitions opened, and new films were frequently exhibited. Another illustration of the possibilities of the Southeast Asian market is the Japanese Cinematograph which had several successful branches throughout the region. In the next chapter we return to the exhibition of the films by examining the audiences who attended the exhibitions and how the audience demographics changed over time.

---

204 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 12 October 1906, 3.
Chapter 3: Audience

Japanese, Chinese, Siamese, Malays, Javanese, Burmese, Cingalese, Tamils, Sikhs, Parsees, Lascars, Malabars, Malagasy, and sailor folk of all coasts, Hindus and heathens of every caste and persuasion, are grouped in a brilliant confusion of red, white, brown, and patterned drapery, of black, brown, and yellow skins; and behind them, in ghostly clothes, stand the pallid Europeans, who have brought the law, order, and system, the customs, habits, comforts, and luxuries of civilization to the tropics and the jungle.¹

(Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore upon arrival in Singapore, 1898)

The way the historiography of entertainment and life in Southeast Asia has been written is that there existed a strict division between Europeans and Asians, which was the case to a large extent. This dividing line is problematised and assessed in this chapter. In 1895, social life and entertainment in Southeast Asia was divided by racial and social lines. Europeans gathered in private, social clubs for food, billiards, music, dancing, and watching visiting itinerant Western opera or theatre groups. Outside of the entertainment venues and social clubs, people in British Malaya, on grounds of ethnic background, were segregated in public trains. A ticket to a performance by an itinerant entertainment company at the Town Hall or a local theatre in Singapore cost between one and three Straits dollars, which was equivalent to at least two days’ salary for ordinary wage earners. Occasionally a circus would come to town, and have cheaper tickets at 25 or 50 cents for sitting in the pit. Less than a decade later, it was possible to attend cinematic exhibitions on a daily basis for ten cents. This chapter is about the audiences that attended evening entertainments, and discusses different aspects of how cinematic exhibitions helped open up and establish common social spaces for different ethnic groups by creating regular alternatives to ethnically exclusive social clubs.

Tan Sooi Beng and Matthew Cohen both argue that there were multi-ethnic audiences for the Malay bangsawan performances in the Dutch East Indies and the Straits Settlements, and show that Komedie Stamboel and Indra Bangsawan attracted a mixed audience of Chinese, Eurasian, Europe-

ans, Malays, and other Asians around the turn of the century. Their programmes were made to attract cross-ethnic audiences, and bangsawan troupes played Malay, Dutch, and English tunes. Wayang Kassim had Malay, Indian, and European plays to target different audiences, and introduced chorus dancing between the acts of a play, inspired by vaudeville shows. Europeans, in limited numbers, also attended Siamese and Malay plays, and theatre groups prepared plot resumés in English (or Dutch in the Dutch East Indies) to make plays more accessible. Circuses and cinematic exhibitions, to an even larger extent, managed to attract a wide range of people, as the shows were cheaper than other stage shows and as there were fewer linguistic barriers compared to other art forms. Circuses attracted multi-ethnic audiences before the advent of cinema. They were, however, a temporary event as they came and performed for a few days or weeks in each locality. During the earliest five years of cinematic exhibitions, film screenings were also itinerant and temporary events in most areas, and at least as expensive than the circus. The earliest exhibitions usually took place in business districts or in residential areas for Westerners. Early film exhibitions in British Malaya were often held at the Town Hall or hotels, and in the Dutch East Indies at the schouwburg or the social clubs (a notable exception being when Harston’s Circus toured with a cinematograph), where expensive performances by itinerant European theatre and opera companies were often held. From there they expanded their geographical reach within the city to working-class areas and native residential areas, and thereby managed to attract new audiences. The earliest cinema audiences in Southeast Asia therefore consisted mostly of the foreign population and the local elite, as exhibition was a relatively expensive novelty. Prices, however, quickly fell.

The price of admission is a useful variable as it reveals what entertainment forms were available to which segments of society. The late 1800s saw a decrease in entertainment prices around the world, making it more accessible to a larger part of the population. E.F. Albee and B.F. Keith in New York were instrumental in lowering entertainment prices by reducing the cost of

---


admission to their vaudeville show to ten cents in 1887. Entertainment audiences throughout Southeast Asia also experienced a fall in prices a few years after cinematic exhibitions became more commonplace. As more permanent venues for cinematic exhibitions were established, prices fell even further, and film exhibitions became a daily event, which created a more permanent common social space where people from diverse sets of ethnic and societal backgrounds gathered in the same space to enjoy the same entertainment. Most entertainment venues gradually became more inclusive, and a space for people from all nationalities and backgrounds. Yet, the tiered price structure and the seating arrangements were conspicuous, and illustrated the disparity and inequality of colonial societies. Nevertheless, just being able to be in the same social entertainment space was of great significance in communities that had been dominated by exclusive social clubs. Singapore was quite rich in entertainment and amusements, with skating rinks, billiards, bars, dances, wayangs, concerts, and plays appealing to all social and ethnic groups. People travelled to Singapore from neighbouring areas in British Malaya to experience a wider range of evening entertainment. Singapore, as a multi-ethnic hub, was not unique in attracting a cross-section of the population. Turn-of-the-century press reports throughout Southeast Asia detail that the majority of audiences for popular itinerant entertainment companies were in fact Asian.

The chapter starts with a section that surveys the structurally segregated colonial society in most Southeast Asian cities, and the role of social clubs and itinerant European entertainment companies. Questions of whiteness and the prestige of the white ‘race’ are central in this division, and in attempts to uphold the colonial binary. This is followed with a section which illustrates how the proliferation of evening entertainments in the form of cinema created new inclusive social spaces. The following two sections consider seating arrangements and pricing for both itinerant companies and cinematic exhibitions. Seating arrangements kept audiences segregated by class and ethnicity whereas ticket prices signalled who the entertainment was for. Expensive tickets for itinerant entertainment companies, such as Western opera and

---

4 Michael Kammen labels this the democratization of entertainment, and calls it part of the ‘entertainment discount revolution’, as it also encompassed lowering prices in rural areas as well as for cultural forms such as the opera. Michael Kammen, American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 31-32.

5 Similar sentiments have been said about the circus and cinema in other parts of the world. In a U.S. setting, Janet Davis describes the turn-of-the-century circus audience: ‘women, men, and children of different social class and ethnicity sat together under the same canvasbigtop’ (Janet M. Davis, Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 32). David Nasaw, in turn, describes the amusement places as spaces with ‘no restrictions as to gender, ethnicity, religion, residence, or occupation’, later adding that African-Americans were excluded from this joint social community (David Nasaw, Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 2).
theatre groups, enhanced a socially segregated society. The section on prices examines ticket prices for different entertainment forms, how prices developed over time, and assesses how affordable they were by looking at costs of living. Cinematic exhibitions made a concerted effort to attract new audiences beyond European men by targeting wider audiences, such as women, children, and ‘natives’, and creating a more inclusive social space.

3.1 White Privilege and Prestige: A Segregated Colonial Society

In the first decades of Singapore’s existence, there were fewer racial barriers among the different ethnic communities, and Mary Turnbull describes the European community as ‘a friendly, hospitable community, where differences of wealth, colour, race or age counted for little’, which ‘mixed freely with their Asian counterparts’. This open exchange of people gradually changed in the latter half of the century, and by the turn of the century the level of segregation, in terms of income levels, social class, ethnicity, and gender, was prevalent. City structures throughout colonial Southeast Asia divided cities into ethnic conclaves, where each ethnic group had its own allotted geographical area and Europeans reserved the best areas for themselves. Singapore, as well as other cities in Southeast Asia, was strictly divided with regard to housing, with separate European, Chinese, Malay, and Indian areas. As the European population grew, they increasingly tried to

---

6 C. Mary Turnbull, A History of Singapore, 1819-1988 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 39, 64. In the 1840s, Singapore had forty-three merchant houses, mostly British, but also Chinese, Indian, Arab, Armenian, and German.

7 The cosmopolitan multi-ethnic nature of Singapore can also be illustrated with its Chamber of Commerce, whose early committee members were European, Chinese, Eurasian, and Arab. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the Chinese were excluded, and thereafter formed their own Chamber of Commerce. Separate Chinese Chambers of Commerce were also formed in Penang in 1903 and in Kuala Lumpur in 1904. Carl A. Trocki, Singapore: Wealth, power and the culture of control (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 47; Turnbull (1989), 68; Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources (London: Lloyd’s Greater Britain Publishing Company, 1908), 744, 855.

8 Brenda S.A. Yeoh, Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2003). The housing situation was even more segregated in French Indochina and Dutch East Indies. Batavia, for instance, was described in the following way: ‘Weltevreden, the upper town of Batavia, is unquestionably the finest of the Indian towns, and quite worthy of being well known. Whilst Batavia proper – the lower town with its counting-houses and shops, its native and Chinese population, its canals and moats, its dust and dirt, and old-fashioned mansions – makes anything but a charming impression, the upper town, to which all Europeans return in the evening, reminds one of a gigantic park, in which villas are built in rows, and great trees shade the
keep their leisure activities separate from the local population, thereby attempting to recreate a social life similar to the one in Europe, which in itself was segregated, with exclusive social clubs and leisure activities. This section depicts how racially exclusive practices were prevalent and gradually adopted in the region. I focus, on the main, on social clubs, and how these social clubs attempted to absorb cinematic exhibitions.

There was an ambiguity toward contacts between coloniser and colonised. On the one hand, it was believed that the colonised could learn much by emulating and being educated by the Europeans. On the other hand, there was a fear that too much education would make the region harder to rule. Education and other means brought Asians and Europeans closer in the colonies, and many Asians in British colonies learned the English language, how to play cricket, and other British traditions. Yet government officials and other Europeans wanted the colonial binary to remain in order to continue feeling a distinction toward Asians. A political and social ceiling persisted that Asian people could not pass. John G. Butcher describes the process in the following way, concerning British Malaya: ‘As the cultural and educational gap between Europeans and Asians closed, the colour bar, however it was justified, was the only remaining means Europeans had of maintaining their superiority over Asians.’

Having domestic workers or servants also strengthened racial binaries, and maintained racial hierarchies in society. Different ethnic groups were often compared to one another, which underlined the essentialist views on people. Newspaper articles and travel accounts compared Tamil, Malay, and Chinese servants, and their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Different histories of colonisation affected the way the colonies were ruled, and how committed the European population was to the colony. The British in Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States were mostly a transient population, whereas most Dutch (and Eur-

---

10 ‘Malay Home Life’, The Weekly Sun, 15 October 1910, 2. Walter del Mar observed: ‘The Chinese make excellent domestic servants, and most families employ them, though some prefer Malay servants, who are cheaper and more easy to control; but it never does to mix the Mohammedan Malay with the pig-eating Chinaman, and so introduce religious warfare into the household.’ Walter del Mar, Around the World through Japan (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), 69.
Parallels can be drawn to John G. Butcher’s assessment of the social life of the British in the Malay States in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. Butcher illustrates how Europeans implemented different means of creating a system of racial segregation to exclude Asians, for instance, from public transport, civil service, and social clubs. Butcher calls the social clubs ‘the most important institutions for Europeans’, and by analysing the development of these clubs in the 1880s and 1890s one gets an understanding of the social history of Europeans. The British gathered, together with other Europeans, in insulated, exclusive white-only clubs, which were the centre of social life in the colonies. Many Westerners, from politicians to writers, have written about the role of these social spaces exclusively for white people. George Orwell described the European social clubs in India as ‘the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain’. These social clubs validated one’s cultural identity, and Swettenham described them as being ‘a very useful and civilizing element’ for the European community. It was essential for people’s careers and validation to be part of these clubs. They were a meeting place for the elite, mostly Europeans, where civilians and military men could forge strong personal connections. These social networks were central in creating a common sense of identity and belonging to a transnational British community.

While in Singapore, the travel writer Walter del Mar describes this as ‘the greatest charm of the East’ for the European, that even ‘the club inebriate [has] a social standing higher in its way than the best member of

---

11 Arthur Keyser, From Jungle to Java: The Trivial Impressions of a Short Excursion to Netherlands India (London: Roxburghe Press, 1897), 71-72, 110. He also quoted a high Dutch official in Java, who allegedly stated that the way the Chinese in Singapore treated the Europeans was ‘nothing less than a disgrace to civilization’. Worsfold observed the differences between Java and Singapore: There the Dutch lived by themselves; the wide streets, education, Christianity, were for them exclusively. Here it was otherwise. Even the native streets were well drained and lighted; for the Englishman shares his civilization with the native races.’ W. Basil Worsfold, A Visit to Java: With an Account of the Founding of Singapore (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1893), 264.

12 Butcher, 59, chapter 5.

13 George Orwell, Burmese Days (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934), 21. Other writers, such as Leonard Woolf and Rudyard Kipling, made similar descriptions.


the subject native races". This was also valid for neighbouring countries. In her travel writings, Eliza Ruhama Scidmore described life in Batavia and the importance of creating similar institutions as in Europe to be able to live there: ‘By providing military bands and subsidizing an opera, by establishing libraries and fostering the museum of the Batavian Society, and by encouraging a liberal social life among the higher officials, everything was done to secure all the advantages of civilization and to make life tolerable in the far-away tropics.”

Larger cities with a more substantial European population had more clubs. In Singapore, Europeans created several social clubs in the mid- and late 1800s and early 1900s, such as the Singapore Club, the German Teutonia Club, the Tanglin Club, the Lusitanian Club, the Catholic Club, the Cricket Club, the Swimming Club, the Yacht Club, the Marine Club, and the Polo Club. The clubs often contained restaurants and facilities for sports, leisure, and concerts, as well as billiard tables, reading room, card room, and a bar. All other major cities and towns in the region also had exclusive social clubs with hundreds of members. In Penang, social life was centred on the Pinang Club which arranged monthly dances for its, mostly, European members. In Kuala Lumpur, the Selangor Club was founded in 1884; six years later the more prestigious Lake Club was formed, and in 1896 the Recreation Club was created as ‘a resort for Government servants and others who had no club of their own’. Butcher went so far as to say that “to be expelled from the Selangor Club was in effect to be cast out of European social life”. In a smaller town such as Taiping, the Perak Club was formed in 1881, and almost every European in neighbouring areas was a member of the club. As the Perak region grew, more clubs were formed in the State. In 1892, the New Club of Taiping and the Ipoh Club were founded.

16 Del Mar, 71. He continues by stating that this is also why it is difficult to leave the colonies: “When Sir Somebody Something returns to his native land after having honourably served his country in the colonies until he has reached the highest post in the community, he finds himself an inconsiderable item lost in the crowd at home. His old friends are scattered, and the march of events has left him behind the times in many ways. “Othello’s occupation’s gone,” and Sir Somebody longs to return where his abilities are acknowledged and his position undisputed, where he knows everybody and everybody knows him, and where he has, at least some intimate friends. And this same feeling prevails throughout the whole social scale, and constitutes the greatest charm of the East.”
17 Scidmore, 102.
18 Wright and Cartwright, 603, 624-625.
19 Wright and Cartwright, 744, 746. In addition, there was a Cricket Club for Europeans and a Recreation Club with mostly Eurasian members (Wright and Cartwright, 732).
20 Wright and Cartwright, 855-6; Butcher, 59-64. The Selangor Club had 650 members and the Lake Club 400 members.
21 Butcher, 60.
22 Wright and Cartwright, 584, 875. In 1908, the New Club of Taiping was reported to have 270 members, and the Ipoh Club 500 members.
In neighbouring countries, there were also several social clubs around which the social life of Europeans revolved. In Bangkok, the German Club, the Golf Club, the Sports Club, and the United Club (which was supposedly open to all nationalities) were the most central clubs. In Batavia, there were two main European clubs, Harmonie and Concordia, which held regular concerts and other social events. The Harmonie Society also existed in other cities, such as Surakarta (Solo) and Makassar, and they hosted some of the early film exhibitions in 1897. The same year, a Kinematograph exhibition took place for members at the Simpangsche Society in Surabaya, and Talbot arranged cinematic exhibitions at Club Bindjei and the aptly named Witte Societeit (the White Society) in Medan. A decade later, cinematic exhibitions still occurred at social clubs, but not very frequently. For instance, there was a cinematograph exhibition at the Teutonia Club in Singapore, and the Parisian Biograph in Bangkok in 1906 also offered private performances at social clubs. In Surabaya, the social life of Europeans centred around two clubs, the Concordia and the Simpang Club, with each club having its house band and amateur theatre group, and where most European itinerant companies were hosted. Social clubs were mostly the domain of men, and the question of women membership was quite ambiguous. Some clubs had special ladies room, and in addition members were encouraged to

---

23 Carter, 111. In Bangkok, an editorial in Bangkok Times described the Europeans in the country as ‘apathetic’ with the exception of electing club committees: ‘The Europeans in this country, being cut off from all public life, gradually becomes apathetic […] All the same the European here can be roused when there is sufficient stimulus, and can throw himself into the work of a contested election of a Club committee… […] the Sports Club has been made so valuable a factor in the life of the community that it is well worth every effort on the part of members to maintain and increase its usefulness.’ Editorial, Bangkok Times, 31 October 1907, 2.

24 Scidmore, 33-34; Worsfold, 211-214. A contemporary observer describes the clubs in Batavia in the following way: ‘In order to fill up the leisure hours of the evening pleasantly, by reading newspapers and periodicals in the four chief European languages, and by playing at cards or billiards, you must try to get an introduction into some club, not only at Batavia, but also elsewhere. Batavia possesses two great clubs, the “Harmonie”, situated close to the hotels, and the military club “Concordia”, on the Waterloo-plein. In the one first mentioned, very good music can be heard on Sundays from six to eight p.m.; and in the second, on Wednesdays at the same hour, and on Saturdays from nine till twelve p.m. If you cannot, by the help of a Consul or some kind friend, get an introduction to these clubs, then you must stay at your hotel, for the coffee-houses, near the theatre, are not to be recommended.’ (van Bemmelen and Hooyer, 30).

25 Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 29 March 1897, 3; Advertisement, Makassarsche Courant, 28 June 1897, 7; Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 6 August 1897, 3.

26 Advertisement, Thieme’s Nieu Advententieblad, 27 April 1897, 2; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 17 November 1897, 7; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 24 November 1897, 7.

27 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 29 January 1904, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 27 August 1906, 3.

28 Cohen, 33.
bring women visitors to special events. The exhibition of the cinematograph at Club Bindjei in Medan, for instance, was ‘for members and their ladies’. Wright and Cartwright’s three separate descriptions regarding the membership of women in social clubs in the Federated Malay States demonstrate the ambiguity: ‘In many cases ladies are admitted to the privileges of membership’; ‘as is usual with most Federated Malay States clubs, ladies are admitted to its privileges gratis’; and ‘As is customary in the Federated Malay States, ladies are privileged to use the reading-room.’

The idea of having exclusive social clubs for networking and leisure was reproduced by other ethnic groups. Malays and Jawi-Peranakans formed sports, social, cultural, and educational clubs in Singapore, such as the Straits Chinese Recreation Club, the Weekly Entertainment Club, the Straits Chinese British Association, the Chinese Swimming Club, Dar ul-Adab, and Dar ul-Taadzim. The Chinese formed the Straits Chinese British Association in August 1900 with the primary objective: ‘To promote among the members an intelligent interest in the affairs of the British Empire, and to encourage and maintain their loyalty as subjects of the Queen.’ Penang had the Cantonese Club, and in Kuala Lumpur, the Chinese formed a Sports Club in 1892 and the Weld Hill Residential Club in 1906. These clubs also had evening entertainments, and later film exhibitions, for their members which were not advertised. In the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States there were also explicitly mixed clubs, such as the Anglo-Chinese Club in Penang.

Local papers owned by Europeans were very concerned about the prestige of white people, to keep the distance between the ‘races’. An 1897 editorial in Malay Mail complained about the effects of having poor white people in the colonies: ‘Kuala Lumpur is seldom without one or two white man out of work, out of health, and absolutely without a cent of ready money. […] What does he do? Lives on the generosity of small Chinese shopkeepers. That such things should not only be possible, but actually of common occurrence [sic] does not strengthen our prestige with the natives.’

---

29 When the Marine Club held a graphophone entertainment, members were encouraged ‘to bring their lady friends’. Notice, Singapore Free Press, 5 August 1899, 2.
30 Advertisement, Deli Courant, 17 November 1897, 7. The exhibition was free of charge for members, whereas non-members had to pay two guilders.
31 Wright and Cartwright, 198, 584, 875.
33 Two months later, they opened a branch in Malacca (Song, 319-320).
34 Wright and Cartwright, 856-857; J.M. Gullick, Kuala Lumpur 1880-1895: A City in the Making (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1988 [1955]), 111. Many Chinese women were members in the Weld Hill Residential Club, which Wright and Cartwright described as a ‘unique feature of the institution’.
35 ‘Distressed Europeans’, editorial, Malay Mail, 15 March 1897, 2.
white Europeans employ themselves with any kind of work. The Singaporean press complained about an Italian street organ grinder: ‘It is to be regretted that a European has to resort to such a method of living in a Colony where the prestige of the white race should be upheld, but at the same time the course the man has adopted is far better than beachcombing.’36 It was, furthermore, essential to avoid situations where Europeans appeared to be weak. In the Dutch East Indies, for instance, European men who were publicly drunk were warned, and military officers who had committed a serious wrongdoing were court-martialed in the Netherlands.37

An evening schedule for a Western visitor to Southeast Asia looked like this: ‘pay visits to your friends between seven and eight, afterwards dine, and finish your evening, towards nine o’clock, at some public place of amusement or club, or at the friends who invited you to spend the evening with them’38 Entertainment venues were central to social life in Southeast Asia, and there was a belief in keeping social evenings and the amusements ethnically separated.39 In essence, only one way of excluding non-white people from the evening entertainment scene existed, which was to hold the entertainment in restricted, white-only social clubs.40 Another way to get more exclusive social gatherings was having expensive ticket prices as a deterrent. In Bangkok, the popular, royalty-supported, annual Dusit Park Fair did not charge any entrance fee for several years, which beyond the Siamese King, the local elite, and the foreign community resulted in many ordinary Siamese visitors.41 Bangkok Times complained that it was a waste of money, and suggested charging an admission, with the result that ‘the rag, tag and boxtail would be left outside and none but the sweet-scented would enter the

37 For a further discussion on poor, white people in the colonies, see Ann Laura Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 34-40; Scidmore, 120.
38 Van Bemmelen and Hooyer, 13.
39 Despite the relatively vast entertainment scene and the privileged position of Europeans, local editorials still complained about the lack of activities for Europeans in the colonies: ‘There are a few thousand white people in Singapore. What institutions exist to provide them with pleasure. What is there to do in any British Colony in the East at night beyond the occasional visit to the performance of a travelling theatrical company, usually badly patronized?’ (‘Sad Singapore’, editorial, Eastern Daily Mail, 10 February 1906, 2).
40 When Bandmann Comedy Company performed in Singapore in 1907, in the presence of Governor John Anderson, the show was for members of the Tanglin and Teutonia Club and their guests (Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 February 1907, 3).
41 ‘The elite of Siamese society have made the place their home for the past few days, and it is needless to say that the foreign community have [sic] been present in full force.’ ‘Dusit Park Fete’, Bangkok Times, 6 December 1900, 3. The Dusit Park Fair consisted of art, entertainment, and commerce, and several side-shows, such as Ramiyana plays, leekay theatres, cinematographs, etc. ‘Dusit Park’, Bangkok Times, 4 December 1903, 2; ‘Dusit Park Fair’, Bangkok Times, 17 December 1904, 3; ‘The Dusit Park Fair’, Bangkok Times, 21 December 1904, 3.
gates, so that the 5000 visitors might dwindle marvellously'. Social segregation was explicitly encouraged and applauded by many Europeans, and European-owned local papers such as *Bangkok Times*: ‘The [Danish] East Asiatic Co., Ltd, are to give a dance on board the a/s Siam on Monday evening, and they are following high precedent and good sense in putting the word “white” on the corners of the cards of invitation.’ Talbot was in Bangkok when the dance took place, and had to cancel his cinematographic exhibition that evening as too few people showed up, which illustrates the dominance of Europeans among early cinema audiences. It was, however, just a matter of years before these strict social divisions were relaxed, and the diversity of Singapore, as described by Wright and Cartwright below, could be reflected in more common social spaces, including cinematic venues:

Probably at no other place in the world are so many different nationalities represented as at Singapore, where one hears a babel of tongues, although Malay is the *lingua franca*, and rubs shoulders with “all sorts and conditions of men” – with opulent Chinese Towkays in grey felt hat, nakeen jacket, and capacious trousers; Straits-born Babas as proud as Lucifer; easy-going Malays in picturesque sarong and baju; stately Sikhs from the garrison; lanky Bengalis; ubiquitous Jews in old-time gabardine; exorbitant Chetties with closely-shaven heads and muslin-swathed limbs; Arabs in long copat and fez; Tamil street labourers in turban and loincloth of lurid hue; Kling hawkers scantily clad; Chinese coolies and itinerant vendors of food; Javanese, Achinese, Sinhalese, and a host of others – in fact, the kaleidoscopic procession is one of almost endless variety.

Despite the segregated colonial society, with Europeans having their own amusements in social clubs, there were increasingly occasions where Europeans, ‘natives’, and other Asians gathered in the same social space. This development is examined in the next section.

---

42 ‘At Dusit Park (From a Correspondent)’, *Bangkok Times*, 16 December 1902, 3. A few years later they started charging an entrance fee. In 1907, the gathered entrance fees reached 1,500 Ticals, and the year before it had been 2,700 Ticals, with the funds going to the monastery (‘Dusit Park Fair’, *Bangkok Times*, 26 December 1907, 3).
43 Notice, *Bangkok Times*, 4 June 1898, 2. I doubt that this notice was published in their Siamese edition.
44 Notice, *Bangkok Times*, 7 June 1898, 2.
45 Wright and Cartwright, 603.
3.2 ‘A Motley and Varied Crowd’: Creating a Common Social Space

Many entertainments, circus shows, plays, and cinematic exhibitions, attracted large audiences in Singapore and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. As early as 1892, an editorial in Pinang Gazette wrote that ‘the natives flock to Circuses’. When Warren’s Circus opened their show in Kuala Lumpur in 1900 before an audience of 3,000 people, an editorial in Malay Mail wrote: ‘The native element was well represented, the pit being densely crowded; in fact some hundreds had to be turned away.’ A review of Willson’s Great World Circus in Bangkok in 1896 mentioned a crowd of 3,000 people being present. Warren’s Circus had even more, as 6,400 people were reported to have watched their show in Bangkok in 1905. Still, in 1910, Harmston’s Circus, attracted 3,000 people to their show in Kuala Lumpur, and a press report summarised the audience demographics: ‘The Acting Resident-General and party graced the proceedings with their presence; there were more Europeans present than we have seen at any recent show outside the Town Hall, and of course there were hundreds of Asiatics.’ This section examines the ethnic synthesis within the common cinematic space.

Many amusements were geared towards attracting a wide audience from different backgrounds. When Phra Nai Saraphet’s Lakon performed at the Entertainment Hall in Bangkok in 1896, each night had a special theme. The first performance was Chinese, the second was focused on European manners and customs, and the third was Siamese. The popularity and the attempts to attract a diverse audience were also valid for cinematic exhibitions. Another illustration of the cultural exchange, and the connection to the film industry, that took place in Singapore and Southeast Asia were the Parsi theatre companies from India. Besides the Victoria Parsee Theatre discussed in previous chapters, the New Elphinstone Parsee Theatrical Company from Bombay, owned by Jamshedji Madan, was the most prominent Parsi theatre company in Singapore. They performed Hamlet in Hindi for European, Indian, Chinese, and Malay audiences in Singapore, and were under the patronage of Mr. Goh Sei Kei, acting Consul-General for China. Jamshedji Madan later became involved in the film industry in India, buying equipment and films from Pathé in 1902, and started the Elphinstone Picture Palace. His

---

48 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 17 November 1896, 2.
50 ‘Harmston circus’, Malay Mail, 4 August 1910; ‘Harmston’s Circus. A Bumper House’, Malay Mail, 8 August 1910, 7
51 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 22 February 1896, 2.
Theatrical Company did not, however, exhibit films in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{52} There were also Chinese entertainment companies in Southeast Asia, both troupes that were based there and itinerant ones from China and Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{53} In addition, a city like Manila had performances in several languages, and there were reported to be Italian, French, Cuban, Spanish, English, American, Russian, Chinese, and Filipino artists performing in different theatres and shows.\textsuperscript{54} Audiences were also part of the transnational cultural exchange. Among the European and Eurasian population, as well as wealthy Chinese, it was common to visit neighbouring areas, such as Java, India, China, and Japan for amusement purposes.\textsuperscript{55} Many people who visited Singapore also attended cinematic exhibitions: ‘The attractive building used by the Grand Cinematograph is proving a popular resort for Singaporeans and visitors.’\textsuperscript{56} A certain curiosity to visit different, local entertainment forms seemed to exist. The Dutch guidebook recommended visitors to Singapore to attend the Chinese theatre: ‘In the evening the traveller who takes interest in the peculiarities of eastern native life, can easily satisfy his curiosity by paying a visit to a real Chinese theatre.’\textsuperscript{57} A contemporary English account describes the Malay and the Chinese theatres in Singapore in the following way for tourists:

In North Bridge Road is situated a Malay theatre where plays, ranging from “Ali Baba” to “Romeo and Juliet” with musical interludes, are nightly presented before crowded houses. This is a favourite place for Europeans to visit who want to see and hear something out of the common. The plays are presented in Singapore Malay, and even though the visitor may not understand the dialect, he will have no difficulty in following the action of the pieces. There is also a Chinese theatre near at hand, where a seemingly interminable play goes on all night, and where it is amusing to observe the cool way in which the spectators will sometimes stroll across the stage right among the actors, to find some more convenient point of view or to exchange greetings with a friend.\textsuperscript{58}

Harmston’s Circus attracted diverse audiences from all social strata throughout Southeast Asia, including the rich local elite, a large number of Westerners, and many from the poorer segments of society. On many occasions the

\textsuperscript{53} ‘Wayang’, \textit{Straits Times}, 26 July 1905, 5. Add more.
\textsuperscript{55} Swettenham (1907), 267.
\textsuperscript{56} Notice, \textit{Straits Times}, 10 September 1907, 6.
\textsuperscript{57} Van Bemmelen and Hooyer, 137.
\textsuperscript{58} Wright and Cartwright, 937.
show was under the patronage of, and visited by, the British Governor-General, other notable government officials, sultans, and royalty.59 Wayang Kassim, likewise, performed to crowded houses in British Malaya and in the Dutch East Indies, and their patrons included the Governor-General, government officials, sultans, and royalty, whose presence was seen as an official endorsement and was repeatedly mentioned in advertisements and press reports.60 The British officials were highly regarded. Colonial administrators were not merely civil servants; many viewed them as the embodied power of the British Empire.61 At a Wayang Kassim performance in Taiping, for instance, the programme did not start until the Resident of Perak arrived at 10.30 p.m., an hour after the programme was supposed to start.62 As Stephen Hughes has argued regarding Madras, the patronage of the Governor or other high officials was instrumental in establishing a hierarchical order of the most prestigious entertainments, as well as securing the presence of the elite classes.63 The cultural activities of Governors, Sultans, and Princes thus gave social prestige to different entertainments and events. These gatherings can also be read as a way of showcasing the unity between the European and local elite, and thereby justifying colonial rule, for instance, by the Governor-General, other high government officials, and members of Consulates, as well as the Sultan or Princes being present at the same occasion.64 Cinematic exhibitions also used these endorsements in their advertisements, as illustrated in Figure 3.1.65 These exhibitions can be viewed as a double-performance:

60 See, variously, ‘Wayang Kassim’, *Perak Pioneer*, 6 November 1906, 4; ‘Wayang Kassim’, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 21 January 1907, 3; ‘Wayang Kassim: A Royal Visitor’, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 24 April 1907, 3; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 23 June 1908, 1. Another sign of the success of entertainment companies, as well as ways for people in the audience to stand out, were medals bestowed upon them by prominent people in the audience. S. Kassim of Wayang Kassim, Robert Love of Harmston’s Circus, Abu Bakar of Wayang Yap Chow Thong, and Indra Bangsawan were some of the managers and troops that received medals. *Straits Echo*, 3 September 1904; ‘Wayang Kassim’, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 16 January 1907, 3; Advertisement, *Perniagaan*, 13 November 1907, 3.
64 ‘The Biographe and Concert Parisien’, *Bangkok Times*, 30 August 1906, 2; ‘Farewell to the Corricks’, *Straits Times*, 15 May 1908, 7; ‘Chao Phya Devesr’s Theatre’, *Bangkok Times*, 15 September 1908, 5.
65 ‘The Only Show of its Kind patronised by H.E. the Governor. The Only Show Selected to Exhibit in Johore under the distinguished patronage of H.H. the Sultan, and in Honour of His
one taking place on stage, or on the screen, and one amongst the audience. As an illustration, consider the setting surrounding the presence of Governor John Anderson (Governor of Straits Settlements, 1904-1911) at a film exhibition at the Alhambra Cinematograph, with a capacity of 3,500 people, in 1908, where the exhibited films included *Sports at Chamonix, Views of Paris, Views of London, Views of Zambesi, The Dieppe Circuit 1908 Motor Car Races*, and *Contagious Nervous Twitching* (Pathé, 1908, starring Max Linder):

Seldom if ever has Singapore seen such a packed house at any place of entertainment as at the Alhambra Cinematograph last night, when the Alhambra was under the distinguished patronage of His Excellency the Governor, Sir John Anderson, KCMG, and party. The decorations were all that could be desired. Streamers of flags were thrown across the road, and the Governor passed from the road to his box on a red carpet, and under a row of evergreen arches. The decorations inside were even more elaborate, scores of flags being suspended in all parts of the hall, the background of His Excellency’s box being made up of the Sarawak Government’s flag and the Union Jack. Punctually at 9.15, His Excellency arrived and was met by Mr. L. Faulkener Willis, the manager, and was conducted to his box.66

![Figure 3.1: Advertisement for the New Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore. *Straits Times*, 18 September 1908, 1.](image)

Beyond giving the elites an opportunity to rub elbows with each other, these exhibitions gave the ‘natives’ an opportunity to partake in the same entertainment evening as the elite; for 10-25 cents anyone had the possibility of attending the same event as the ruling elite, albeit seated far apart, and sharing their gaze. There was a significant Chinese audience, particularly in Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States. In Singapore, some of the early phonograph exhibitions consisted of Europeans and ‘a number of influential Chinese together with their families’. An often-repeated term when describing cinema audiences in both Singapore and Penang was ‘our Chinese millionaires’, or a variation thereof, with descriptions such as there was ‘a packed house last night, among the audience being some of our Chinese millionaires’. Cinematic exhibitions were not an entertainment merely for the elite, however. In Taiping, it was reported that especially the Chinese frequented the cinematograph (whereas the Malays visited the Wayang). Other measures used to try to attract specifically Chinese audiences included the London Chronograph exhibiting extra Chinese films during a Chinese festival in Kuala Lumpur, and the Chinese-owned British Cinematograph in Ipoh introducing a ‘novel idea’ in 1907 by having ‘a Chinese description of each film hoisted on the panel prior to its reflection on the screen’. I have been unable to trace documents and traces regarding intertitles, and I gather that most intertitles were usually in English, or other European languages.

The discourse of advertisements was about inclusiveness and having everyone join the cinematic exhibition. In Bangkok, an advertisement for the Grand Cinematograph in Wat Tuk in 1906 promised a programme ‘most pleasing and delightful to Western as well as to Eastern people regardless of age and sex’. Advertisements for the American Bioscope at the King Street Theatrical Hall in Penang the previous year read: ‘The prices of admission have been reduced so as to give everybody, rich or poor, a chance to see this popular show before it leaves for the F.M.S. [Federated Malay States]’, and the King Street Theatrical Hall was repeatedly filled with 2,000 people throughout their stay. Entertainment venues had increasingly become a more mixed and inclusive social space throughout the Malay States. It was, however, not just the cinematic exhibitions that opened up, the previously segregated trains were becoming more mixed. The press report below is a reflection on the vast array of people who took trains in Taiping, but it is

67 ‘The Phonograph’, *Mid-day Herald*, 14 November 1895, 3.
68 ‘The Cinematograph Exhibition’, *Straits Echo*, 26 September 1905, 4. Also see ‘American Bioscope Co’, *Straits Echo*, 8 July 1905, 4;
equally valid for how audience composition looked in cinematic venues in Singapore or elsewhere in British Malaya around the same time:

The cosmopolitan nature of certain important places in the Far East, notably Shanghai and Singapore, is often commented upon, and it might be rather peculiar to term a railway train as being cosmopolitan, but if this can be done, then those of the F.M.S. are certainly unique in this respect. What may be taken as a fairly average instance might have been seen this morning on the arrival of the mail train from Penang, when amongst its heterogeneous crowd of passengers were to be seen a Malay Prince of ancient lineage; the ever ubiquitous and omnipresent Briton; the pushing and energetic Tenton; the grasping and avaricious representative of the lost ten tribes; the clever and capable Armenian; the Bande mataram Babu; the much becommed Singhalee; the dirty Punjabi; the oily Tamil; the unpretending Malay, and several grades of the last but not least all conquering, frugal, law-abiding, and enterprising Chinese – the whole forming a motley and varied crowd which it would be difficult to find in a railway train in any other part of the world.73

Such a ‘motley and varied crowd’ of people from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds also occupied the cinematic spaces in the region. Within a few years, cinematic venues had become the new gathering place of people. When the Royal Biscopic exhibited films in Singapore in 1902, the tent was so crowded, especially the cheaper seats, that the management had to rearrange the seating.74 When the Imperial Bioscope exhibited films in Bangkok in 1903, ‘there was a crowded audience, of Siamese, Indians, Chinese and Europeans’.75 The Krung Thep Cinematograph stressed their popularity by advertising, ‘full houses every night’.76 And during the Bioscope Company’s exhibitions at the Town Hall in Taiping in 1905, ‘the native element fill[ed] the room to overflowing’.77 Town Halls in British Malaya, which had been the domain of Europeans, started becoming a more inclusive social space. Also the poorer segments of the community were reportedly received with ‘the greatest courtesy’ at the cinematic venues.78 In Manila, Cinema Walgraph was described as the place where Manila society met and spent their evenings, and Cinema Filipino as the place where the most distinguished families gathered in the evenings.79 Antonio Egea was reported to have sold over one thousand pre-ordered tickets to Cinematógrafo Parisien within a few hours after advertising the exhibition of new films from Spain.80

74 This would, however, be rectified with a new tent, ‘specially imported from the United States’. Notice, Straits Times, 3 November 1902, 4.
75 ‘The Bioscope in Bangkok’, Bangkok Times, 3 February 1903, 2.
76 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 23 September 1908, 5.
77 Notice, Perak Pioneer, 2 May 1905, 2.
79 ‘Cinematografo “Walgraph”’, El Mercantil, 10 June 1904, 2; ‘Teatralerias. En El Filipino’, El Mercantil, 15 November 1907, 1.
80 ‘Cinematografo Parisien’, El Mercantil, 7 April 1905, 3.
In another instance it was noted that Cinematógrafo Parisien had audiences of 300–400 people to each of their shows, and one film exhibition was so full that the newspaper reviewer left at half-time. The London Chronograph in Singapore was, reportedly, so popular (‘the tent was packed to overflowing’) that the management had to issue special police orders in order to handle the traffic. An advertisement for the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore read: ‘Over 400 people could not get admission on Saturday.’ And when the new Alhambra Cinematograph opened in December 1907, it had a seating capacity of 3,500 people, which further demonstrates the immense popularity of the exhibitions.

There are not many detailed descriptions on how cinematic audiences in Southeast Asia reacted to the exhibitions. In his autobiography, Carl Hertz mentions how Chinese people did not applaud his exhibition, as it was not their custom, rather they grunted just like ‘other natives’. This is a further illustration of how Asians were being portrayed as fundamentally different from civilised Europeans. Press reports, however, indicate that such behavioural differences were not insurmountable, and in many cases, did not exist at all. A review for a performance by Warren’s Circus in Bangkok in 1902 stated: ‘Circus performers who come here find it somewhat disconcerting that an audience of Siamese and Chinese do not applaud. But last night at least one turn on the programme made the whole house ring with laughter and applause.’ In Singapore and Penang, where the population was mostly Chinese, circuses and cinematic exhibitions were well appreciated and applauded: Chatre’s Circus ‘was loudly applauded from start to finish by all’; at the programme of the American Bioscope ‘[a]lmost every item was applauded’; and for the Moving Pictures Exhibition, ‘the hall resounded again and again with cheering and the clapping of hands’. Reports stated that the ‘natives’ were especially interested to see strongman Ben Hur or the Indian Sandow lift local football teams and show other signs of strength, the clown

---

83 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 2 April 1906, 2.
84 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 30 November 1907, 2.
85 A notable exception is a screening in Surabaya where A Trip to the Moon was part of the programme. Soerabaiaasch-Handelsblad, 25 November 1904. For a more comprehensive account, see Dafna Ruppin, ‘“Waa...h!” sounds rise from behind the screen”: Early Cinema Spaces and Multiple Spectatorships in Colonial Indonesia’ (paper presented 20 June 2013 at NECS in Prague).
86 Carl Hertz, A Modern Mystery Merchant: The Trials, Tricks and Travels of Carl Hertz, the Famous American Illusionist (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1924), 186.
Nini at Spampani’s European Circus, as well as the clounery and Russian dance of M. Klimanoff and Miss Lusie.89

The daily occurring cinematic exhibitions in a common social space, and the sharing of the experience of laughing and being entertained contributed to the process of blurring the colonial lines. The next section describes how seating arrangements in theatres, town halls, and tents attempted to uphold structural hierarchies of race and class within the liminal space of cinematic venues.

3.3 ‘For Natives Only’: The Racial Hierarchy of Seating Arrangements

This section assesses how venues for itinerant amusement companies and cinematic exhibitions were arranged in terms of seating, and how, within that space, there were attempts to reproduce the racial and class hierarchies that existed in society. Seating arrangements created a division of different social classes based on pecuniary means, and as a consequence separated Europeans from the vast majority of the Asian population. Many entertainment forms had several different price levels, thereby creating a stratified social space within the entertainment venue. There were different seats in various price ranges: box, loge, first class, second class, third class, gallery, and pit. The variety of ticket forms also depended on what kind of exhibition was being presented and where it took place. The most expensive entertainment forms were also the most segregated. Prices for some exhibitions could vary considerably between the most expensive and cheapest seats, especially for the circus and other entertainments in tents. Seats in the boxes could be ten-fifteen times more expensive than seats in the pit, and royalty, government officials, and wealthy merchants occupied them. A report in Pinang Gazette from 1895 illustrates the preference of the wealthier class for opera compared with the circus: ‘This excellent company [Harmston’s Circus] gave another representation last night to an appreciative audience who filled the cheaper parts of the house. The boxes were not so well patronized, owing, no doubt, to the counter attraction of the opera [Willard Opera] at the Town Hall.’90

---

90 ‘Harmston’s Circus’, Pinang Gazette, 16 October 1895, 2.
The American Biograph had separate screenings for Europeans and ‘natives’ at the Town Hall in Singapore in 1901. This was, however, highly unusual, and is the only occasion where racially exclusive screenings have been found, outside the social clubs, throughout Southeast Asia during the period. One advertisement read: ‘Positively the Last Night for Europeans. [...] Next week, the Biograph will be shown at the Town Hall exclusively for Natives.’

Occasions can still be found when Europeans received special treatment. When the Royal Bioscope exhibited films at Beach Road and later at Fort Canning in Singapore in December 1902 and January 1903, they explicitly advertised that they had ethnically separated the audience: ‘Special seat for Europeans’ and ‘Good accommodation for Europeans’.

At the London Chronograph, in a tent on Beach Road in Singapore, ‘the seats for Europeans [were] on a carpeted dais’.

At the Straits Bioscope at the Chinese Theatrical Hall in Taiping in 1909, the Europeans who had reserved the first-class seats came late to the exhibition, but they were compensated with an extra session after everyone else had left the hall.

For some papers, it was still important to mention to their readership that exhibitions were popular among European audiences as if their presence gave increased prestige to the exhibition. A notice in Perak Pioneer for the Besan Cinematograph read: ‘On Saturday the show drew quite a large house, a number of Europeans being present.’

An advertisement for the Paris Cinematograph in Singapore stated: ‘To avoid disappointment and inconvenience, Europeans and others are advised to book for both Shows at special reduction rates.’

In 1895, when Harmston’s Circus performed in Penang, the cheapest tickets, in the gallery, were ‘for natives only’, with the addendum: ‘Special space reserved for Native Ladies in the Stalls and Gallery.’ Earlier the same year when D’Arc’s Marionettes performed in the Town Hall, ‘Military and Natives’ paid half price for the back seats, and a week later, ‘Children and Amahs’ (nursemaids), as well as ‘Chinese and Malay Ladies’ received the same offer for tickets in all classes. An additional week later, there was a new price system where the unreserved stalls as well as the back seats were for ‘natives only’. The situation was the same in Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia. On Makassar in the Dutch East Indies, Abell’s Circus had

91 Advertisement, Straits Times, 19 July 1901, 2; Also see ‘The Biograph’, Singapore Free Press, 20 July 1901, 2.
92 Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 December 1902, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 10 January 1903, 4; Notice, Straits Times, 13 January 1903, 4.
94 Notice, Perak Pioneer, 7 October 1909, 4.
95 Notice, Perak Pioneer, 11 May 1908, 4.
96 Advertisement, Straits Times, 28 January 1905, 1.
97 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 17 October 1895, 2.
98 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 22 February 1895, 2; Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 1 March 1895, 2.
99 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 7 March 1895, 2.
separate sections for Chinese and natives. When Willison's Circus performed in Hanoi, the gallery was divided into two parts, where the cheaper left side was reserved for Annamites. And when Spampani’s European Circus performed there, the cheaper seats consisted of a ‘native gallery’ and a ‘common gallery’ where the latter was the cheapest. Cinematic exhibition followed the precedent set by other entertainment forms. The cheapest tickets for the film exhibitions of the American Biograph at the foot of Fort Canning in Singapore in 1902 were ‘for natives only’, as was the case for the Royal Bioscope at Beach Road later the same year, and for the Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères on Beach Road five years later. The practice of separate seats (the cheapest) for ‘natives’ continued for many years. This mirrors the seating and pricing in trains in the Federated Malay States as well as the Dutch East Indies. The trains in the Federated Malay States were divided on grounds of ‘race’; the first-class wagons were for white people only. Moreover, third-class tramline tickets in Batavia were only for natives and Chinese. In Surabaya in 1903, Permainan Kinematograph explicitly wrote that Europeans were not allowed in the gallery. The Straits-Chinese-owned Straits Echo tried to explain the ‘segregated’ cinematic venues as a response to a letter from ‘A Native’, and discusses that ‘gallery for natives only’ does not mean that they are only allowed in the back seats; rather:

…the opulent European, who is, naturally, rolling in dollars, will not be allowed to patronise those fifty-cent seats. If he wants to get in he will have to pay his one, two, or three dollars, and we can assure “A Native” that, so long as he pays up his one, two, or three dollars, he can occupy any seat in the house provided he observes the rule of etiquette. If any colour line has been drawn in this instance it is against the European, who is thus debarred from witnessing a good show at a modest fifty cents.

Madam A. Simons Panopticum and their wax exhibition in Bangkok in 1903 can further exemplify this reasoning, as they charged different prices for Europeans (2 Ticals) and Siamese (1 Tical). Another, more plausible, explanation is that it would be demeaning for the public image of Europeans to be seated in the cheapest seats with ‘ordinary natives’, and, as a conse-

---

101 Advertisement, *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, 20 January 1897, 3. The advertisement does not specify who the left gallery is for.
102 Notice, *L’Avenir du Tonkin*, 5 January 1906, 3. The advertisement does not specify who the ‘common gallery’ is for.
104 Butcher, 97-107; van Bemmelen and Hooyer, 24.
106 Notice, *Straits Echo*, 1 November 1905, 4.
107 Advertisement, *Bangkok Times*, 3 March 1903, 3. The advertisement does not state how much people who did not fall into any of the two categories paid.

---

175
quence, it would reflect poorly on white, colonial prestige. As a result, Europeans occupied most first-class seats during many cinematic exhibitions, the plays of Wayang Kassim, and many other entertainments.\(^{108}\) Stephen Bottomore claims that some film venues in British Malaya were divided by the screen, with one side of the screen being filled with Europeans and the other by ‘natives’.\(^{109}\) It is also worth mentioning that an early Lumière exhibition in Paris on 11 July 1895 partitioned the audience space by having the screen in the middle, and this was done in order to give the majority of the audience a good view of the screen and to reassure the audience that there was no trickery involved.\(^{110}\) In my archival research I have not come across any such cases. Dafna Ruppin who has examined early film audiences in the Dutch East Indies has, however, found many instances of cinematic exhibitions where there was a racial divide of the audience.\(^{111}\) Regarding cinematic exhibitions in large tents, it is logistically understandable that the screen is placed in the middle of the tent; what is particularly fascinating, and rather saddening, is that even newly-built permanent film venues, such as the East Java Bioscope in Surabaya, which opened in 1913, were designed with a racial partition in mind.\(^{112}\) The racial divisions in the Dutch East Indies, however, were more central to Dutch colonial rule, which was also reflected in the seating arrangements, which not only separated Europeans from Asians, but also made other divisions: when the N.V. de Java Cineograph exhibited films in Makassar the third-class seats were for ‘foreign Orientals’ and the fourth class for ‘natives’, and when the Kilpatrick Show performed in Batavia in 1906, the third class was reserved for ‘Chinese’ and the fourth class for ‘natives’.\(^{113}\) The audience space, and the respective comfort levels of each class, can thereby be seen as a reflection of their status in society. This can be illustrated by a cinematograph exhibition in Hanoi in 1897, where the first-class seats were in armchairs, whereas the cheaper seats for soldiers and natives were directly on the floor.\(^{114}\) In most Town Halls, the expensive seats were


\(^{111}\) Ruppin (2013).

\(^{112}\) *Weekblad voor Indië*, 30 November 1913, as discussed in Ruppin (2013).


\(^{114}\) Advertisement, *L’Avenir du Tonkin*, 4 September 1897.
the ones at the front, and the seats at the back were the cheapest. When an
exhibition was held in a tent, the arrangements differed depending on the
layout of the specific tent. At a cinematographic exhibition in Kuala Lumpur
it was reported that the natives were sitting at the front of the tent, and the
Europeans and Chinese ladies at the back.\(^{115}\) There was a flexibility of the
seating arrangements in large tents, especially the ones that could accommoda-
tate two to three thousand people. The seating arrangements were quite hap-
hazard in the tents, and many spectators wrote to the press and complained.
Harmston’s Circus’ show in Singapore in 1904 proved very popular, and
\textit{Straits Times} suggested that the audience would bring their own camp stools:
‘One way of being sure of securing a place in the boxes and first and second
seats is to book it during the day; the alternative is to take a camp stool and
dump it down where a place can be found.’\(^{116}\) Another advice of the press to
be able to secure a seat, and avoid the seating chaos was, simply, to arrive
there early.\(^{117}\) In the Dutch East Indies, it was common to pay 25 cents extra
for a reserved seat.

The arrangement of seats varied as well, but I have not found any tent de-
signs with details of seating arrangements, and the proportion of the respec-
tive sections. In order to get room for more people, and to make preparations
easier, the pit did not have any chairs, and people in that section would sit on
the ground. Warren’s Circus’ tent in Kuala Lumpur accommodated 3,000
people, almost half in the pit.\(^{118}\) Circuses were reportedly particularly popular
among the ‘natives’. In reviews it was repeatedly mentioned that especially
the cheaper sections of the tent were full.\(^{119}\) For tent exhibitions it was also
possible to get standing-room tickets when all seats were taken, as in the
case of Ott’s Circus performance on Beach Road in Singapore: ‘The tent was
absolutely packed for the evening performance, every available seat being
occupied and large numbers of Europeans and natives having to stand.’\(^{120}\)
The system of standing room, and where in the tent people were allowed to
stand, is unclear, and probably varied from tent to tent. A review of the Al-
hambra Cinematograph at Beach Road in Singapore stated: ‘The Alhambra
Cinematograph was packed to overflowing last night. Not only was every
available seat taken up, but there was not even standing room in the space
between the dollar seats and the screen.’\(^{121}\) Regarding the more expensive

\(^{115}\) ‘The Cinematograph Show. Fire causes serious damage’, \textit{Malay Mail}, 22 November 1906,
2.
\(^{117}\) Notice, \textit{Straits Times}, 16 October 1902, 4; ‘Ott’s Circus’, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 21 March 1906,
3.
\(^{118}\) ‘Warren’s Circus. A Good Show.’, editorial, \textit{Malay Mail}, 9 October 1900, 2.
\(^{119}\) See, variously, ‘Harmston’s Circus’, \textit{Pinang Gazette}, 16 October 1895, 2; ‘The Circus’,
\textit{Bangkok Times}, 3 December 1896, 2; ‘Spampani’s Circus’, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 23 February 1907,
\(^{120}\) ‘Ott’s Circus’, \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, 5 March 1906, 3.
seats in the tent, they were equipped with tables. A report from Bangkok writes about a Siamese man who had his cigar-case stolen while ‘sitting at a table’ watching Warren’s Circus. The quality of the seats in the tent, however, left much to be desired, and Perak Pioneer gave suggestions how the Grand Cinematograph could improve their seating arrangements: ‘The constant breaking down of long forms made of thin cheap planks for the use of the “gods” was a disturbing element throughout the evening. We would suggest bentwood chairs being provided as Reserved and First Class seats instead of chairs with canvas seats and backs placed an uncomfortable angle.’

This section has demonstrated that there were several cases of how racial hierarchies were preserved through seating arrangements. The practice of having separate seats for ‘natives’ decreased over time, which illustrates how simply by being an audience in the same social space gradually questioned and dismantled the colonial dichotomy. Closely related to the issue of seating is pricing, which is discussed in the next section.

3.4 ‘Prices As Usual’ No More: Admission Prices and Costs of Living

By looking at the price of the cheapest tickets, we can see who the show was trying to attract. The section starts with a review of admission prices to different amusement forms in Singapore, with occasional comparisons to neighbouring countries, as a frame of reference for admission prices to cinematic exhibitions. These prices are also contextualised by relating them to costs of living, wage levels, and the prices of different necessities.

The standard price structure for Singaporean entertainments consisted of a three-tier price system. Willard’s Opera frequently toured Southeast Asia, and always charged $3, $2, and $1 for their show at the Town Hall. These prices were so common and standard that several advertisements just wrote, ‘Prices as usual’. Pollard’s Lilliputian Opera charged $2 and $1 for their performance at the Town Hall, but it was possible to add one dollar for a

122 ‘The Circus’, Bangkok Times, 18 November 1905, 3. It seems it was common with pick-pocketers at these events, as the article also reports about a European who had his money stolen and a Siamese woman who had her bracelet stolen. The article assured people that ‘Warren’s have engaged sufficient Police for night and day duty to prevent all this sort of thing.’


124 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 7 September 1894, 2; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 31 May 1895, 2; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 2 March 1896, 2; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 18 July 1896, 2.
The Italian Opera gave a concert at the Stamford Hotel, and charged $2 per ticket. These prices had been quite stable over time. In the 1880s, the standard ticket price for watching an itinerant entertainment company in the Town Hall was $2 and $1. The Gaiety Company, however, tried to charge $3 during a performance in 1884, which led to an angry letter to the editor of *Straits Times*: ‘I enjoy an evening at the theatre immensely, but at $3 a night my love grows cold, and I wait for the coming of all Professors, Actors, and Artistes who charge… TWO DOLLARS.’ In the early 1900s, Pollard’s Lilliputian Opera, the Ada Delroy Company (which also included a Bioscope as part of its show), and Barnes’ Entertainers (with their Barnesgraph) performed in the Town Hall, and they all charged $3, 2, and 1 for their respective tickets.

Circuses and magic shows had cheaper tickets, the circus being the most affordable entertainment among itinerant entertainment forms. Admission tickets for Harmston’s Circus around the turn of the century consisted of four different price levels, $2, 1.50, 0.50, and 0.30, with the cheapest tickets being reserved for the ‘native’ population. Warren’s Circus had a five-tier price system, charging $2, 1.50, 1, 0.50, and 0.30, with the latter one being for ‘natives only’. Professor Deval’s Great Indian Circus charged $3, 2, 1, and 0.50 for its show on Beach Road. Zio Payne’s magic show at the Town Hall charged $2, 1, and 0.50. The tickets for Willison’s Circus in Bangkok cost Ticals 4, 3, and 1 ($2.40, 1.80, and 0.60). Willison’s Circus in Hanoi had a five-tier price structure: $2.50, 2, 1.50, 1, and 0.50 (for natives), as did Spampani’s European Circus, $3, 2, 1, 0.50 (for natives), and

125 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 8 April 1897, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 23 August 1897, 2.
127 ‘Theatre Prices’, Letter to the Editor of the *Straits Times*, *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 6 December 1884, 16. The increased price was also commented on in reviews: ‘the unusual charge of $3 for the front seats apparently acts as a check upon the theatre going proclivities of a very large section of the community.’ (*The Gaiety Company*, *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 13 December 1884, 2). The prices were later lowered to the usual rate (Advertisement, *Singapore Free Press*, 13 December 1884, 3).
128 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 2 April 1900, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 15 August 1900, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 28 May 1902, 4. The system and price level was similar in neighbouring countries. A concert and theatre at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok in 1896 had a two-tier price system where tickets were 5 and 3 ticals respectively ($3 and $1.80), and a New Year’s classical concert at the Oriental Hotel in the same year priced all tickets at 5 ticals ($3). Advertisement, *Bangkok Times*, 7 December 1896, 2; Advertisement, *Bangkok Times*, 30 December 1896, 2.
129 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 12 May 1897, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 18 May 1900, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 20 October 1900, 2.
130 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 20 December 1898, 2. In addition, soldiers in uniform received half price.
131 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 30 July 1901, 2.
Harmston’s Circus frequently toured throughout Southeast Asia. Looking at their admission prices in Batavia during the period shows that the prices were quite static throughout the years. The general five-tier price level varied between $4, 3, 2, 1, 0.50 (for natives) and $3, 2.50, 1.50, 0.50, 0.25 (for natives), depending on whether it was at the beginning or end of their stay. Admission prices were often lowered after a company had been at a place for a longer period of time; one thereby paid a novelty premium to watch performances early on. Paul’s Great Indian Circus in Surakarta charged $1.50, 1, 0.50, and 0.25 (for natives). Circuses charged the same as local entertainment troupes, such as Wayang Kassim and Komedie Stamboel. The latter group charged $2, 1, 0.60 and 0.30 when they performed in Singapore for the first time in 1894. The prices for Wayang Kassim are harder to decipher, as their advertisement until 1906 merely claimed ‘popular prices’ and ‘prices as usual’. In Medan, on Sumatra, the company charged $2, 1, 0.50, and 0.30. Advertisements from 1907 onward had a price structure of $2, 1, 0.50, and 0.25 for performances at Alexandra Hall and the New Theatre Hall in Singapore.

Audiences were price sensitive though. When the European Circus performed in Ipoh in 1905, the initial prices were $4, 3, 1.50, 1, and 0.50. The audience was smaller than usual, and the Perak Pioneer wrote ‘had they [the prices] been 50 per cent lower, the audience would have trebled’, and consequently the circus lowered their prices. Based on ticket prices, circuses, magic shows, and local entertainment were not as highly regarded, or exclusive, as itinerant opera and theatre companies. Expensive admission tickets to itinerant opera companies from the West signalled that they mostly catered to the European population. And they were very appreciated by their audience, as well as the local press: ‘Those who live in the East, far from the home of the drama of the day, own a debt of gratitude to companies like the Willard Opera Company, which enable us to see that drama from time to time... [...] There was a small but highly appreciative audience present. High admission prices to certain entertainment venues thereby ensured that

---

134 Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 20 January 1897, 3. Prices for Willison’s Circus were quickly lowered: 2, 1.50, 1, 0.50, and 0.25 (for natives) (Advertisement, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 23 January 1897, 3); Notice, L’Avenir du Tonkin, 5 January 1906, 3.
135 Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 1 July 1903, 3; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 5 September 1905, 3; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 19 September 1905, 4; Advertisement, Perniagaan, 9 September 1907, 4; Advertisement, Pemberta Betawi, 30 November 1907, 3.
136 Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 28 June 1897, 3.
137 Advertisement, Straits-Chinese Herald, 3 March 1894, 2.
138 Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 May 1904, 5; Advertisement, Straits Times, 31 January 1905, 5; 5 September 1906, 7.
139 Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 February 1907, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 June 1908, 8; Advertisement, Straits Times, 30 April 1909, 8.
141 “‘The Gaiety Girl’ at the Town Hall”, Pinang Gazette, 27 May 1895, 3.
classes or ethnic groups were separated, and Europeans could keep their social spaces exclusive. Circuses were, however, considerably cheaper, and non-European audiences were needed to fill the large tents.

Cinematic exhibitions followed the tiered price structure of earlier entertainment forms. Prices for cinematic exhibitions were initially as expensive as circuses and local entertainment forms. The exhibition with the Ripograph at Adelphi Hall in Singapore charged $1 and $0.50, and the following year a cinematographic exhibition at the Town Hall charged $2, 1.50, and 1.\textsuperscript{142} The earliest film exhibition in Bangkok charged Tcs 3, 2, 1, and 0.50 ($1.80, 1.20, 0.60, and 0.30).\textsuperscript{143} The next film screening was in October 1897 with Edison’s Vitascope at Oriental Hotel, where there was only a two-tier ticket price, Tcs 3 and 2, as the films were in a programme together with the theatre of Elsie Adair.\textsuperscript{144} In Hanoi, the 1897 cinematograph exhibition at the Philharmonic Society cost $1.50 for an armchair seat, $0.50 for a floor seat for ‘natives’, and $0.25 for a floor seat for soldiers, and one month later the exhibition with ‘Black Magic’ cost $1 and 50 cents.\textsuperscript{145} The prices for Talbot’s film exhibition in Surakarta were f1.50 ($1), and f0.75 for children, in Batavia f1, whereas his exhibition at the Surabaya Theatre cost f1 and after a week the price was halved.\textsuperscript{146} In Makassar, the 1897 exhibition (‘Kinematograph en Graphophon’) were priced f2 ($1.35), and f1 for children below ten.\textsuperscript{147} In Manila, the tickets for the earliest exhibitions were priced at 50 cents, and then lowered to 40 cents and 20 cents.\textsuperscript{148} Talbot charged $1, 0.50, and 0.25 when he came to Adelphi Hall in Singapore, and considerably more at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok, Tcs 5, 3, and 2 ($3, 1.80, 1.20).\textsuperscript{149} One month earlier, in May 1898, the Kinematograph exhibited films at the Oriental Hotel, together with a variety show, and charged 4 Ticals ($2.40).\textsuperscript{150} And when the Victoria Parsee Theatre performed and exhibited films in Singapore, they charged $1.50, 1, 0.50, and 0.25.\textsuperscript{151}

As cinematic exhibitions became more popular, exhibitors arranged screenings in large tents which allowed lower prices. The American Bio-
graph had a five-tier price system in their tent on Beach Road in late 1899, charging $1.50, 1, 0.75, 0.50, and 0.20 (only for natives). The Animatoscope was exhibited at the Adelphi Hotel Hall in Singapore in 1899, and first charged $1 and 0.50, lowering the prices a few days later to $0.50 and 0.25. Within two years it was thus cheaper to go to a cinematic exhibition in Singapore than to go to the circus. Cinema tickets could, however, be more expensive and on par with the price of attending Western opera and theatre groups. When the American Biograph returned to Singapore in 1901 for exhibitions at the Town Hall, the prices were raised to $3, 2, and 1. The Bioscope exhibited films at the same time in their tent on Beach Road, and charged $2, 1, and 0.50, where children under 10 received half-price tickets. The American Biograph exhibition, under the patronage of Governor Frank Swettenham, was advertised as ‘The Biggest Evening’s Entertainment ever given in the Straits’, and claimed that it was first exhibition in Singapore of ‘The Original American Biograph’. The location of the exhibition, as well as the presence of the Governor-General, was thus central in terms of pricing. Charging such a high price was only possible by creating and advertising a very special event. When the American Biograph returned to Singapore in 1902, and had exhibitions in their tent at the foot of Fort Canning, the price structure was $3, 2, 1.50, 1, and 0.50 (for natives). Specific cinematographic exhibitions became less popular as the programmes lost their novelty after a few weeks, and as a consequence, film exhibitors either lowered their prices or met half-full halls during the latter part of their stay.

Until 1907 when Pathé opened their regional agency, most cinematic exhibitions in Singapore, including the Royal Bioscope, the Japanese Cinematograph, the Paris Cinematograph, the French Cinematograph, Grand Cinematograph Pathé Freres, and Alhambra Grand Cinema, kept the same basic price structure: $1.50, 1, 0.50, and 0.25, with some variations (at times there

---

152 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 11 November 1899, 3.
154 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 6 July 1901, 2.
157 Advertisement, *Singapore Free Press*, 12 July 1901, 2; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 13 July 1901, 2; ‘To-night’s “Biograph” Performance’, *Singapore Free Press*, 13 July 1901, 3; ‘The Biograph’, *Straits Times*, 13 July 1901, 2; ‘The Biograph’, *Singapore Free Press*, 17 July 1901, 3. The films exhibited at two venues were covering the same events: The Funeral Procession of Queen Victoria, Kind Edward VII opening Parliament. The Coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, the Boxer Uprising, and the Boer War.
158 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 22 April 1902, 4.

182
were also tickets for $2 and 30 cents, and reduced tickets for 15 cents. The price structure was similar in Penang, and throughout the Federated Malay States. The Paris Cinematograph at the Malay Theatre in 1904 is one of the few exceptions, and had the cheapest prices I have found around this time, $1, 0.50, 0.40, 0.20, and 0.10. The American Kinematograph in 1905 also had low prices: $1, 0.60, 0.40, and 0.20. It is, however, likely that there were cinematic exhibitions in Singapore that were even cheaper, but did not advertise in the local press. In 1908 and early 1909 when Pathé was firmly established as a local film dealer and the film industry had become more institutionalised, more permanent film venues opened as a result and the cheapest tickets became even more affordable. The cheapest ticket at Emperor Cinematograph at the foot of Fort Canning was 10 cents, and the Marlborough Cinematograph at Beach Road charged $0.60, 0.25, 0.15, and 0.07. Admission prices in other parts of British Malaya were around the same level, maybe slightly higher. An editorial about cinema in Malay Mail in 1907 claimed: ’As far as our experience goes, the prices here range from $2 to 25 cents. The risks attendant on this business are so great that we cannot conceive of any show ever paying its way at a maximum charge of 50 or 30 cents for admission.’

The prices in Bangkok fell as well; in 1906, the Royal Bioscope charged Tes 2, 1, 0.50, and 0.25 ($1.20, 0.60, 0.30, 0.15). Cinematic tickets were even more affordable in the Dutch East Indies. In 1900, Cineorama Biograph-Phonograph in Surabaya charged f1, 0.50, and 0.25 (for natives) ($0.68, 0.34, 0.17). The next year, the American Biograph, also called Java Biorama, followed the same price structure, but added a more expensive tier at f1.50 ($1). In 1903, when the Permainan Kinematograph exhibited films, the price for the cheapest tickets (for natives) had been lowered to

---

160 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 11 September 1901, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 December 1902, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 10 January 1903, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 17 January 1905, 5; Advertisement, Straits Times, 4 March 1905, 5; Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 March 1905, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 2 October 1906, 5; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 18 December 1906, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 28 August 1907, 9; Advertisement, Straits Times, 30 November 1907, 6.
161 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 8 August 1905, 1; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 25 August 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 2 September 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 23 September 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 8 November 1905, 4; Advertisement, Perak Pioneer, 7 October 1909, 5.
162 Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 November 1904, 3.
163 Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 June 1905, 4.
164 Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 August 1908, 8; Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 January 1909, 8.
165 ‘Day by Day’, editorial, Malay Mail, 4 May 1907, 3.
166 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 27 October 1906, 3.
167 Advertisement, Bintang Soerabaia, 24 December 1900, 2.
168 Advertisement, Bintang Soerabaia, 11 February 1901, 2.
In Medan, the New Bioscope charged $2, 1, and 0.50, later lowered to $1.50, 0.75, and 0.30 (for natives). The following year, the American Biograph charged: $2, 1, 0.50, and 0.25 (for natives), and in 1903, Edison’s Cinematograph charged $1.50, 1, and 0.50. In Makassar, the N.V. de Java Cineograph charged $1/50, 1, 0.50, 0.25 (Foreign Orientals), and 0.15 (Natives) in 1903. As cinematic exhibitions proliferated and cities had several simultaneous exhibitions, prices could vary depending on the target group. The Royal Bioscope charged twice as much as the Eastern Bioscope when they both exhibited films in Batavia in December 1904 (respectively $2, 1.50, 1, 0.50, 0.25; and $1, 0.75, 0.50, 0.10). Ticket prices continued falling, and in 1907 both the Royal Optigraph and the London Cinematograph charged $0.50, 0.25, and 0.10 ($0.34, 0.17, 0.07). In Manila where cinematographic exhibitions proliferated, the price decrease was as rapid. Prices at Cinematógrafo Wargrah and Gran Cinematógrafo Parisien in 1902 were $0.40 (and $0.30) for first class and 0.20 for second class, and the latter cinematograph charged $0.20 and 0.10 during its final days in 1903. The programmes were, however, shorter and lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. These prices ($0.40 and 0.20) stabilised, and Gran Cinematógrafo del Oriente, Gran Cinematógrafo Universal, Cinematógrafo Walgraph, Cinematógrafo Rizal, and Cinematógrafo Apolo all had the same prices, with occasional variations, as did Gran Cinematógrafo Colon in Iloilo. An article signed by ‘Zapatillas’ discusses what makes the cinema different from the theatre, opera, and concerts, where the writer states that he prefers to pay 20 cents to sit ‘democratically’ on a hard bench and watch many short films, than pay two dollars to sleep on a comfortable chair at the ‘serious theatre’.

169 Advertisement, Bintang Soerabaia, 8 April 1903, 3. Again, note that the silver dollar was the common currency on Sumatra.
170 Advertisement, Deli Courant, 24 October 1901, 3; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 30 October 1901, 3.
171 Advertisement, Deli Courant, 21 July 1902, 3; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 14 January 1903, 3.
172 Advertisement, Makassarsche Courant, 29 July 1903, 6.
173 Advertisements, Pembrita Betawi, 28 December 1904, 3.
174 Advertisement, Perniagaan, 6 August 1907, 4; Advertisement, Perniagaan, 16 November 1907, 3.
175 Advertisement, Ang Suga, 14 May 1902, 2; Advertisement, El Progreso, 10 December 1902, 3; Advertisement, El Mercantil, 11 November 1903, 6.
176 See, variously, Advertisement, El Mercantil, 18 June 1903, 5; Advertisement, El Progreso, 20 August 1903, 3; Advertisement, El Progreso, 19 November 1903, 4; Advertisement, El Progreso, 10 December 1903, 4; Advertisement, Libertas, 1 February 1904, 3; ‘Espectaculos’, advertisement, El Mercantil, 15 December 1904, 3; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 18 January 1905, 3. Cinema Visayas had a price of ten centimos (‘Espectaculos’, advertisement, El Mercantil, 29 October 1904, 3). It is also worth mentioning that cinematic venues were in different parts of Manila: Quiapo, Santa Rosa, Tondo, and Sampaloc.
As cinematic exhibitions proliferated, I propose that it was possible for different film venues to target specific groups, and that film houses were correspondingly located and priced in different parts of the city. The tier system and seating arrangements varied depending on where the exhibition was held, and what kind of performance one sought. As the entertainments became cheaper, a more expensive option opened in Singapore. Raffles Hotel changed their Billiard Room (Figure 3.2) into a Music Hall, where they frequently showed moving pictures, initially charging three dollars for every seat. The cheaper exhibitions were still hard to afford for people without a regular income, and the poorer segments of society were excluded from these entertainments. There were, for instance, reports of thousands of homeless people living in shacks near Cinema Parisien in Manila in 1905. The owner Egea as well as several in the audience had complained several times to the police about people, especially children, coming to the lounge of the cinema and decreasing the cinematic experience. Besides these entertainments there were several film exhibitions as well as other local entertainment forms, such as theatres and wayangs, that did not advertise in the local press, but which were cheaper. As a comparison, a Malay wayang in Singapore was reported to cost six cents in 1897. At that time it was much more affordable than a visit to the circus or cinematograph. Around a decade later, cinematographic exhibitions could be viewed for around the same price (seven cents).

Figure 3.2: The Billiard Room of Raffles Hotel, Singapore, c. 1900, The venue was later used for cinematic exhibitions.

178 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 6 June 1908, 8. The price was quickly lowered to $2 (Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 8 June 1908, 8).
180 ‘The Dyak Police in England: Their Adventures and Impressions’, *Straits Times*, 17 August 1897, 3.
In order to put the falling cinema prices into perspective, there was reported to be a general inflation and increased prices throughout Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States. Several articles in local papers throughout Southeast Asia complained about the rapid rise in the cost of living, ranging from price increases in food, housing, and labour. One article claimed that it cost more to live in Siam than in Europe and Japan, and the travel writer Scidmore claimed that ‘living and travel in the Netherlands Indies is the most expensive in the world’. Especially the increased salaries of local ‘servants’ were frequently raised as a problematic issue that really affected the well-to-do population. It was obvious that the perspective when discussing the costs of living was a Western one, with an idea of racial hierarchies and using terms such as white man’s burden: ‘Throughout the East there has been a steady upward trend in the white man’s monthly burden, and it would appear as if the Shiny East were destined to lose a good deal of its glamour for the Occidental, who is rapidly being shorn of many of those luxuries which he has heretofore deemed to be his right.’ Excerpts from the local foreign-language press, such as these, capture and reflect the contemporary colonial discourses prevalent in society, as described in the Introduction, and how they permeated everyday matters.

The preceding discussion has presented how prices for cinematic exhibitions became lower and lower. In order to get a grasp of their affordability the prices need to be contextualised and compared to the cost of living. Figure 3.3 presents the costs of food in Singapore in 1907, as charged in the local bazaars. My starting-point in assessing the affordability of film viewing is that the cheapest tickets to most cinematographic exhibitions in Singapore cost ten cents, although there were most likely cheaper, non-advertised exhibitions as well. With than in mind, it was cheaper to attend a film exhibition than to buy a kilogram of all the listed groceries in Figure 3.3 with the exception of onions, potatoes, and tamarind. Furthermore, the price for a daily (or bi-/tri-weekly) newspaper, such as Pinang Gazette, Perak Pioneer, and The Times of Malaya was 15-20 cents, albeit Eastern Daily Mail charged five cents. Rickshaw fares in Singapore around the same period cost six cents per mile, or twenty cents per hour, but could rise when there were

---

181 Editorial, *Bangkok Times*, 16 June 1900, 2; ‘Why the cost of living increases (from Straits Times)*, *Bangkok Times*, 18 December 1900, 3.
182 ‘The High Cost of Living’, *Bangkok Times*, 3 December 1907, 3; Scidmore, 7. For instance, hotels on Java, deemed appropriate for Europeans, cost around $6 per night (Scidmore, 60).
185 Wright and Cartwright, 950.
many tourists. We can therefore safely propose that cinematic exhibitions were quite inclusive and inexpensive for the vast majority of the population.

Salaries for manual labourers in British Malaya were around 25-40 cents per day, including accommodation and sometimes food. Headmen could earn twice as much, around $15 a month. Daily earnings for rickshaw drivers in Singapore around 1900, after paying 30 cents for renting the rickshaw, were about 40-50 cents. Many rickshaw drivers also held a second job as a manual labourer or shop assistant. Salaries for other forms of daily manual labour, such as coal heavers and tin field workers, were also less than a dollar per day.

---


day. The salary for a senior at a vernacular school working as a Malay writer in an outstation was $10 a month, and the salary for driving a bullock cart was around the same. The monthly salary for a Malay, Chinese, or Tamil servant or cook was around $10-15, whereas an amah who took care of the children received around $30 a month. Commercial firms paid $20-25 a month to boys who had graduated from the technical and industrial schools. Monthly wages for teachers in vernacular schools in British Malaya were $15-25 for the main teachers, including free lodging, and $8-10 for assistant teachers. The salaries of local teachers were low all over Southeast Asia. An editorial in Bangkok Times claimed that the salaries varied between less than $15 a month up to $60-70. As a comparison, European teachers, who were not connected to a Christian mission, had a starting salary of around $180 a month in British Malaya. Another report claimed that European teachers were divided into three classes, making between: $100-160 a month (including free rent), $60-80, and $30-50, depending on age, education, and experience. A civil servant in the Dutch East Indies earned $250 ($170) a month, and $62 ($42) for a retired civil servant. And finally, to return to the entertainment world and assess how profitable it was to work as a cinema operator, the salary of M. de Roquefeuil, cinema operator at the Sam Yek Cinematograph in Bangkok, was 200 Ticals ($120) a month in 1908.

In the same way as this section has tried to examine ways that definite racial binaries were problematised by having the cinematic venue as a liminal space with a mixed group, the next section assesses what measures were taken to open the patriarchal entertainment space to women.

---

188 Warren, chapter 3 and 4. Another salary rate, which is not representative for the general salary level, but rather illustrates the slave-like conditions that many labourers experienced, is the terms of the contract for newly-arrived labourers from China to Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States. Their salary, in 1890, was $30 per year, or $2.50 per month, including food and housing. The employer paid for the trip from China, equalling $19.50, which the labourer had to repay. If the labourer was still in debt after a year, the contract automatically continued with a monthly salary of $3. (Chai, 110; Syed Hussein Alatas, The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism (London: Frank Cass, 1977), 87).

189 'What can we do for the Malay?', Perak Pioneer, 28 March 1896, 3-4.
190 Belfield, 22; ‘Malay Home Life’, The Weekly Sun, 15 October 1910, 2.
191 Chai, 258.
192 Chai, 240, 251, 265-266.
194 Chai, 265.
196 Cohen, 64.
197 ‘Sam Yek Cinematograph Case’, Bangkok Times, 10 September 1908, 5.
3.5 ‘For Ladies Only’: Targeting Specific Audiences

The majority of the Singaporean population were men, and they had long dominated the public sphere. Like the rest of the world, Southeast Asia around the turn of the century was a patriarchal society, and if it had not been before, it became so with European colonisation. This was reflected in politics, government, education, and social life. Newspapers in general targeted men, and turned directly to them.\(^{198}\) Structural problems regarding race and gender often intersect, as discussed in postcolonial literature.\(^{199}\) Some of the same figures that were leading statesmen and proponents of a strong British Empire and colonial rule, such as Lord Cromer, Lord Curzon, and Joseph Chamberlain, were also among the founders and leading figures of the Anti-Suffrage League in Britain in 1908.\(^{200}\) This section first shows how different amusements targeted men as their audience. In the early 1900s, evening entertainment, including cinematic exhibitions, proliferated, and exhibitors started targeting specific demographics, particularly women.\(^{201}\) Cinematic exhibitions enabled women to increase their presence as an audience in a public entertainment, after largely being excluded from many amusements.\(^{202}\) Exhibitors in Singapore, for instance, had ladies-only nights, and the practice of having matinees for children developed further.

\(^{198}\) An 1894 editorial in *Straits-Chinese Herald* wanted to encourage newspaper reading among the population, and thus wrote: ‘Newspaper reading, it should be known, does not only help boys to improve in their studies, but it also helps to bring up a scholar to be a good buy and a better man. There are many other advantages to be derived from newspaper reading, specially amongst the younger people whether Asiatics or Europeans.’ Editorial, *Straits-Chinese Herald*, 22 January 1894, 3. This changed in the early 1900s with special pages in newspapers devoted to women.


\(^{201}\) Other groups that received special discounts were soldiers (beneath the rank of officer) and sailors; none of these groups is addressed in this dissertation, however. In addition, Warren’s Circus sent out invitations to the Wats in Bangkok, and one exhibition had around two hundred monks attending. ‘The Circus’, *Bangkok Times*, 18 November 1905, 3.

Newspapers conversed directly with men. Many amusements were advertised as family entertainments, but they were primarily directed at men. Advertisements for the American Biograph in Singapore in November 1899 specified: ‘Bring your wife and children with you.’ \(^{203}\) Similar language was used in newspapers throughout Southeast Asia. A September 1905 review for the Cinematograph Exhibition ‘advise[d] all Penang and his family not to miss the great treat now open to them.’ \(^{204}\) A January 1906 advertisement for Walgraph Cinema in Manila, stated ‘Bring your wife’. \(^{205}\) An August 1906 review of the London Chronograph in Kuala Lumpur wrote that ‘[a]ll the world and his wife were at the tent at Petaling St. on Saturday to witness the exhibition of animated pictures’. \(^{206}\) A May 1908 advertisement for Krung Thep Cinematograph in Bangkok read: ‘Gentlemen. Bring your Wives and Children to have a good time.’ The advertisement indicates what kind of films different demographics supposedly enjoyed (Figure 3.4). \(^{207}\)

![Figure 3.4: Advertisement for Krung Thep Cinematograph [sic] in Bangkok. Bangkok Times, 15 May 1908, 3.](image)

I have also encountered a few entertainments that were for men only, for instance an exhibition by Willison’s Circus in Bangkok in 1896 with solely women performers (Figure 3.5). \(^{208}\) The nature of these events was performances such as female acrobats in tights and dance performances by wom-

---

\(^{203}\) Advertisement, Straits Times, 11 November 1899, 3.  
\(^{204}\) ‘The Cinematograph Exhibition’, Straits Echo, 26 September 1905, 4. Emphasis added.  
\(^{205}\) Advertisement, Manila American, 9 January 1906.  
\(^{206}\) ‘The London Chronograph Show’, Malay Mail, 28 August 1906, 3.  
\(^{207}\) ‘Exhilarating Pictures for Children; Amusing Pictures for Ladies, and Scenes of Stirring Interest and Warfare for Gentlemen.’ Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 15 May 1908, 3.  
\(^{208}\) ‘For Gentlemen Only. This Special Show. For Gentlemen Only. All The Ladies Appear in a Special Programme. For Gentlemen Only. Enough Said.’ Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 8 December 1896, 2.
The British Cinematograph also had a men-only event in their tent on New Road in Bangkok ten years later. There were also men-only events (‘gentlemen shows’) in Batavia and Surabaya. I have not found advertisements in other Southeast Asian cities for men-only exhibitions. These could have still taken place though, but in social clubs which usually did not advertise in the press. It, however, seemed important to be surrounded by beautiful women when going to these evening entertainments. The new female staff at the Parisien Cinematograph in Manila were described as possessing a beauty out of this world.


211 For instance, during a Kinematograph exhibition in 1898 all women had to leave the venue during the second part of a session, which men had to pay extra for. Java Biograph Company also had men-only exhibitions on weekends, where people under 18 years were not allowed. See Dafna Ruppin, *Early Cinema-going in Colonial Indonesia, 1896-1914* (Forthcoming doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University, 2014).


---

Figure 3.5: Advertisement for Willison’s Circus in Bangkok. *Bangkok Times*, 8 December 1896, 2.
The earliest instance of a film exhibition in Southeast Asia specifically targeting women was the Beresford Pettitt Surprise Party, who travelled with a biograph, also arranged a ladies’ night when they performed and exhibited films in Johore at the invitation of the Sultan. Two years later, in July 1901, the New Bioscope at Beach Road in Singapore had a ladies-only day, which it advertised: ‘This week... a day will be fixed for ladies only, every arrangement pertaining to this class being made. Boys under ten years of age will be admitted.’ This was followed with another advertisement two days later (Figure 3.6). The ‘ladies-only’ event was apparently successful, as it became a weekly event. It is noteworthy that on all these occasions children were allowed to come as well, in stark contrast to the ‘men-only’ events. Unfortunately there is no mention of what films were shown, other than that there were ‘various scenes of interest and fun’. In Singapore in 1905, the Paris Cinematograph, which had four sessions per day, exhibited films exclusively for women between 7 and 8 p.m.

213 ‘Johore’, *Singapore Free Press*, 28 August 1899, 2. Johore was Singapore’s neighbouring Malay State, later part of the Unfederated Malay States


215 ‘A Golden Opportunity For Ladies Only. Come One! Come All!! An Exhibition of the Bioscope Exclusively For Ladies Only [...] Every arrangement is made pertaining to the female sex. Children under 12 years of age will be admitted.’ Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 24 July 1901, 2.


Women audiences continued to increase: when Matsuo’s Cinematograph exhibited films in Singapore in 1906, it was reported that many women were present; and at the Parisien Cinematograph in Manila in 1905 it was reported that the audience consisted of mostly women. Many entertainment venues started having special galleries for women. In Taiping when the projectoscope exhibited films at the Chinese Theatre in 1897, it was reported that ‘the rickety female gallery… was crowded with ladies of all nationalities’. In Singapore, the American Biograph had separate seats ‘for native ladies’ during their 1899 exhibitions at the Town Hall. When the Parsee New Elphinstone Theatre performed in their tent on Beach Road in Singapore in 1901, and Indra Bangsawan performed at the New Parsi Theatre Hall in 1903, native ladies (zenana) had separate seats. There were also exhibitions where there were different price levels for women and men. At a cinematic exhibition by the Ripograph/Scenimatograph at the Harmonie Society in Surakarta the cost of admission for men was f1.50, whereas women paid f1. Women also received discounts and ‘special seats’ for the exhibitions of the Paris Cinematograph, the Parsi Alfred Theatre, and Wayang Kasim. In Penang, the Grand American Bioscope reserved the upstairs gallery at King Street Theatrical Hall ‘for Ladies only’, where prices were the same as the third-class tickets. When Opera Indra Zabba replaced the Grand American Bioscope at the Theatrical Hall, they continued having the upstairs gallery for ladies only, with the difference that the gallery now had a two-tier ticket price. During the same month the Moving Pictures Exhibition exhibited films at the New Theatrical Hall on Campbell Street in Penang; in this instance the upstairs gallery was reserved for ‘Native Ladies’, and the gallery was divided into first- and second-class seats which cost as much as the second- and third-class tickets in the rest of the hall.

220 Notice, Perak Pioneer, 22 December 1897, 3. European women most likely sat with the European men, rather than with other women.
221 Advertisement, Straits Times, 11 November 1899, 3.
222 Advertisement, Straits Times, 31 August 1901, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 27 February 1903, 4.
223 Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 6 August 1897, 3. This practice was also used by other entertainment forms, such as a comedy variety a month earlier (Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 7 July 1897, 5).
224 Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 November 1904, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 19 June 1907, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 June 1908, 8; Advertisement, Straits Times, 30 April 1909, 8.
225 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 8 July 1905, 5.
226 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 2 August 1905, 5; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 19 August 1905, 1.
227 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 8 August 1905, 1.
Around this time issues concerning gender and the growth of the suffragette movement around the world were prevalent in Southeast Asia. In the local press throughout the region one could read about women’s perspectives on different topics, ‘modern women’, and other gender-related concerns. In Bangkok, a monthly Siamese magazine, Kunlasatri, aimed at women readers was launched in 1906 (but only lasted for around six months). In 1908, several films also highlighted the suffragette movement, especially in Singapore, which were also probably exhibited in neighbouring countries. A Vote for Women, or will it ever come to that (later referred to as A Vote for Women) was exhibited at the Hippodrome Cinematograph on Beach Road in Singapore for two weeks in April. The programme also included The Ladies of the Whip and To Tame His Wife (Pathé, 1907). A Day in the Life of a Suffragette (Pathé, 1908) was exhibited for two weeks at Alhambra Cinema in Singapore in June and July, and at Krung Thep Cinematograph in Bangkok in September and December. In Singapore the issue seems to have been especially interesting as it was one of a few films mentioned in the advertisements, in bold letters. The following year, Marlborough Cinema in Singapore exhibited A Suffragette’s Dream (Pathé, 1909).

This was a period when more European women started coming to the region, which changed the dynamics in the colonies. The census for Straits Settlements in 1901 shows that in the category ‘Europeans and Americans’,

---


230 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 17 April 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 30 April 1908, 8.

231 Advertisement, Straits Times, 20 June 1908, 6; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 1 July 1908, 1; Advertisement, 18 September 1908, 5; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 4 December 1908, 5.

232 Advertisement, Straits Times, 20 June 1908, 6; 22 June 1908, 6; 23 June 1908, 6.

233 Advertisement, Straits Times, 19 March 1909, 6.
the proportion of women in Singapore increased from 14.4 per cent in 1891 to 26.8 per cent in 1901. In most other categories the number of women increased as well: among ‘Chinese’ from 14.3 to 16.9 per cent, ‘Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago’ from 38.8 to 40.7 per cent, ‘Tamils and other Natives of India’, from 15.9 to 16 per cent, Eurasians (decreased) from 51.7 to 51.0 per cent, and ‘Other Nationalities’ from 45.1 to 53.0 per cent. In total, in 1891, 23.4 per cent of the population of Singapore were women, which had risen to 25.2 per cent by 1901. White women are an interesting subject to study in a colonial setting as they can be included in both the dominant and dominated side of the binary division. There was an ambiguous view on the role of European women in the imperial conquest. Some argue that they had a civilising influence and brought normality to European men (less drinking, gambling, and sexual promiscuity); others argue that it created larger barriers and increased the social distance between coloniser and colonised. As more white women entered the colonies, a fear of having white women marrying Asians arose which was articulated in the local press. Below is an editorial from the Eastern Daily Mail, entitled ‘A Warning to White Women’:

The broadest minded European cannot agree with marriages between the women of the West and the men of the East, be the latter never so advanced, wealthy, and socially desirable. Such marriages usually end unhappily. There may be exceptions to the rule, but they are rare – we have heard of one or two such alliances locally and we trust they may be numbered among the exceptions – and on this question we know that the majority of our Eastern readers will agree with us. We freely admit that we would rather see an English girl married to a high-class Chinese gentleman than to some Englishmen, but the principle is wrong, and both Society and Nature have their revenge.

234 Innes (1901), 21-22.
The white woman was seen as the symbol of Western civilisation, and as such should not be ‘defiled’ by Eastern men.\textsuperscript{237} In 1896, \textit{Perak Pioneer} measures ‘civilization’ by the number of white women living in each Malay State, as well as defining ‘ladies’ as white women, and as long as the number of women are high, the paper argues that the State will do well: ‘Here [in Perak] the ladies dominate every thing, we are happy to say, from the Residency to the new crase for bicycles. May this always be this for while these conditions last Perak will be \textit{facile princeps} not only in cricket but in every other respect.’\textsuperscript{238} The lack of European women and the consequences for marriage were occasionally discussed in the press. An 1897 editorial in \textit{Malay Mail} claimed that English women did not generally like the East as their life was ‘very limited and somewhat monotonous’. For European men, an alternative would be marrying a local woman, and the editorial warned against the negative consequence of ‘constitutionally’ weak children and ‘social difficulties’.\textsuperscript{239} Articles about Malay women and the customs of Malays in general could also be read as a warning to European men starting long-term relationships: ‘The younger Malay women are good looking and are generally the possessors of deep, fiery, passionate eyes. It is very noticeable though how soon the Malay woman withers, and fails when she becomes a mother.’\textsuperscript{240} Another editorial in the \textit{Eastern Daily Mail}, a week earlier than the previously quoted editorial, complained about the relation and interaction between, primarily European, women and men in Singapore:

\begin{quote}
We have a dismal “calling” system that ought to have been laughed out of fashion decades ago. We cannot have subscription dances as at Home; the youth may not ride, cycle or drive with the maiden unless under police escort, or something equally objectionable … plain, straight-forward inter-sex friendships are almost unknown quantities. It is not so in Saigon, nor in the larger centres of the Dutch Colonies. There brightness and sociability, the delights of the “raree show,” and the pleasures of the promenade are understood and made the most of. Bands play, the ladies flutter here and there as becomes their sex, the club or hotel verandah is thronged with decent folk of both sexes, all happy, chattering, light-hearted, and natural. […] And yet if Singaporeans did such a dreadful thing! – if one took one’s womenfolk to the balcony of a pot-house!! – if it were known that He and She were companions yet not engaged!!! If –but we shudder to contemplate what the verdict of Singapore So-
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{238} \textit{Notice, Perak Pioneer}, 7 March 1896, 3.
\textsuperscript{239} ‘Marriage in the East’, editorial, \textit{Malay Mail}, 17 March 1897, 2.
\textsuperscript{240} ‘The Customs of the Malays’, \textit{Pinang Gazette}, 12 October 1892, 3. And the consequences were portrayed to be harsh. Frank Swettenham explained that ‘…it has happened that Malay women have preferred life with the Chinese infidel to a harder lot with a man of their own race and faith. The common result was, first a warning to the woman to leave the man of her choice, and if that failed the Chinese was killed, and sometimes the woman also.’ Swettenham (1907), 147.
\end{footnotes}
ciety would be. Yes, we take our pleasures sadly, and in consequence our girls are dull and witless, many utterly un-English, and our boys drift nightly to unlovely haunts, the bar and the billiard saloon. […] There is nothing to do at nights.  

Amusements, including cinematic exhibitions, were becoming family entertainment. Most amusements tried to attract children to their exhibitions, and most entertainments were very popular among children. Children received special offers in order to attract the rest of the family to the exhibition as well. When the Parsee Theatre, Willison’s Circus, and Harmston’s Circus were playing simultaneously in Singapore in 1896, Harmston’s charged half price for children attending their matinee, whereas Willison’s admitted children for free. Cinematic exhibitions started charging half price for children as early as 1897 when the projectoscope exhibited films in the Dutch East Indies. In Singapore in 1897, the projectoscope even had a special exhibition for children, charging 20 cents. A few years later, the American Biograph, as well as other companies, arranged special matinée performances for children ‘to give the children a chance of seeing the famous “living pictures”’. In some cases, the age of children was specified. The definition of children varied between 3-5 years old, 3-7, 6-10, below 10, and below 12. The practice of special exhibitions for children continued, and was frequent around Christmas and New Year. Matinée exhibitions rarely exhibited before 6 pm, since daylight did not permit the earlier viewing, and the programme lasted for one hour. Another common feature was to give special prices to ‘children and servants’, which can be read both as a modern babysitting device as well as an example of Europeans patronising the local population by categorising them as children. Willison’s Great World Circus in Bangkok (1896) and Harmston’s Circus in Singapore (1900) both offered

---


242 Advertisements, Straits Times, 29 May 1896, 2.

243 Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 5 April 1897, 2

244 Advertisement, Straits Times, 17 September 1897, 2.

245 Advertisement, Straits Times, 17 July 1901, 2.

246 See, variously, Advertisement, El Progreso, 5 August 1903, 4; Advertisement, El Progreso, 15 November 1903, 4; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 21 December 1905, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 13 July 1901, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 22 December 1902, 5; Advertisement, De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, 29 March 1897, 3.

247 By, for instance, the American Biograph on Beach Road, the Royal Bioscope and their ‘Children’s Grand X’mas Fete’ at Beach Road, and the Paris Cinematograph on Victoria Street. Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 December 1899, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 28 December 1899, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 2 January 1900, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 22 December 1902, 5; Advertisement, Straits Times, 4 January 1905, 3.

248 Notice, Singapore Free Press, 17 July 1901, 2. The Cinematografo Colon in Iloilo had a period where they started their matinée sessions at 5 p.m. ‘Nuevas peliculas’, El Tiempo, 7 February 1905, 3.
half-price tickets for children and servants to their shows.\textsuperscript{249} When the Cinematograph had a children’s matinee at the Town Hall in Singapore in 1898, they, likewise, offered half-price tickets to children and servants ($0.50).\textsuperscript{250} In Kuala Lumpur in 1906, the London Chronograph admitted children and ayahs (or, amahs) for free at some of their matinee exhibitions.\textsuperscript{251} The Alhambra Cinematograph had a special matinee for children, where they offered half-price tickets (only for first and second class) for children and servants.\textsuperscript{252}

This chapter has shown how cinematic exhibitions, in particular, helped to distort the clear-cut colonial divisions of society. The segregation of the entertainment world, focused on social clubs, which was present in Southeast Asian society around the turn of the century, has been contrasted by the relatively inclusive nature of cinema exhibitions. For decades, racial classification and skin colour functioned as an exclusionary mechanism. To further cement these divisions, the evening amusements that Europeans attended were expensive, and thus not affordable to a large portion of the population. Itinerant circuses had cheaper admission prices, and attracted people from different classes and ethnicities to their exhibitions during their visits. Cinematic exhibitions were initially quite expensive, and seen as a form of elite entertainment. Within a few years prices for cinematic exhibitions were considerably lower, and in most cases lower than even the prices for visiting the circus. It was also cheaper to attend a cinematic exhibition than to buy a kilogram of sugar, spring onions, or wheat flour at the local bazaar. With the gradual appearance of shared sites for public amusements with people from across the racial spectrum, societal differences in terms of race, gender, and class were temporarily blurred. Inexpensive cinematic exhibitions changed how people spent their evenings, and with whom they associated. Having a shared cultural experience, however, did not necessarily mean having similar interpretations of the exhibitions, as can be illustrated by films depicting the Diamond Jubilee and the Russo-Japanese War discussed in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{249} Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 11 November 1896, 2; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 9 November 1900, 2.
\textsuperscript{250} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 16 February 1898, 2.
\textsuperscript{251} Advertisement, \textit{Malay Mail}, 20 August 1906, 2; Advertisement, \textit{Malay Mail}, 27 August 1906, 3.
\textsuperscript{252} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 5 March 1908, 6.
Chapter 4: Pictures

The local papers inform you what happens around you. The Paris Cinematograph does better by showing them to you.¹

(Singapore, 1905)

Film gives people a visual image of other people and places, and works as a vehicle for imagining the world by exhibiting city views, people, traditions, and dances from all over the world to audiences. Travelogues and early films depicting different parts of the world can also be related to the cultural (Western) tradition of wanting to capture, categorise, and exhibit the world. In this sense, the World Fairs can be seen as a precursor, as they showed the world in a small compressed form. Through the exhibitions, the World Fairs exoticised native people and provided a hierarchical map of races and civilisations.² Early moving images that Southeast Asian audiences saw mirrored what other audiences around the world saw, such as the arrival of trains, serpentine dances, strongmen flexing their muscles, boxers, magic tricks, wars, and images of royalty. Cinema was a way of bringing the world to colonised people, but what kind of world did the early films portray? Considering that most early films were made in Europe and North America there was a distinct Eurocentric worldview that was reproduced in these images, and many parts of the world were portrayed as exotic and strange.³

¹ Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 March 1905, 1.
² Robert Rydell, All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). For an analysis of the relation between early cinematic representations and ‘scientific’ racism, see Fatimah Tobing Rony, The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). The increased importance of the Southeast Asian region can also be illustrated by Hanoi having a World Exposition in 1902-1903, the first in Southeast Asia, and the second in Asia after the one in Calcutta 1883-1884.
Although not many films were produced in Southeast Asia, the meanings of the exhibited films were constantly produced and reproduced. Showmen could use motion pictures in different settings and thereby create different narratives and meanings, as illustrated by travelling film lecturers such as Burton Holmes and Lyman H. Howe. Depending on the social context, and who the audiences were, the meanings differed. By having a predominantly local audience, as well as local musicians, and at times intertitles in Asian languages, cinema relatively quickly stopped being something that was considered European or Western, and was incorporated as a vital part of local culture and practice. This chapter determines and discusses what films were exhibited, what messages were conveyed, and what image of the West was transmitted to early film viewers in colonised Southeast Asia, as well as what images of Southeast Asia were reproduced. In this section the focus will be on films about the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05, as well as how films were used to ‘instruct’ the population. A sense of Asian identity was also gradually growing and spreading in colonial Southeast Asia in this period, something the Japanese Cinematograph and the Russo-Japanese War films tapped into.

Cinema was part of the culture of spectacle, novelty, and amusement, and was used in that context by the circus and magicians. Amusement companies described themselves in superlative terms, pointing out the grand scale of their show, the high international standard, their novelty value, and how successful they were, often using hyperbole. At first, cinematic exhibition in itself was the spectacle, and something audiences enjoyed for its novelty, curiosity, and shock-value, in line with Tom Gunning’s (and André Gaudreault’s) concept of the cinema of attractions. As cinema became more established and the novelty wore off, there was a greater emphasis on what was being exhibited and the exhibition of new films. Films were advertised as events or spectacles not to be missed.

The chapter starts with an assessment of the film programmes that were exhibited, in terms of their length, frequency of change of programme, and in what ways they were accompanied. The chapter examines what advertising strategies exhibitors employed, and how amusements were advertised and promoted as spectacles and novelties. Cinema was also part of a cultural education, a sign of the progress of western science, as well as a visual newspaper and a way of travelling, issues that the second section deals with. Cinematic exhibitions were also used as a source of patriotism and jingoism. The chapter includes two case studies on important and emblematic historical episodes: I examine how films from the Diamond Jubilee and the Russo-

---


Stephen Hughes makes a similar argument for Calcutta (Hughes (1996), 13-14).

Japanese War were distributed and exhibited throughout Southeast Asia. The late 1890s can be seen as the height of imperial culture, highlighted by the Diamond Jubilee 1897. This can be further illustrated by Harmston’s Circus advertising their show in Singapore in 1897 as an ‘Imperial Programme’. The section on the Diamond Jubilee films examines how imperial imagery was used to reproduce hegemonic ideas prevalent in colonial society. This is contrasted with the section on the Russo-Japanese War, where an Asian country won the war and could use motion pictures as a source of patriotic fervour. Between these two sections, there is a part that examines how specific films started being advertised.

4.1 ‘The Best Show Ever Seen’: Promoting Spectacle

A central aspect of the entertainment world and attracting the audience was marketing and advertising. The major entertainment companies had advance representatives and managers, such as Charles Hicks, who arrived in a city a few days before the rest of the company to promote the shows with posters, newspaper advertisements, handbills, and by contacting the press and local merchants, as well as arranging the practical matters surrounding the performance; for example, the exhibition site and accommodation for the performers. Entertainment companies without advance representatives sometimes had to leave a city because all the theatrical venues were booked. This section relies on newspaper advertisements, as I have not found any other marketing tools that were used, such as contemporary handbills, leaflets or posters. Handbills were used to a large extent by film exhibitors, such as Talbot’s Cinematograph, London Chronograph, British Cinematograph, and Paris Cinematograph, and in many cases the newspaper advertisements referred to the handbills ‘for further particulars’.

---

6 Advertisement, Straits Times, 14 May 1897, 2.
7 In Japan, for instance, moving images from the Russo-Japanese War were reported to comprise 80 per cent of the exhibited films during the period (Gerow, 48).
8 Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 17 January 1898, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 February 1898, 2; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 31 January 1900, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 21 January 1905, 1; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 24 November 1905, 4; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 12 November 1906, 3; Advertisement, Perak Pioneer, 20 December 1906, 4. Posters and chronolithographs were referred to as well, for instance Cinema Insular and La Paz Theatre in Manila used them (‘En el Cinematografo Insular’’, El Tiempo, 23 October 1905, 2 and ‘El teatro “La Paz.”’, El Progreso, 13 January 1901, 3). Street announcers appeared as well (‘La Escolta’, El Progreso, 28 November 1900, 3). Large signboards were used by Hale’s Tours, though they were fined ($2 each) for obstructing the street (Notice, Straits Times, 8 October 1908, 6; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 9 October 1908, 4; Notice, Straits Times, 11 October 1908, 6).
Newspaper advertisements gave credibility and contributed to commercial success. An editorial in *Perak Pioneer* reported, naturally in its self-interest, on a magician referred to as Professor “Jakson” who came to perform at the Town Hall in Taiping, and who used handbills, and not newspaper advertisements, to promote his show. The result was an ‘uncrowded house’, and the editorial concluded with advice to him and other entertainment companies: “Consult the press always, and see that a man who knows a thing or two turns out the announcements of the company or troupe.” There was a trade-off between newspapers and entertainment companies; entertainment companies would pay for advertisements, and in return, newspapers would write reviews about their shows. Many reviewers commented about overflowing tents and big crowds, which shows the cultural resonance that these entertainment forms had, as well as the importance of the local press in the marketing campaign. It was furthermore common to give free tickets to the local press. The Royal Bioscope gave a private film rehearsal to a representative of *Straits Times* the day before the premiere, which led to good publicity. Mr. Ramos, the owner of Cinematografo Colón, arranged test screenings in Iloilo for the press before the opening of the exhibition, and the press, in turn, recommended its readers to attend the show.

---

11 David Nasaw claims this was common in the United States (David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 22), and based on newspaper descriptions of different shows, it seems to have occurred in Southeast Asia as well. The costs of advertising can be divided into two parts: street advertisement and advertisements in newspapers. The development of print culture in the last decades of the nineteenth century enabled itinerant entertainment companies to market themselves more widely and effectively. With illustrations by means of lithography and photography, companies could promote their show prior to their arrival through posters and playbills. Printing costs for posters could be expensive, and it also included the task of posting advertisements. Advertising costs in papers were cheaper, and easier to administer. The standard price of advertising for most papers in Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States was $1 for 5-8 lines, with a small addition for each extra line. If the advert was repeated, the rates were halved, and if the advertisement were repeated several times (for instance, for Harmston’s Circus or Pathé), special rates would be negotiated.
12 Here is a sample of some press reactions: ‘Cooke’s Circus is now performing at Singapore to crowded houses’ (Notice, *Pinang Gazette*, 22 February 1895, 2); The Opera Indra Zabba in Penang: ‘There was a very large audience, the house being filled to its utmost capacity’ (Notice, *Straits Echo*, 21 August 1905, 4); ‘There was a large attendance at Ott’s Circus on Saturday night, every seat being occupied and many people arriving late had to be turned away for want even of standing room’ (‘Ott’s Circus’, *Bangkok Times*, 19 March 1906, 2); The Hippodrome Circus in Singapore: ‘All Penang went mad over the show, and declared it the best show that had ever been there, and those Singaporeans who could find a seat or even standing room on the first night heartily endorsed the opinion of the Penangites’ (‘A Magnificent Show. The Hippodrome Circus. Record Opening House’, *Eastern Daily Mail*, 19 April 1907, 3).
14 ‘The Royal Bioscope’, *Straits Times*, 1 October 1902, 4.
Advertisements mentioned the different acts on the entertainment bill, as well as the admission prices. Making an assessment of the different entertainment advertisements throughout Southeast Asia, there are a few qualities that stand out and were often repeated in the promotional material of itinerant companies. Firstly, it was an elite entertainment that had been endorsed by royalty. Mentioning who had seen the performance in a newspaper advertisement or report was a common publicity stunt used by the majority of itinerant amusement companies, and a way to legitimise and promote the entertainment, as discussed in the previous chapter. Secondly, the entertainment came from Europe or North America, and it was expensive. For instance, Warren’s Mammoth Oriental Circus came ‘direct from Europe at enormous expense.’ Thirdly, by highlighting its popularity, a point that was also stressed in reviews and reports. Warren’s Circus claimed: ‘Gigantic crowds. Thousands turned away. Come early to avoid crush’.

Fourthly, creating narratives where novelty, uniqueness and ‘for the first time’ were highlighted, and where different acts claimed to be more extreme, complex, and dangerous than previous programmes. Finally, general hyperbole:

16 Advertisement, Malay Mail, 3 October 1900, 3.
17 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 18 November 1905, 3.
18 An illustration of the process of marketing novelties, and getting into dialogue and competing with other entertainment companies is the daring motorcycle/bicycle trick ‘looping the loop’ which seemed to be part of every successful circus show for a few seasons in the early 1900s. For almost three years, if not more, different variations of the loop were touring Southeast Asia. The Gaiety Stars first included ‘Looping the Great Wheel’ as the grand finale in their programme at the Town Hall in Singapore in October 1905. In 1906, Ott’s Circus ‘looping the loop’ was called ‘the event of the evening’ in Singapore, and the press in Bangkok stated: ‘The interest excited by “looping the loop” shows no sign of diminishing.’ The Crown Prince of Siam, for instance, was there twice in a row, and was reported to especially like the loop. Advertisements for Ott’s Circus in Batavia and Deli, and for the Kilpatrick Show in Batavia headlined ‘Looping the Loop’. The next year, 1907, Spampani’s Circus had a show in Kuala Lumpur, Miss Annie performed the loop which questioned gender roles and impressed the press. A few months later Ott’s Circus came to Kuala Lumpur, and this time a Chinese man would attempt to loop the loop for the challenge of $2,500. When Harmston’s Circus performed in Bangkok and Batavia in late 1907, looping the loop was still advertised as the highlight of the programme, and pictured in the advertisements. The next step was performing with the ‘looping of the open loop’, which Ott’s Circus did in Singapore later in 1907: ‘The Dangerous Open Loop by Mr. William Schultz. Who will give $2,500 to anyone doing the same act.’ A year and a half later that particular spectacle reached Bangkok, with Harmston’s Circus: ‘The sensation of the performance is the looping of the open loop, which will be seen for the first time in Bangkok.’ (Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 12 October 1905, 2; ‘The Gaiety Stars. Opening performance to-night’, Eastern Daily Mail, 12 October 1905, 3; ‘Ott’s Circus. Bumper House’, Eastern Daily Mail, 27 February 1906, 3; ‘Ott’s Circus’, Bangkok Times, 21 March 1906, 3; Notice, Bangkok Times, 22 March 1906, 2; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 4 April 1906, 3; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 20 June 1906, 3; Advertisement, Deli Courant, 12 November 1906, 3; Notice, Malay Mail, 19 January 1907, 2; Notice, Malay Mail, 15 April 1907, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 8 October 1907, 3; Advertisement, Pembrita Betawi, 30 November 1907, 3; Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 April 1907, 8; ‘The Circus’, Bangkok Times, 7 December 1908, 4). This form of sensationalism in entertainment was common in the United States, and elsewhere, see, for
D’Arc’s Marionettes, for instance, declared themselves ‘the Most Unique, The Most Marvellous, and Most Beautiful Show that has ever toured the world’. A very different advertising strategy, using irony, can be found for a variety programme at the Sungei Ujong Club in Taiping, where the Manabulih Minstrels advertised ‘a boring exhibition’. The advertisement ended: ‘Eggs, coconuts, and dead moosangs [musang] will be provided in the Bar in readiness for this item.’

Advertisements for film exhibitions followed the marketing style of itinerant entertainment companies, in terms of novelty, popularity, variety of programme, venue comparison, and general hyperbole. As mentioned in Chapter 1, an advertisement for the earliest film exhibition in Singapore stated: ‘Brought direct from Paris at a cost of over $10,000.’ Later advertisements also mentioned that cinematographic apparatuses and films were from Europe and the United States, and some reviews indicated that specific films in the programme were successful in Paris, London, or other European cities. Britain and London, in particular, was the frame of reference for entertainment in Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. When Carl Hertz performed at the Town Hall in Singapore in March 1898, the advertisement called him ‘The Eminent English Conjurer’, although he was from the United States. Moreover, Hale’s Tours, which originated in the United States, was advertised as ‘the Talk of London’ when it premiered in Singapore in 1908.

From the onset of film exhibitions, there were comparisons between different manufacturers, in terms of, for instance, picture quality. In 1898, the Cinematograph Exhibition in Singapore promised a programme, ‘compared with which all similar shows are but mere toys’, partly because they exhibited the Diamond Jubilee Procession. A decade later, film exhibitors started using superlatives and hyperbole in their advertisements. An advertisement instance, Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 90-99. This specific trick was, however, reportedly forbidden in Britain (Notice, *Malay Mail*, 15 April 1907, 3).


20 Advertisement, *Perak Pioneer*, 3 January 1907, 5. Musang, or the Asian palm civet, is a cat-like creature, and today its faeces are used in producing the most expensive coffee in the world.

21 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 12 May 1897, 2.


for the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore read: ‘Over 400 people could not get admission on Saturday. The opinion of the audience, “The Best Show Ever Seen.”’ In February 1907, at least three different cinematographs in Singapore (the Japanese Cinematograph, the Royal Cinematograph, and the London Chronograph) explicitly called their exhibitions ‘the best’. The advertisements also copied each other. The Japanese Cinematograph called itself ‘The King of Kings’, and a month later the London Chronograph called itself ‘The King of Cinematographs’. The Royal Cinematograph used advertisements such as: ‘275,000 people to-day know the very best show in town is The Royal Cinematograph;’ and ‘The City’s Best. The only show that gets the Crowd. The Coolest and Brightest Show in Town. The Royal. The Show that Eclipses all others.’ Finally, the advertisements simply stated that they were great (Figure 4.1). In 1908, the Japanese Cinematograph repeatedly proclaimed in different ways that they were the best show in town (Figure 4.2), whereas the Hippodrome Cinematograph declared to be ‘The Biggest and Best Show in the East’. This sophisticated advertising strategy was similar in other major cities in the region. In Bangkok, the Krung Thep Cinematograph claimed to be the ‘Best Show in Bangkok’.

![Figure 4.1: Advertisement for the Royal Cinematograph in Singapore. Eastern Daily Mail, 5 March 1907, 2.](image-url)

26 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 2 April 1906, 2.
27 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 4 January 1907, 3; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 12 February 1907, 2.
28 Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 12 February 1907, 2; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 13 February 1907, 2; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 23 February 1907, 2; Advertisement, Eastern Daily Mail, 5 March 1907, 2.
29 See, variously, Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 April 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 April 1908, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 22 July 1908, 1.
30 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 20 July 1908, 5.
Many amusements promised souvenirs and prizes to its audience, maybe as part of a sponsorship agreement. The standard raffle procedure was that coupons were distributed to everyone who was seated in the first-, second- and sometimes third-class seats, and in some cases everyone with a ticket received a coupon. The most common raffle gifts were gold and silver watches, but I have also found ponies, bicycles, hats, and sewing kits as prizes: Willison’s Circus gave away a couple of silver watches specifically to its ‘Asiatic spectators’ on a few occasions in Bangkok; two Chinese men were reported to have won a pony and a gold watch at Harmston’s Circus’ performance in Singapore in 1897; Ada Delroy’s Company promised two bicycles during their performances at the Town Hall in Singapore in 1900; and Spampani’s Circus distributed four pocket watches to ticket-holders in Manila in 1908. Harmston’s Circus had lotteries which were loudly proclaimed in their advertisements, where the winners received gold and silver watches. In one instance it was reported that a gold watch went to a Siamese

Figure 4.2: Advertisement for the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore. Straits Times, 18 March 1908, 1.

---

31 ‘The Circus’, Bangkok Times, 10 April 1905, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 11 April 1905, 3; ‘Harmston’s’, Bangkok Times, 19 December 1908, 4.

32 ‘The Circus’, Bangkok Times, 5 December 1896, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 7 June 1897, 2. A Shetland pony and watches were also the prizes in their Bangkok show a decade later (‘The Circus’, Bangkok Times, 2 January 1909, 5); Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 April 1900, 2. It was also mentioned that the bicycles were a Raleigh, valued $265, and a Cleveland valued $100. Harmston’s Circus also gave away bicycles (‘Harmston’s’, Bangkok Times, 19 December 1908, 4); ‘El circo Spampani’, El Tiempo, 5 February 1908, 3.
in the gallery and the silver prize to a European in the boxes.\textsuperscript{33} December, close to the Christmas season, was the period where most gifts were given to audiences, especially in Catholic Manila. Ten raffle gifts were promised to the audience at Cinema Rizal in Manila, and Cinema Walgraph promised raffle gifts for women in their audience: ladies hats, sewing kits, and velvet.\textsuperscript{34} The following Christmas season, Cinema Walgraph reported sixteen different prizes.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, the British Cinematograph in Ipoh gave Japanese silk fans to people seated in the more expensive seats.\textsuperscript{36}

Another way of advertising was by having benefits and gathering money for varying good causes. Mr. Baliwala and the Victoria Parsee Theatre had a theatrical and cinematographic benefit exhibition for the Holy Infant Jesus Convent School, and another for the Tan Tock Seng Hospital six months later when they returned to Singapore.\textsuperscript{37} The Royal Bioscope in Singapore arranged benefits for the orphanage at the Singapore Convent.\textsuperscript{38} It was also common with benefits for schools. The Japanese Cinematograph had repeated performances in Singapore and Ipoh over many years where the proceeds went to the Anglo-Chinese School, the Anglo-Chinese Girl’s School, the Anderson School, or the Japanese Famine Fund.\textsuperscript{39} In Manila, the cinema repeatedly had benefit performances for hospitals, especially Hospital de San Juan de Dios, and there were also benefits for firefighters.\textsuperscript{40} In Ipoh, there was an amateur theatre at the Chinese Theatre in aid of recent floods and typhoons in Canton.\textsuperscript{41} It was also common for shows to give away complimentary tickets, as well as season tickets, for promotional purposes. Some-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] ‘Cinematografo Rizal’, \textit{El Mercantil}, 5 December 1904, 3. And later, the winning ticket numbers were printed in the paper (‘Cinematografo Rizal’, \textit{El Mercantil}, 12 December 1904, 3); ‘Cinematografo Walgraph’, \textit{El Mercantil}, 9 December 1904, 3.
\item[40] Notice, \textit{Times of Malaya}, 12 September 1908, 4.
\end{footnotes}
times, when business was bad or the owner changed, previously issued complimentary tickets could be cancelled, as in the case of the Moving Pictures Exhibition in Penang. Instead, the company devoted the proceeds from one night’s exhibitions to the Fund for the Penang Band.\textsuperscript{42}

This section has demonstrated how cinematic exhibitions were advertised as an expensive, unique novelty with the latest technology from Europe that has been very successful all over the world, endorsed by Kings, Queens, and Sultans, giving regular benefits for good causes, and with thousands waiting in line to experience the great show. Moving beyond such descriptions, the next section assesses how moving images were marketed and portrayed as an institution for learning.

4.2 ‘The School and the Newspaper of To-morrow’: Images from around the World

Cinematic exhibitions were viewed as an educational tool. Advertisements for the American Kinetograph promised to amuse and teach by combining ‘profitable instruction with delightful entertainment.’\textsuperscript{43} Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères advertised its films as moral, scientific, and interesting. The same advertisement claimed cinema combined culture, education, and news: ‘It is the Theatre, the School and the Newspaper of to-morrow.’\textsuperscript{44} New technology was often portrayed as learning tools, and something that school children should experience. Returning to the phonograph exhibitions in Singapore in November 1895, they were described as an educative tool as well: ‘any person of ordinary intelligence who loses this opportunity of learning something about this wonderful invention will place himself behind the times.’ The review continued, in a more misogynistic manner, by labelling it a male concern: ‘There is not a school manager in the place but should have an exhibition of this invention in his school and give those boys who are able to appreciate it a chance of doing so. It is a matter of education.’\textsuperscript{45} This section examines in what ways cinematic exhibitions attempted to be considered as an educational institution by, for instance, collaborating with schools and offering views from around the world. As cinema became more institu-

\textsuperscript{42} This was, of course, also partly for marketing purposes, and the symbioses of newspapers and entertainment companies can be further illustrated by Straits Echo hoping that ‘the public will patronise the Moving Pictures Exhibition in aid of so good a cause’. ‘The Band’, Straits Echo, 31 August 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 1 September 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 5 September 1905, 4.
\textsuperscript{43} Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 June 1905, 4.
\textsuperscript{44} Advertisement, Straits Times, 28 August 1907, 9.
\textsuperscript{45} ‘The Phonograph’, Mid-day Herald, 11 November 1895, 2. My emphasis.
tionalised, warnings started to be articulated about the possible negative effects that films could have.

In Singapore, film exhibitors collaborated with schools. The Paris Cinematograph arranged a programme with the support of Saint Mary’s and ‘other Leading Schools’ in December 1904. The programme included the following films: *Fox and Rabbits* (Pathé, 1904), *Children’s Christmas Dream* (aka *The Christmas Dream*, Georges Méliès, 1901), *Napoleon* (Pathé, Lucien Nonguet, 1903), *A Butterfly’s Metamorphosis* (Pathé, Gaston Velle, 1904), *Indians and Cowboys* (Pathé, 1904), *Modern Burglars*, *Japanese Fancy*, *Little Tieb, Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* (Pathé, Ferdinand Zecca, 1902), *Insolvent Guests, Pass in Boots* (Pathé, Lucien Nonguet and Ferdinand Zecca, 1903) and *Omer’s Up-to-date Burglars* (Pathé, 1904).46 A few months later the company once again arranged special exhibitions for boy and girl schools respectively.47 Collaborations between film exhibitors and schools also took place in Penang, Ipoh, Bangkok, and most likely elsewhere in the region as well. In November 1905, school children in Penang could obtain voucher tickets to the Oriental Kinetograph from their teachers, which would give them ‘greatly reduced’ ticket prices.48 In November and December 1907, the Besan Cinematograph had exhibits for free of charge for school children in one instance, and for Ipoh Convent girls in another.49 When the Parisian Biographe and Concert exhibited in Bangkok in 1906 they offered private performances at schools.50

Cinema was also portrayed as a way of travelling and seeing the world. As early as 1897, film exhibitions in Southeast Asia advertised that films were a way to see views from around the world. Edison’s Vitascope at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok showed ‘animated views of the world’.51 In Singapore in 1902, the Royal Bioscope advertised that a visit to their tent ‘will carry you all over the World’, by exhibiting films from the Coronation of Edward VII in London, *The Christmas Dream* (Georges Méliès, 1901), and *Panorama of Alpine Scenery* (Warwick Trading Company, 1901) where the latter was especially applauded.52 Film exhibitions in Southeast Asia around

---

46 Advertisement, Straits Times, 29 December 1904, 1.
48 Advertisement, *Straits Echo*, 1 November 1905, 5.
52 Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 24 October 1902, 5. Earlier in the month, when the Royal Bioscope was exhibited at the Town Hall, the exhibited films included *Deep Sea Fishing* (AM&B, 1900) at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, and scenes from Paris and Hong Kong (‘The Bioscope at the Town Hall’, *Straits Times*, 2 October 1902, 5; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 11 October 1902, 4).
1907 started underlining, and repeating that film was a way of travelling around the world. The Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères in Singapore went even further, by first claiming: ‘We reproduce the living world’, and three weeks later, ‘We produce the living world’. An additional three days later, they used the well-known phrase, which can be seen at the top of Figure 4.3: ‘To the world, the world we show. We make the world to laugh. And each hemisphere to know. How lives the other half.’ Exhibitors also started repeating the words, ‘We put the world before you’, which was used in advertisements by the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore in September 1906, by the Grand Cinematograph Pathé Frères in Singapore in October 1907, and by the Besan Cinematograph in Taiping in April 1908.

Most exhibited films were made in Europe and North America. Films made in Latin America were completely absent from the programmes, and the only scenes from Africa exhibited were films from the Boer War. Occasionally scenes from around Asia were exhibited. Scenes from neighbouring India

---

53 Advertisement Straits Times, 9 September 1907, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 27 September 1907, 6.
54 Advertisement, Straits Times, 30 September 1907, 6. Lyman H. Howe used the same advertisement in his exhibitions in 1909 (Griffiths (1999), 282).
55 Advertisement, Perak Pioneer, 28 April 1908, 4. Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 October 1907, 6. ‘We Put the World Before You’, was also the slogan for Charles Urban’s Urbanora show in 1907. Luke McKernan, A Yank in Britain: The Lost Memoirs of Charles Urban, Film Pioneer (Hastings: The Projection Box, 1999), 77.
were only exhibited in conjunction with important British royal events. Films from the Delhi Durbar in 1903 were distributed and exhibited throughout the region, and were still being exhibited two-three years later when the American Kinetographe exhibited *Viceroy of India’s Royal Levee* (Edison, 1903) in Singapore in 1905, and the Queen’s Bioscope in Bangkok advertised ‘The Indian Durbar Parade with 200 Elephants’. When the Prince and Princess of Wales (who later became King George V and Queen Mary) went on a tour of India between November 1905 and March 1906, film companies followed them. The London Chronographe in Singapore depicted their tour with films from Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Simla. The company also exhibited pictures from life in India and Ceylon when in Kuala Lumpur, where the most noteworthy was *Elephants Bathing*. The Japanese Cinematographe exhibited *A great festival in Calcutta*, *Brilliant procession of elephants* (possibly a Delhi Durbar film as well) and *Bombay pagoda* in Bangkok in 1906, and scenes from Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Karachi in Singapore in 1908, which do not seem to have been in conjunction with any royal events. A reoccurring figure in films from India was the elephant, which was repeatedly reproduced, as that was what audiences expected to see.

As early as 1898, L. Talbot exhibited images from native life in Malaya, as described in Chapter 1, together with, for instance, *The Conjuring of a Woman at the House of Robert Houdin* (Georges Méliès, 1896), *The Haunted House*, *A Nightmare* and *Two’s Company, Three’s None* in the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and Bangkok. This could have signalled a wave of regionally produced films, but this was not the case, and it may have taken around five years until it happened again when the Edison Cinematographe exhibited the Coronation Festivities at Bangkok in Bangkok as well as in Singapore. In Manila and Iloilo, and probably also elsewhere within the region, there were exhibitions from local events, such as the procession of the Virgin of Antipolo in 1904, the procession in honour of Rizal’s death on 30 December 1904, the parade of the Macabebe volunteers in Manila, the procession in honour of the arrival of the Taft Commission in August 1905.

---

60 In line with the arguments of Griffiths (1999), 292-293.
as well as Manila street scenes and the banks of River Pasig. Queen’s Bioscope in Bangkok exhibited Into the Wilds of Borneo (Charles Urban, 1904), together with a number of films by Georges Méliès: Cinderella (1899), Bluebeard (1901) and A Trip to the Moon (1902). Despite the popularity of the Méliès’ films, people wanted to view the films from Borneo (note the way the reviewer repeatedly marks the length of the films by mentioning the number of scenes): ‘The coloured pictures will tell the story of Blue Beard in twelve scenes. Many people however will probably be even more interested by the scenes in the wilds of Borneo photographed by Mr. H.M. Lomas, who conducted the Urban Bioscope expedition into Borneo. There are 32 different scenes shown.’

Lastly, the London Chronograph in Singapore exhibited the Chingay procession in Kuala Lumpur. The Chingay was a yearly Chinese festival which was celebrated on the streets by thousands of people with banners, flags, bands, and a procession. The procession through Kuala Lumpur in 1906 was filmed, and when it was exhibited in Singapore it was ‘greatly appreciated by the Chinese section of the audience’.

Exhibitions depicting scenes from local life in the region became increasingly popular, and by 1908 they had multiplied. The Japanese Cinematograph frequently exhibited films showing life in Southeast Asia, such as Life in Singapore and Borneo, Singapore Harbour, S.S. Selangor, Scenes in Borneo, Scenes in Batavia, Scenes in Penang, Malay Dancing, New Singapore.

---

63 See, variously, Advertisement, El Progreso, 16 January 1904, 4; ‘Procesion de la Virgen en película’, El Mercantil, 23 December 1904, 2; ‘Cinematografo Walgraph’, El Mercantil, 21 January 1905, 3; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 20 June 1905, 3; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 26 June 1905, 2; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 12 August 1905, 3; Advertisement, El Tiempo, 28 October 1905, 3; ‘En el Cinematografo Insular’, El Tiempo, 4 December 1905, 3. The Macabebe volunteers (scouts) were Filipino soldiers who fought the Spaniards, later joined the U.S. forces, and were involved in the capture of General Aguinaldo in 1901. The Rizal and the Macabebe films were reported to be 200 metres. The Rizal and Taft films were filmed by M.E. Quiros, who was the manager at Cinematografo Walgraph and at Cinematografo Insular in Iloilo. A few years earlier, in 1898, Antonio Ramos had filmed and exhibited films in Manila as well.

64 ‘The Queen’s Bioscope’, Bangkok Times, 23 April 1906, 3; ‘The Queen’s Bioscope’, Bangkok Times, 27 April 1906, 3. Harold Mease Lomas made three expeditions to North Borneo in 1903, 1904, and 1908 as a cameraman for the Urban Bioscope Company. The Singaporean press reported from the first trip: ‘It is reported from the British North Borneo that the Chartered Company have had an artist taking “living pictures” throughout the country with a cinematograph.’ (Notice, Straits Times, 20 October 1903, 1) Lomas later became a cameraman for Hale’s Tours, and was in Europe in 1907 filming for the company’s expansion on the continent. He travelled throughout Norway in March 1907 and shot the scenes for Hale’s Tours (Gunnar Iversen, ‘Norway in Moving Images: Hale’s Tours in Norway in 1907’, Film History, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2001: 71-75).


Views and F.M.S. Railway, all of which they advertised prominently, and the Alhambra Cinematograph in Singapore exhibited Picturesque Java (Pathé, 1907). The Bangrak Cinematograph exhibited two films made in Siam: H.M. the King at Bang-Pa-In Giving Gifts to Priests and The Thunam Ceremony at Wat Pra Ken. The films were exhibited together with films from King Chulalongkorn’s visit to Europe in 1907, and his meeting with Kaiser Wilhelm II and Danish King Frederick VIII.

In July 1908, Hale’s Tours arrived at Beach Road in Singapore and stayed in the region for around six months. Hale’s Tours advertised their programme in Singapore as a cheap way of travelling (Figure 4.4). Governor John Anderson was present at the opening together with a ‘crowd of prominent citizens (and citizenesses)’. The train could seat seventy people, and the chosen trips for the first night were A Trip to Norway, The Wonders of Canada and The Devil’s Drive. The exhibition started at 7 p.m., and each train ride was fifteen minutes, followed by three minutes to pick up new passengers. Initially one trip cost fifty cents and three trips cost one dollar. After three weeks, half price second-class tickets were added. During the last two months, admission prices were lowered by more than half, and the second-class tickets cost ten cents for one trip and twenty cents for three trips.

67 Advertisement, Straits Times, 13 March 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 July 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 July 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 25 July 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 May 1908, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 5 August 1908, 6. I suspect Pathé made the other films as well, but I have not been able to confirm my suspicion.

68 Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 9 May 1908, 3. The films were reportedly made by Pathé and Gaumont.

69 Advertisement, Straits Times, 27 July 1908, 1; ‘Hale’s Tours: Opening of a Novel Entertainment at Beach Road’, Straits Times, 30 July 1908, 8. Hale’s Tours was first shown at the St Louis World Fair in 1904, and opened in Kansas City on 28 May 1905, and the next summer the train and film tours were very popular in amusement parks across the United States. In 1908, there were around five hundred Hale’s Tours movie theaters in the United States. (Raymond Fielding, ‘Hale’s Tours: Ultrarealism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture’, in John Fell (ed.) Film Before Griffith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 123; and Charles Musser, The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907 (New York: Scribner, 1990), 429-430).

70 ‘To travel is most delightful – it is an education as well as a pastime. But it is so expensive. Now for the first time in Singapore it is possible to see all the countries of the world from the window of the railway carriage for 50 cents.’ Notice, ’The World of Travel’, Straits Times, 7 August 1908, 7.

71 ‘Hale’s Tours: Opening of a Novel Entertainment at Beach Road’. Straits Times, 30 July 1908, 8. The Devil’s Drive (When the Devil Drives, Charles Urban, 1907) was a spectacle that combined the railway thrill ride with a narrative about the devil driving the train. Lauren Rabinovitz, Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 91-93.

72 Advertisement, Straits Times, 27 July 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 19 August 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 October 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 5 December 1908, 1.
Hale’s Tours was very popular and was endorsed by the local elite, royalty, and the press. There were daily advertisements in the local papers for six months. Several princes from Siam attended the exhibition when they were in Singapore, and the press reported on their enthusiasm toward the show: ‘Their Royal Highnesses expressed keen appreciation of the unique idea, especially showing their interest while travelling through places which they had previously visited.’ Here, we once again see how royalty was used for marketing purposes. More than a month later, advertisements were still using the patronage of the princes, the Governor, and the Sultan of Johore as an advertising strategy. Royalty was employed in the marketing campaign from the beginning: ‘The Pullman car in use here is the one actually visited by the King and Queen of Spain at the Bordeaux Exhibition on August 21 last. […] The two seats occupied by the King and Queen are indicated in the car, and no extra charge is made for occupying them.’ Figure 4.5 is an illustration of how Hale’s Tours advertised their programme in Singapore; notice the way they also targeted visitors to Singapore.

---

73 ‘Royalty at Hales Tours’, Straits Times, 4 September 1908, 7. The exact same words were used in a report in the Singapore Free Press, which indicates that this was a promotion from the company. ‘Siamese Royalty at Hale’s Tours’, Singapore Free Press, 5 September 1908, 7. The princes were also reported to have invited Mr. Feldon, who was responsible for Hale’s Tours in Singapore, to Siam.

74 Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 October 1908, 1.

75 ‘Hale’s Tours: Opening of a Novel Entertainment at Beach Road’, Straits Times, 30 July 1908, 8.

76 ‘Visitors to Singapore should not miss this absolutely unique and amazing illusion. It is the ONLY Exhibit of its kind in the Far East.’ Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 October 1908, 1.
Advertisements called Hale’s Tours ‘[t]he perfect illusion of rapid Railway travel amidst the loveliest scenery and most interesting places in the World’. 77 ‘The World’, however, seemed to be defined as Europe and North America, as they were, in essence, the only stops that the train made. Most programmes included a trip to London, and the press seemed to enjoy being ‘back’ in London: ‘The English atmosphere seems once more familiar as we take a tram through the principal streets. It is wonderful.’ 78 Hale’s Tours reproduced a Eurocentric worldview by equating the world with the Western world, and mainly exhibiting views from Europe and North America. The most common places were busy cities and snowy places. The virtual voyages took Singaporeans to London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Stockholm, Naples, Wyoming, Canada, Wales, Norway, Germany, Holland, French Alps, Swiss Alps, Austrian Alps, Mount Vesuvius, Montserrat Mountain, and Niagara Falls. 79 It took around eighty days before Hale’s Tours took Singaporean audiences beyond Europe and North America. The only places outside of Europe and North America were trips from Hex River to Rhodesia (including Hippo Hunt), from Cairo to the Pyramids, and Burmah Teak Forest. The Eurocentric view can also be illustrated by the advertisement of one

77 Advertisement, Straits Times, 22 August 1908, 1.
78 ‘All the World is Travelling by Hale’s Tours’, Straits Times, 8 August 1908, 7.
79 Advertisement, Straits Times, 8 August 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 October 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 20 October 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 October, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 4 November 1908, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 20 November 1908, 1.
of the rides as ‘Africa (Rhodesia)’.\textsuperscript{80} This narrow view becomes especially problematic as Hale’s Tours was used for educational purposes. School children frequented the tours, and they were reported to receive ‘a remarkable object lesson’ by the views as well as the manager of Hale’s Tours who was frequently present and guided the tours.\textsuperscript{81}

As cinematic exhibitions became increasingly popular and were being used for educational purposes, warnings about the possible negative effects of cinema started to appear. Reviews and advertisements, therefore, had to comment on the appropriateness and lack of vulgarity of cinematic exhibitions. A reviewer of the London Chronograph in Singapore in 1906 wrote: ‘There is nothing vulgar about any of the Company’s numerous films nor are there any pictures likely to offend the susceptibility of any one’, and labelled it ‘a place to which ladies and children can be taken without fear of offence’\textsuperscript{82} One year later, a reviewer for the Grand Cinematograph wrote: ‘The programme furnished is interesting, there being an utter absence of anything verging on vulgarity.’\textsuperscript{83} Bangrak Cinematograph in Bangkok wrote: ‘The programme furnished is interesting, there being an utter absence of anything verging on vulgarity.’\textsuperscript{84}

The cinematograph in the East became a permanent institution long ago. It appeals very strongly to the native mind. [...] There is no excuse for the plethora of nightly pictures of vice with which the Oriental is provided. They are not really entertaining, or amusing, and they certainly are not instructive except that the means employed by an enterprising burglar are now and then revealed, with the cunning of the apache exhibited in addition. What is the object? We can hardly believe that all Asiatic patrons of the cinematograph are so interested in films such as those indicated, that they prefer them to the unobjectionable and occasionally very instructive pictures of events on land and sea which the machine can depict with such realism and profit, in more than the monetary sense. If not, then why cannot one escape the exploits of the cinematograph gutter thieves, its ill-treated, starving children, and its cut-throats?

\textsuperscript{80} Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 20 October 1908, 1; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 4 November 1908, 1; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 9 November 1908, 8; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 5 December 1908, 1; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 10 December 1908, 1; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 21 December 1908, 1. Hale’s Tours also had views from South America and Asia, including views from China, Japan, Ceylon, Borneo, Samoa, and Fiji Islands, in their repertoire (Rabinovitz (2012), 78), but none of them were exhibited during their stay in Singapore.

\textsuperscript{81} ‘Hales Tours Entertain the Children’, \textit{Straits Times}, 23 October 1908, 7; ‘Hales Tours’, \textit{Straits Times}, 31 October 1908, 7; ‘Hales Tours Afternoon Performance’, \textit{Straits Times}, 6 November 1908, 7; Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 14 December 1908, 1.

\textsuperscript{82} ‘The London Chronograph Show’, \textit{Singapore Free Press}, 1 June 1906, 3. Again, we notice the misogynous tone, as well as the equating of women with children.


\textsuperscript{84} Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 9 May 1908, 3.
And if they are, it is quite time that a serious effort was made to prevent their indulgence in them.  

This 1910 editorial reveals how cinematic exhibitions had entered a new phase in the public discussion in British Malaya where issues such as regulation and censorship became commonplace. Those issues are beyond the scope of this dissertation, which now will turn to two specific events and how they were medialised and exhibited: The Diamond Jubilee and the Russo-Japanese War.

4.3 ‘The Great White Queen’: The Diamond Jubilee in Singapore

Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary of Britain (1895-1903), used the metaphor of underdeveloped estates to refer to the colonies, and likened Britain to a landlord that needed to develop its possessions. He further stated that ‘the British race is the greatest of governing races that the world has ever seen’.  

As an organiser of the Diamond Jubilee, this was the image that Chamberlain wanted to reproduce. Royalty played an important role in establishing imperial images. Royal ceremonies and tours were instrumental in promoting British political authority throughout the colonies. In this section I assess the role of the British monarch as a symbol of the Empire by focusing on the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of 1897 in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and how the Diamond Jubilee films were exhibited and received a few months later. The Diamond Jubilee films are significant, as they were the earliest films depicting a historical event being spread throughout the world. In the British colonies the films were, moreover, the visual representation of an event for which they had prepared for months.

The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria was a celebration of the British Empire close to its peak. The procession was held on 22 June 1897 in London and included 50,000 troops from different parts of the British Empire as a way to illustrate a united Empire under the guidance of the British Queen.

---

85 ‘Day by Day’, editorial, Malay Mail, 8 November 1910, 6.
86 Joseph Chamberlain, speech at the Imperial Institute, 11 November 1895, quoted in George Bennett (ed.), The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953), 316. Chamberlain often used the metaphor of the landlord; see, for instance, Joseph Chamberlain, speech at Walsall, 15 July 1895 (reproduced in The Times, 16 July 1895), quoted in Bennett, 314; and speech to Birmingham jewellers and silversmiths, (reproduced in The Times, 1 April 1895), quoted in Travis L. Crosby, Joseph Chamberlain: A Most Radical Imperialist (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 115.
From the British colonies in Southeast Asia, members of the Straits Malay Armed Police (ten from Singapore, nine from Penang, and five from Malacca), the Malay States Guides (consisting of Sikhs), and the British North Borneo Company’s Dyak Police (‘as the representatives of the wild head-hunting savages of their native jungle’) were part of the procession in London. The Diamond Jubilee was a display of British power and strength, as well as a projection of a unified British Empire. In the Procession there were Egyptians, Canadians, Australians, Sikhs, Bengalis, Gurkhas, Malay, etc; or, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, ‘the world of what was considered barbarism at the service of civilization’. The event was filmed and exhibited throughout the world, and can rightly be described as the first mediated event spread throughout the world thereby creating and spreading the visual images of a worldwide imagined British community. There were around twenty different film production companies, several of them having more than one operator filming Queen Victoria and the procession. The films from the Diamond Jubilee Procession underlined the political and racial hierarchies as troops from different parts of the British Empire went past and saluted the British Queen.

The Diamond Jubilee was widely celebrated as a momentous event in Singapore and the other British colonies. In Singapore, there was a three-day celebration (22-24 June 1897) that had been planned for months by a specially appointed committee. The committee consisted primarily of British citizens living in Singapore, but also included Chinese and Malay representatives. The programme included special contributions, in the form of processions, speeches, and fireworks, from the Malay, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese communities. The beautifully decorated streets of Singapore were filled with thousands of flag-waving ‘white, and black, and sunny brown’ people. More than a thousand troops, including Asians, participated in the

87 ‘The Diamond Jubilee: A Three Days’ Celebration’, Straits Times, 12 June 1897, 2; ‘Malay Police at the Jubilee: Where they went and what they saw’, Straits Times, 14 August 1897, 3; ‘The Dyak Police in England: Their Adventures and Impressions’, Straits Times, 17 August 1897, 3. A British woman from Singapore who was in London for the Jubilee described the Southeast Asian element: ‘The Dyaks from Borneo look funny little fellows with their swords decorated with tufts of hair and the Jamaica Artillery and Hongkong police caused much curiosity. The Malay States Guides and Singapore police were marching very well and I wondered if their books creaked as loudly on the London pavement as they do in Raffles Square. The Malay States Gudies looked very handsome men, and held their own with any of the other Colonials.’ ‘My Jubilee: A Singapore Lady’s Letter’, Singapore Free Press, 30 July 1897, 2.


parade, and ‘God Save the Queen’ was played.\textsuperscript{91} Five thousand school children participated in the procession, and they each received a Jubilee medal formed like a Maltese cross with a portrait of the Queen on one side and the inscription ‘Victoria, the Good’ on the other.\textsuperscript{92} The programme, moreover, included water sports, such as sailing, swimming, and water-polo, where different ethnic groups competed, as well as land sports, such as cycling, boxing, wrestling, rickshaw races, and eating ships biscuits.\textsuperscript{93} The representative for the Chinese community was Lim Boon Keng, and he thanked the Queen (‘gifted by Heaven with exceptional ability’) for giving ‘Your Majesty’s Chinese subjects’ the same opportunities as the British have. He concluded by stating: ‘I am voicing the whole body of the Chinese, especially the Chinese in the Straits Settlements, in saying that we, Chinese, believe that the Queen is the Heaven appointed ruler of the British Empire.’ This was followed by speeches by representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu communities.\textsuperscript{94}

Different communities competed in their attempts to express their loyalty to the British Empire. An article in \textit{Singapore Free Press} observed: ‘All nationalities seem to vie with one another as to how they may best give vent to the sentiments of loyalty and friendly sympathy and these feelings as usual find expression in a profuse display of bunting and other decorative material.’\textsuperscript{95} High Street, for instance, was described as a Fairyland with thousands of Chinese lanterns, and in total there were reported to be hundreds of thousands of Chinese lanterns decorating the streets.\textsuperscript{96} The Japanese community in Singapore decided to spend $2,000 on fireworks, and the Arab Club in Singapore commemorated the Diamond Jubilee with a dinner for fifty people.\textsuperscript{97} Special Malay and Chinese days to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee followed the main celebrations. The Chinese Committee in charge of the Chinese contribution to the celebration had divided the city in ten parts, and for the past months they had prepared the procession and the decorations. The parade included between three and four thousand people and twenty bands,

\textsuperscript{91} ‘The Diamond Jubilee: Parade of the Troops’, \textit{Straits Times}, 22 June 1897, 3.
\textsuperscript{92} ‘The Jubilee in Singapore’, \textit{Straits Observer}, 2 July 1897, 5.
\textsuperscript{93} ‘The Diamond Jubilee, \textit{Straits Times}, 9 June 1897, 2; ‘Diamond Jubilee Land Sports’, \textit{Singapore Free Press}, 14 June 1897, 2. Europeans and Asians did not compete against each other in the land sports, but had their separate competitions. The native competitions were reported to have ‘attracted an enormous crowd of gaily attired natives’, and many Europeans also took an interest in the competitions to the surprise of newspaper reports (since ‘he has no knowledge of the competitors’). ‘The Jubilee’, \textit{Straits Times}, 25 June 1897, 3. In Penang the Land Sports were also segregated, with Asians competing in the morning, and Europeans in the afternoon. ‘The Jubilee Celebration’, \textit{Straits Observer}, 25 June 1897, 5.
\textsuperscript{94} ‘The Diamond Jubilee’, \textit{Straits Times}, 23 June 1897, 2.
\textsuperscript{95} ‘The Decorations’, \textit{Singapore Free Press}, 23 June 1897, 2.
and streets were again reported to be full of people from all nationalities.\textsuperscript{98} The celebrations were quite expensive: the Chinese procession and decorations were reported to cost $15,000 or $20,000; and the costs for the Jubilee decorations and fireworks in Singapore were $8,000, where the government provided $4,500 ($2,750 for fireworks and $1,750 for decorations).\textsuperscript{99} Similar programmes were held throughout the British colonies in South-east Asia. In Penang, newspapers reported on unprecedented, vast crowds. There were nine addresses, seven of which were from non-Europeans, which emphasised the image of diversity and unity under the British banner. The ceremonies started and concluded with the singing of ‘God Save the Queen’.\textsuperscript{100} Celebrations in Singapore gathered large parts of the population of neighbouring Johore, ranging ‘from His Highness the Sultan to the school children’.\textsuperscript{101} In Taiping, the Jubilee was celebrated with a two-day event where the programme included parades, sports, fireworks, speeches by representatives from different ethnic communities, and theatrical amusements. Newspapers reported about flag-waving Chinese, and during the procession two young Malay soldiers sang a Malay song about ‘the great White Queen’ and thousands of school children joined in during the refrain.\textsuperscript{102} In reports of the Diamond Jubilee from other countries in the region, the cross-ethnic aspects of the celebration were repeatedly stressed, and local troops around the British Empire were all simultaneously parading in honour of the Queen on the same day.\textsuperscript{103} A telegram from Hong Kong read: ‘The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee has been celebrated here with immense enthusiasm, by people of all nationalities, creeds, and colours.’\textsuperscript{104} The Jubilee led to discussions on the British Empire in the local press. An editorial in the \textit{Straits Observer} discussed how genuine the manifestations of loyalty that the colonies showed were, and quickly concluded that the enthusiasm and celebrations seemed real and true, and was a confirmation of the benevolence of British rule, as were the large generous financial donations from two Straits Chinese men.\textsuperscript{105}

From official platforms during the Jubilee celebrations in Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, the idea of an imagined cross-ethnic

\textsuperscript{101} ‘Johore’, \textit{Straits Times}, 28 June 1897, 3.
\textsuperscript{105} ‘Native Loyalty’, editorial, \textit{Straits Observer}, 29 June 1897, 4.
community under the guidance of the British Queen was verbalised and echoed by the different ethnic communities. They repeated their gratitude toward the British in allowing them to be part of their Empire. Yet, the audience in Singapore watching the programme from the erected sheds were segregated, as they frequently were in public spaces throughout the nineteenth century. There were three different sheds: one for Europeans and Eurasians (with a ticket price of $1.25), one for Malays and Indians (30 cents), and one for Chinese ($1). The latter two sheds had separate compartments for women.106 Elsewhere in British Malaya, the united front exhibited in the celebrations during daytime was followed by racially segregated evenings. In Taiping, the European community celebrated with a dance at the Perak Club where the Manila Band played, the Malay community was entertained by a theatre troupe from Penang, and the Chinese community had musical performances at the Cantonese Club.107

This was the way the people in Singapore and other cities nearby celebrated the Diamond Jubilee in June 1897, which is an important backdrop when assessing how the films were received. The Diamond Jubilee was such a significant event that Song Ong Siang remembered it fondly more than a quarter of a century later in his history of the Chinese in Singapore.108 The Diamond Jubilee films were first exhibited in Singapore two months after the event, on August 21, 1897, by Edison’s Projectoscope in their tent at the foot of Fort Canning, where they charged $1 for front seats and 50 cents for back seats. The Jubilee films were presented as ‘Views from the Jubilee Procession’ without going into more details, and were first exhibited together with The Fitzsimmons-Corbett fight (150 feet in length), A Cock Fight and A Bull Fight, and later with The Skirt Dance, The Kiss, The Umbrella Dance and Clarke’s Thread Mill.109 That there were several different production companies filming the event is obvious when considering that the earliest Jubilee films did not come to Singapore from India; rather, they were exhibited around the same time (late August) as in Bombay and Madras.110

A week before Jubilee films were exhibited in Singapore, the twenty-four people in the Straits Malay Armed Police had returned from London. In a conversation with Straits Times, Chief Inspector Jennings who had been in charge of the Malay Police reported on their time in London. Regarding their visit to the Alhambra Theatre in early July, he claimed: ‘The Malays were

---

108 Song Ong Siang, One Hundred Years’ History of the Chinese in Singapore (London: John Murray, 1923), 297-299.
109 ‘The Projectoscope’, Straits Times, 19 August 1897, 2; Advertisement, Singapore Free Press, 21 August 1897, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 24 August 1897, 1; Notice, Straits Times, 6 September 1897, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 7 September 1897, 1; ‘The Projectoscope’, Straits Times, 14 September 1897, 3.
110 Barnes, 197; Hughes (2010), 159.
considerably startled by the cinematograph, depicting the Jubilee procession. They could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the procession, and their own faces so realistically portrayed [sic], and were somewhat anxious to get away. They feared they would become “gila” [mad] if they remained.”

It is hard to measure the accuracy of this report. The statement is corroborated by a report in another local paper three days later, but it is likely that their source is the initial report. Such statements of ‘natives’ being amazed, afraid, or astonished by new technology, is in line with observations in Chapter 1. There are no reports of the Malay Police being seen in the Jubilee films exhibited in Southeast Asia during the years. Jennings reported that the highlight of the exhibition was seeing the Queen, rather than thousands of troops: ‘When, at last, the eight cream-coloured horses appeared and the Queen was seen there was a tremendous burst of applause.’

The audience in Madras reportedly met the films with applause and cheers, especially when the Queen was shown.

Elsie Adair and her variety company, who included Edison’s Vitascope in their programme, exhibited the next Jubilee procession films in Singapore in October 1897. They only performed for one night at the Town Hall in Singapore, and exhibited thirty films, fifteen of them being from the Jubilee Procession, and the only other named film being Falls of Niagara. The company then continued to Bangkok where they performed for two weeks at the Oriental Hotel. The Jubilee films were exhibited together with The Waves, The New York Fire Brigade Rushing to a Fire, An Express Train, A Burning Studio and Busy Street Scenes. In February 1898, almost eight months after the Diamond Jubilee took place a cinematograph show arrived from Rangoon, which claimed to show ‘the whole of the Diamond Jubilee procession – not merely parts of it’. The programme at the Town Hall included the following Jubilee films: Queen’s Arrival at Paddington, The Cavalcade of Princes, The Naval Brigade with their Guns, The Band of the 5th Dragoons and Lifeguards, The Royal Artillery, The Colonial Troops, The

111 ‘Malay Police at the Jubilee: Where they went and what they saw’, Straits Times, 14 August 1897, 3.
114 Madras Times, 1 September 1897, quoted in Hughes (2010), 159.
115 Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 October 1897, 2; ‘Miss Elsie Adair’, Singapore Free Press, 16 October 1897, 2; ‘Elsie Adair’, Straits Times, 18 October 1897, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 October 1897, 2. The ticket price was the regular one for Town Hall exhibitions, i.e. $2 and $1.
116 Notice, Bangkok Times, 25 October 1897, 2; ‘Miss Elsie Adair’, Bangkok Times, 28 October 1897, 2; ‘Miss Elsie Adair’, Bangkok Times, 6 November 1897, 2.
117 ‘An improved cinematograph’, Straits Times, 12 February 1898, 2; Advertisement, Straits Times, 12 February 1898, 2; Notice, Singapore Free Press, 14 February 1898, 2.
Queen Drawn by her Eight Cream Coloured Ponies and The Crowd After the Procession.\textsuperscript{118}

A month later, in March 1898, Carl Hertz exhibited films from the Diamond Jubilee Procession together with The Greco-Turkish War and The Mardi Gras at Nice.\textsuperscript{119} In May 1898, the Victoria Parsee Theatre had a film programme in conjunction with their opera play. The film programme focused around Jubilee films, the only one mentioned was one of a huge crowd dispersing from St. Paul’s Churchyard after the celebration. Other films in the programme were A Railway Station, A Street Scene, Quarrel with a Cabman, Serpentine Act and A Soldier’s Courtship (Robert W. Paul, 1896).\textsuperscript{120} It could very well be the same films that were exhibited three months earlier. An indication of it being the same films is that when the company performed at the Mom Chow Alangkarn’s Theatre in Bangkok a year later, they were reported as showing ‘the whole of the Diamond Jubilee procession’, which had previously been seen by five million people ‘in England, India, Burma, Java, and the Straits’.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, two years after the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the films were still hot-selling commodities. In July and August 1899, the Beresford-Pettitt Comedy Company, also referred to as the Beresford-Pettitt Surprise Party, toured throughout the Federated and Unfederated Malay States and the Straits Settlements, where S. Louis Beresford, from Lancashire, performed with songs, comic acts, and dances, whereas Peter Pettitt exhibited films with the American Biograph. At the Town Hall in Singapore, their film programme included scenes from ‘various parts of the world’, and was highlighted by the Diamond Jubilee procession (‘in which Queen Victoria may be seen passing along in her carriage’) together with The Arrival of a Passenger Train in Melbourne, A Pantomime Scene, The Royal Horse Artillery in Full Marching Order and A Sleeping Coachman.\textsuperscript{122}

Exhibition of moving images from the Jubilee procession visualised British power, its popularity (by showing the crowded streets), and with diverse troops in the procession tried to produce visually an idea of a unified British Empire ruled from London by the Queen. The same moving images were


\textsuperscript{119} ‘Carl Hertz’, \textit{Straits Times}, 25 March 1898, 2.


\textsuperscript{121} ‘The Parsi Theatre’, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 5 June 1899, 2.

later used for other imperial purposes. When Britain became involved in the Second Boer War (1899-1902, also referred to as the South African War and the Transvaal War) films from the War were shot and exhibited throughout the world. When moving images from the Second Boer War were exhibited in Singapore for the first time in April 1900, by the London Bioscope in conjunction with the programme of the Ada Delroy Company at the Town Hall, the film programme started with views from the Diamond Jubilee procession. They were followed by images from the war:

The war pictures showed Imperial and Colonial troops marching to the front. The Guards were shown marching past in dashing style, and the Colonials swung along in business-like fashion. As the pictures were shown the audience rose to the occasion and sang “Soldiers of the Queen.” In the actual pictures of the war the Gordons were seen in the distance firing volleys, some kneeling, some standing. They then fixed bayonets, and, led by their officers, charged up a “kopje.” The “Fighting Fifth” were shown giving three cheers for the Queen before embarking for South Africa. Wilson’s last stand was also good.

The popular Jubilee procession pictures were thereby used as a device to recreate patriotic feelings for the British Empire, and thus to prepare, engage and rile up the audience for the war pictures. The following section assesses how moving images from the Second Boer War were exhibited and received in Singapore, as well as examining what other films were exhibited and advertised in the region.

4.4 Comedy, War, and Méliès: Advertising Individual Films

This section moves from comic films to war films and funeral processions. In that journey, the section also examines film programme changes, and what films were frequently advertised and exhibited, and Georges Méliès is a reoccurring figure until around 1907 when Pathé films dominate the exhibitions. In order to enable audience members to attend their show several

---

123 For more on the use of imperial imagery during funerals and coronations, see Ian Christie, “‘The Captains and the Kings Depart’: Imperial Departure and Arrival in Early Cinema”, in Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe (eds.), Empire and Film (London: British Film Institute and Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 25-32.


125 “The Ada Delroy Co”, Straits Times, 7 April 1900, 3.
times during a stay, circuses and theatre groups repeatedly changed different
acts of their programme, and larger circuses promised a complete change of
programme every week. Film programmes followed this practice, and reg-
ularly changed their programmes and offered new films, especially from 1905
onwards: the Moving Pictures Exhibition in Penang made an announcement
on the screen during an exhibition that ‘a fresh consignment of films had just
been received’; Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore claimed to
have 5,000 Films in stock; and the Bangrak Cinematograph advertised that it
had received ‘thousands of new films’.126 Other companies, such as Levy
Hermanos, American Bioscope, American Kinetograph, Moving Picture
Exhibition, Oriental Kinetograph, British Cinematograph, and Grand Cin-
ematograph advertised their total length of newly-arrived films, gradually
moving between 10,000 feet to 17,500 to 25,000 to 27,500 to 30,000, and
finally reaching 37,000 feet.127 Reoccurring titles, besides general references
to the Russo-Japanese War, in those advertisements were A Trip to the Moon
(Georges Méliès, 1902), Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (Georges Méliès,
1903) and Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Edison, Edwin S. Porter, 1903).

Previously, it was common practice to mix moving images with lantern
slides in order to fill out the programme as there had not been enough films
on the Southeast Asian market. The programme of Cinematografo Walgrah
in Manila in 1902, for instance, consisted of six films, then stills, and then
ten more films.128 In 1905, the American Bioscope exhibited more than ‘fifty
pictures, moving as well as stationary’ at the King Street Theatrical Hall in
Penang.129 Two months later, the Moving Pictures Exhibition pointed out that
they had enough films (reportedly over thirty), ‘precluding the necessity of
eking out the show with lantern slides’.130 The Paris Cinematograph in Sin-
gapore, American Bioscope in Penang (‘entirely fresh items every night’),
Japanese Cinematograph in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, Cinematógrafo
Colon in Iloilo, and Imperial Cinematograph in Medan all promised daily
changes of their programme in 1905 and 1906.131 Most days only a few films

126 ‘The Moving Pictures Exhibition Co’, Straits Echo, 17 August 1905, 4; Advertisement,
Eastern Daily Mail, 21 May 1906, 3; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 7 March 1908, 3.
127 ‘American Bioscope Co’, Straits Echo, 8 July 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18
August 1905, 3; Notice, Straits Echo, 28 August 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Times, 15
September 1905, 3; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 14 October 1905, 4; Advertisement, Bang-
kok Times, 18 January 1906, 2; Advertisement, Perak Pioneer, 18 July 1906, 2.
129 Notice, Straits Echo, 6 July 1905, 4.
130 ‘The Moving Pictures Exhibition Company’, Straits Echo, 5 September 1905, 4; ‘Moving
Pictures Exhibition Company’, Straits Echo, 7 September 1905, 4.
131 See, variously, ‘Cinematógrafo Colon’, El Tiempo, 20 January 1905, 2; ‘The Paris Cinem-
atograph’, Singapore Free Press, 27 January 1905, 2; ‘American Bioscope Co’, Straits
Echo, 8 July 1905, 4; Advertisement, De Sumatra Post, 24 September 1906, 7; Advertise-
ment, De Sumatra Post, 28 September 1906, 7; Advertisement, De Sumatra Post, 29 Septem-
ber 1906, 7; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 22 October 1906, 3; Notice, Malay Mail, 10
December 1906, 2.
in the programme were changed, whereas other times, a complete change of the programme was promised. In Bangkok, for instance, the Grand Cinematograph changed two films in their programme per night in 1906.\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 3 March 1906, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 12 March 1906, 3; Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 22 March 1906, 3.} In Manila, Cinematografo Rizal changed their programme completely three times a week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday) in 1904.\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{El Progreso}, 15 January 1904, 4.} In Ipoh, Matsuo’s Japanese Cinematograph and the British Cinematograph changed their programmes twice a week in 1907.\footnote{‘Matsuo’s Show’, \textit{Times of Malaya}, 6 February 1907, 5; ‘Cinematograph’, \textit{Times of Malaya}, 8 May 1907, 5.} In Taiping in 1908, the Besan Cinematograph changed its programme three times a week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday).\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Perak Pioneer}, 28 April 1908, 4.} Finally, in Bangkok in 1908 the Krung Thep Cinematograph changed its programme twice a week (Wednesday and Saturday).\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Bangkok Times}, 18 September 1908, 5.} The early exception is the New Bioscope at Beach Road in Singapore, which promised a daily change of the programme as early as 1901.\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 25 July 1901, 2.} As a frame of comparison, programmes in nickelodeons in New York changed twice a week in July 1905, three times a week in November 1906, and every day in May 1907.\footnote{Musser (1990), 433.} The comparison is, however, not completely fair as many exhibitors in Southeast Asia were still itinerant or semi-permanent, and could proceed to the next city after exhibiting all their films. Being able to exhibit something ‘new’ was central though, as illustrated by Figure 4.6. Furthermore, when Raffles Hotel started exhibiting films in Singapore, they guaranteed that they would only exhibit new films: ‘In case of the management learning that any picture has been seen before, it will be deleted from the programme.’\footnote{Advertisement, \textit{Straits Times}, 6 June 1908, 8. The programme included the following Edison films: \textit{Daniel Boone Fighting Indians, New York Fire Department and Actual Fire Scene, Desperate Chase after an Armed Burglar, Did He Fall or Was He Pushed?, Boarding School Girls’ Outing, Rustic and Sweetheart having a Holiday, 10-Mile Sensational Steeple-chase, The Stolen Bride, Stopping a Runaway} and \textit{American Policeman}.}

The complete film programme was not written in newspaper advertisements, especially when they started changing the programme a few times a week, if not daily. Many advertisements referred to handbills for particular programmes. The programme of the American Biograph in Singapore in 1902 included twenty-five films, and for the first time almost all the titles in the programme were mentioned in a review. A plausible reason for mentioning all the films was that the attendance had been quite small. The films in the programme were \textit{Piccaninies at Lion Cubs} (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), \textit{Photographing a Ghost} (George Albert Smith, 1898), \textit{The Immature}
Punter (Cecil M. Hepworth, 1898), Fantastical Illusions (Georges Méliès, 1898), A Novice in X-rays (X Rays, Georges Méliès, 1900), Extraordinary Wrestling Match (Georges Méliès, 1900), Astronomer’s Dream (Georges Méliès, 1898), Reminiscenses of Two Old Sports, Man Overboard (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), The Railway Cycle Race (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), A Children’s Party and Jerusalem. There were also military scenes in the form of Major Wilson’s Last Stand (Warwick Trading Co, 1899), Infantry Parade, Highlander’s Drill and African Troops. The highlight of the programme was, reportedly, two other films by Georges Méliès, Cagliostro’s Mirror (1899) and Neptune and Amphitrite (1899) which ‘would more than compensate any inconvenience endured by passing the tent a visit’.  

Figure 4.6: Advertisement for the New Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore. Straits Times, 4 July 1908, 1.

Comedy was highly appreciated by audiences in Southeast Asia, and several advertisements highlighted their comic prowess, for instance, the mimic/ventriloquist Sidney Colville called himself ‘The King of laughter makers’, and The Weatherleys promised ‘100 laughs to the minute’.  

Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 30 August 1894, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 30 August 1905, 3.

Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 September 1907, 6.

141 Advertisement, Pinang Gazette, 30 August 1894, 2; Advertisement, Bangkok Times, 30 August 1905, 3.
142 Advertisement, Straits Times, 9 September 1907, 6.
number, kept the audience in the best of good humour during the evening. All who want a hearty laugh ought to put in an appearance at to-night’s exhibition. Advertisements continued mentioning the comic aspects of the films. A review for the Alhambra Cinematograph in Singapore stated that ‘the natives’ especially appreciated ‘the customary funny pictures’, whereas Europeans would be drawn to films from the Olympic Games in Stockholm. The Tramp and the Mattress Makers (Georges Méliès, 1906) was reportedly a comic success in Taiping and drew ‘roars of laughter from all parts of the theatre. Comic pictures were central in the film advertisements as well, which often guaranteed laughter. The London Chronograph arranged a ‘Comical Night’, and promised: ‘$50 will be paid to any person who on this night will sit still and not laugh while the show is on. Every Picture This night will be a side splitting one. All persons suffering from any ailments whatsoever are advised to attend this night.’ Unfortunately, there is no mention what film titles had this all-curing effect. The sum was later raised to hundred dollars, as seen in Figure 4.7.

143 ‘The Cinematograph’. Bangkok Times, 6 June 1898, 2.
144 ‘Olympic Games at the Alhambra Cinematograph’, Straits Times, 22 September 1908, 6.
146 Advertisement, Malay Mail, 1 September 1906, 3; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 4 September 1906, 3.
147 Advertisement, Malay Mail, 14 September 1906, 2; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 17 September 1906, 3.

Figure 4.7: Advertisement for the London Chronograph in Kuala Lumpur. Malay Mail, 17 September 1906, 3.
Film audiences commonly appreciated war pictures as they spread news and were inherently exciting. Stephen Bottomore discusses the Greco-Turkish War, the Battle of Omdurman, the Spanish-American War, the Boxing Uprising, and the Boer War, and shows how films about the military and war were essential elements in early cinema.\(^{148}\) Films from these wars were distributed and exhibited in Southeast Asia as well. In 1899, J. Naftaly and the Animatoscope exhibited films from the Spanish-American War in Singapore, including the films: *Hoisting of the American Flag at Cavite* (S. Lubin, 1898), *Spaniards Attacking the American Camp, Execution of a Spanish Spy* (S. Lubin, 1898) and *Fighting Near Santiago* (S. Lubin, 1898).\(^{149}\) In Manila, the Biograph reported to have received 200 war pictures, and advertised it subtly (Figure 4.8). The Edison Cinematograph exhibited Spanish-American War pictures in Bangkok in November 1903 and Singapore in January 1904. The exhibition in Singapore also included films from the South-African (Boer) War.\(^{150}\) The New Japanese Cinematograph exhibited ‘American Battleship Squadron in Manila’, ‘War in Philippines’, and ‘War in Manila’ as late as 1908.\(^{151}\)

*Figure 4.8: Advertisement for the Biograph in Manila. *Manila Freedom*, 2 September 1899.*

Films from the Boer War were repeatedly exhibited in Singapore, as they were particularly relevant for the British audience. To add excitement and a

\(^{148}\) Bottomore (2007).

\(^{149}\) ‘Animatoscope Entertainment’, *Straits Times*, 4 August 1899, 2.


\(^{151}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 26 October 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 30 October 1908, 1; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 8 December 1908, 1.
life and death feeling, reviews added comments such as ‘many stirring scenes from the Boer War, where some of the Biograph men took their pictures whilst actually under fire’. The Boer War scenes the American Biograph exhibited at the Town Hall in Singapore were reportedly ‘enthusiastically received’, and included Shelling the Boer Trenches at Colenso, Marines and Other Troops Going to the Front in Armoured Trains, Unloading Stores for the Front at Durban, The Departure of the Gordons and the Fighting Fifth for the Cape, The Dis-embarkation at Cape Town from the S.S. Nineveh of the N.S.W. Lancers, The Return from Reconnoitring of a Party of Mounted Light Infantry, The Repairing of Frere Bridge by the Royal Engineers, Lord Roberts and Staff at Pretoria and General Buller. The last two films were ‘greeted with loud cheers’, and the Pretoria film showed the raising of the British flag. The next day an additional number of films were exhibited: The Despatch of Reinforcements by Troopships, The Embarking of the Northumberland Fusiliers, The Marines in an Armoured Train, “Flag-wagging” on Outpost Duty and Assembly and Advance of Highlanders. The most appreciated films were once again those with Lord Roberts which were ‘very warmly applauded’. Attitudes towards General Buller (who was applauded the day before), however, seem to have been more ambiguous. A reviewer wrote: ‘In passing, it was quite inappropriate to play the “Conquering Hero” for General Buller, who was guilty of that shocking and quite unavoidable fiasco at Colenso.’ Despite this long list of films from the Boer War, there were complaints that there were too few: ‘The pictures of a military character were as keenly watched as any; and the only fault to be found was that there were not nearly enough of them.

Films from the Boer War were exhibited together with scenes of the Boxer Uprising, as well as films from the funeral procession of Queen Victoria. Films from the Boxer Uprising (or Chinese War, as they were called in the local press) included A Sikh Regiment on Parade at Shanghai, and U.S. Cavalry and Infantry Attacking one of the Pekin Forts. Other films in the programme were Coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1898), A Hotel Fire in Paris (British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1898) and The Great Pillow Fight Scene – “The Charge of the White Infantry!” The funeral procession of Queen Victoria, who passed away on 22 January 1901, was described as ‘the attraction of the evening’. Many films were shown depicting the procession from several different views, and the press wrote that ‘one could imagine the sad and

---

touching scene as though one were present amongst the packed crowds of spectators who lined the route on either side. The audience were sitting ‘in respectful silence, as was proper to the occasion’, and the press recommended everyone to attend: ‘No one should miss the chance of seeing these reproductions of that which can only be described as the greatest and most mournful procession of the century.’ Interestingly, the Funeral Procession was followed by images of the Queen alive, as if to illustrate the life-giving potency of the medium. The exhibition that started with War pictures and a Funeral Procession, continued with the late Queen reviewing the troops before they went to the South African front, and concluded with images of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra opening Parliament and the King and Queen saying farewell before their Royal tour on board the Ophir. The final scenes were met with loud applause, and afterwards ‘the latest Photo of Their Majesties King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra was shown, the audience rose and sang “God Save the King.”’

The Bioscope that was exhibiting at the same time as the Biograph, advertised scenes from the Boer War, the Chinese War, and the Turko-Grecian war, as well as exhibiting films from the 1899 FA Cup Final between Sheffield and Derby, a polo match, and The Kiss (Edison, 1896). Boer War films continued being exhibited in the region for many years. The Diamond Jubilee in 1897 was the starting point of large medialised event focusing on Royalty and War, and often including military parades and processions. On 9 August 1902, nineteen months after the death of Queen Victoria, the Coronation of Edward VII took place. Films from the Coronation procession were distributed and exhibited throughout the region. The fittingly-named Royal Bioscope exhibited films at the Town Hall in Singapore from the Coronation Procession a mere two months after the event, and the local press rejoiced:

157 ‘The “Biograph.”’, Singapore Free Press, 15 July 1901, 2; ‘The Biograph’, Singapore Free Press, 16 July 1901, 3. The procession was described in the following way: ‘The departure of the Royal bier from Cowes, the solemn march through London, shown from a point in Hyde Park, near the Marble Arch, bluejackets drawing the gun carriage bearing the Queen’s remains through Windsor High Street, were all vividly portrayed, the outlines being sharp and distinct, despite the unfavourable weather in which the “biograph” exposures were obtained. The Queen’s coffin, the Royal Mourners, the Field Marshal and his staff and the host of representatives from all countries who followed in their train were re-produced in life-like style.’ As well as: ‘the arrival of the coffin at Cowes pier, the procession past the Marble Arch in London, and the bluejackets drawing the gun-carriage through the streets of Windsor.’


159 Advertisement, Straits Times, 13 July 1901, 2; ‘The Bioscope’, Straits Times, 22 July 1901, 2; ‘The Bioscope’, Singapore Free Press, 27 July 1901, 3. The Kiss was called “Linger ing Kiss” and described as ‘[a]n attractive number’.

An opportunity now presents itself to the public of Singapore to see the Coronation procession in London, not the real thing, but, at least, a very good reproduction on the bioscope. The proprietors have secured several films of various portions of the procession, and the Royal coach, the Colonial troops, etc., are easily distinguishable. The most interesting is probably the picture showing the Coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey. The scene is shown when the crown is placed upon His Majesty’s head, and this is certainly well worth seeing.\(^\text{161}\)

The Coronation films were exhibited for around a month.\(^\text{162}\) The Royal Bioscope stayed in Singapore until early 1903, and their programme was highlighted by the following films: *The Interrupted Honeymoon* (aka *A Charming Wedding Trip*, Georges Méliès, 1899) *The Bridegroom’s Dilemma* (Georges Méliès, 1899), *The Chameleon Man* (*Magical Changes*, Edison, 1902), *The Congress of Beauties*, *Accident to Shamrock II* (1901) and *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (George Albert Smith, 1899).\(^\text{163}\) Especially, the latter film was well received, and was still exhibited and mentioned by the press more than one month later together with the primary attraction, *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (Edison, 1898).\(^\text{164}\)

Cinematógrafo Walgrah on Calle Santa Rosa in Manila advertised and exhibited the coloured *Joan of Arc* (Georges Méliès, 1900) in 1903, and claimed it was twenty minutes long.\(^\text{165}\) Gran Cinematógrafo de Oriente exhibited *William Tell* (Pathé, Lucien Nonguet, 1903) a mere two months after it premiered in Paris. The film consisted of five scenes, was described by the press as a ‘the hectic life of the great champion of Swiss Independence, and ended with the Swiss cheering their liberator’.\(^\text{166}\) That the film was advertised and reviewed is even more noteworthy considering the ongoing Filipino resurgence and fight for independence. In Makassar in 1903, the N.V. de Java Cineograph had one new, longer film every day. The list of films that were advertised included *The Passion Play* (Lubin, 1903 or Edison, 1898), *The Cuban War*, *A Trip to the Moon*, *The Transvaal War*, *The Devil in the Monastery* (Georges Méliès, 1899), *The Wedding Procession of Queen Wilhelmina* (married 7 February 1901), *The Devil’s Castle* (Georges Méliès, 1897), *Hamlet’s Dream* and *The Delhi Durbar*.\(^\text{167}\)

From around 1905, individual films were receiving increasingly more attention in advertisements, which was a central development in early cinema history. There were, however, many earlier exceptions as illustrated above.

\(^{161}\) ‘The Bioscope at the Town Hall’, *Straits Times*, 2 October 1902, 5.

\(^{162}\) Notice, *Straits Times*, 22 October 1902, 4.

\(^{163}\) Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 26 November 1902, 4; Advertisement, *Straits Times*, 29 November 1902, 4.

\(^{164}\) ‘The Royal Bioscope’, *Straits Times*, 30 December 1902, 4.


\(^{166}\) ‘Gran Cinematógrafo de Oriente’, *El Progreso*, 10 December 1903, 3.

In 1905, however, the lengths of individual films were advertised, which illustrates that audiences were looking for longer stories. The Paris Cinematograph in Singapore exhibited Russian-Japanese War films together with Annie’s Love Story (Pathé, Ferdinand Zecca, 1904), Up-to-date Burglars (Pathé, 1902), Little Piets, the great comedian, Insolvent Guests, Unexpected Restitution and Cake Walk. 168 Two months later they advertised even longer films: Sleeping Beauty (Pathé, Lucien Nonguet and Ferdinand Zecca, 1903), Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves (Pathé, 1902), Samson and Delilah (Pathé, Ferdinand Zecca, 1902), French Lady Acrobats, The Nest Robbers (Pathé, Gaston Velle, 1904) and Cake Walk. 169 The Japanese Cinematograph promised the ‘longest films ever exhibited in Penang’ in their advertisements in 1905. 170 The Moving Pictures Exhibition in Penang advertised their longer features, including the length of the films: In the Mining District (Pathé, Lucien Nonguet and Ferdinand Zecca, 1905), Annie’s Love Story, A Father’s Honour (Pathé, Ferdinand Zecca, 1905), Up-to-date Burglars (Pathé, 1904), Burglars at Work (Pathé, Gaston Velle, 1904), Surgical Operations (Pathé, 1905), A Pleasure Trip (Pathé, 1905) and The Bull Fight (Pathé, 1903). 171 When the London Chronograph exhibited films in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur in 1906, the local press mentioned that several films were over a thousand feet in length. The programme consisted of fifteen films with at least one longer film, such as Sleeping Beauty, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, East Lynne (Vitagraph, 1903, or Harrison & Co, Dick Winslow, 1902) and The Sign of the Cross (Pathé, 1905) per night. 172 In their daily advertisements, they explicitly named only two films, Annie’s Love Story and Rescued in Mid Air (Clarendon Film Co, Percy Stow, 1906). The latter film was especially highlighted: ‘Our new programme includes the latest and most thrilling pictures ever produced on a screen entitled “Rescue in Mid Air.” Must be seen to be believed.’ 173 Moreover, it was exhibited less than two months after it was released in Britain.

From the time Pathé opened an office in Singapore in 1907, it also became more common for different exhibitors to print their full film programme in newspapers, rather than just having them on handbills. Several film companies printed their programmes even earlier, and in Manila it had been common practice for many years. An advertisement for the Alhambra

168 Advertisement, Straits Times, 14 January 1905, 3. The length of the films varied from 130 to 750 feet.
169 Advertisement, Straits Times, 24 March 1905, 5. The length of the films varied from 150 to 960 feet.
170 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 23 September 1905, 4.
171 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 28 August 1905, 4. The length of the films varied from 500 to 1,250 feet.
173 Advertisement, Malay Mail, 1 September 1906, 3; Advertisement, Malay Mail, 14 November 1906, 3.
Cinematograph in Singapore in November 1907 included a short synopsis (4-5 lines) for the main features in the programme: The Adventuress (Pathé, 1907), In West Africa (Pathé, 1907) and A Drama in Seville (Pathé, Louis J. Gasnier, 1907, starring Max Linder). Living London (Charles Urban, 1904) was particularly successful, and called ‘the longest cinematograph picture ever imported into the Far East’ with a claimed duration of, first, thirty minutes, and later, forty-five minutes. Exhibited films were, however, not always the same as the ones that were printed in advertisements and on handbills, and an advertisement for the Alhambra Cinematograph pointed out this supposed discrepancy: ‘I Do Not Deceive the Public. The titles of my films are the same as those on my Programme.’ A longer review from the Japanese Cinematograph in 1906 concludes this section in order to demonstrate the variety of the programme, as well as how individual films were highlighted:

The programme is a lengthy and varied one, with something suited to the varied tastes of every class of the community but nothing objectionable to any one. The star attraction on Saturday night was the fine illustrations from the thrilling drama, “The Sign of the Cross” [Pathé, 1905]. The student of Roman history and of the social life of the Roman people could not but appreciate the absolutely correct and life-like manner in which these were depicted. The commanding air and fine presence of the Roman centurion, in contrast with this humility before the serene virtue and heroic bearing of the Christian maiden, was worth going miles to see, the actors who posed for the pictures evidently having been past masters of the histrionic art. In the first pictures shown, “An Intruding Drunkard,” and in the “Canards Parisiens,” the audience was completely baffled as to the manner in which the wonderful tricks depicted were performed. These two series of views are a first-class legerdemain performance in themselves. “The House on Fire” was so realistic as to be almost horrifying in its earlier stages, when the father is overcome by the smoke and falls powerless upon his bed, but the delight which he experiences after his rescue when, while still suffering, his child is places safely in his arms, is so genuine and deep that the spectators cannot but rejoice with him. “Off for the Holidays” [Clarendon, Percy Stow, 1904] and “Fun at a Boarding School” [aka A Boarding School Prank, AM&B, 1904] kept the great audience in roars of laughter. It was innocent, hearty fun of the best description. “An Improvised Suit” was almost equally amusing. The series of mining pictures took many of us back home again, giving a phase of life among white toilers which is quite foreign to the Far East. “The Vendetta” [Alice Guy, 1901] with the flight of the murderer and the pursuit over hills and rocks, down precipices, across streams and along the seashore gave a fine touch of tragedy to the entertainment, second only to the more tragic scenes in the “The Sign of the Cross.”

174 Advertisement, Straits Times, 8 November 1907, 6.
175 Advertisement, Straits Times, 15 November 1907, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 November 1907, 6; Advertisement, Straits Times, 29 November 1907, 6.
176 Advertisement, Straits Times, 4 November 1907, 6.
To the Oriental mind at least, one of the finest views was that taken from the Arabian Nights. The colouring was gorgeous, the dancing superb and the beauty of the lady dazzling. It would be heard to find a series of views which would take better with such an audience as gathered there Saturday night.177

Many of the programmes in 1905 and 1906 also included scenes from the Russo-Japanese War, which was a War that questioned prevailing racial hierarchies and colonial rule. The effects of this War, and exhibited films from the War, are issues that the final section examines.

4.5 ‘They Are Wonderful Little Men’: Russo-Japanese War Films

This section covers the Russo-Japanese War, which lasted from February 1904 to September 1905, and how films from the War were distributed, exhibited, and received throughout Southeast Asia. The previous three sections, which mostly focused on Europeans films, British Royalty, and the Boer War can be used as a backdrop against which to juxtapose the images of Japanese success. The outcome of the Russo-Japanese War and the fall of a major European power against an Asian nation was such a momentous historical event that the historian D.A. Farnie went so far as to call the year 1905 ‘the true beginning of a new era in world history’.178 Lothrop Stoddard, a U.S. political historian (and racial anthropologist), called the Russo-Japanese War the beginning of the ebb of the dominance of the white race and the ‘destroyer of white prestige’.179 The section, therefore, starts with an overview of the political situation of the era, Western attitudes towards Japan, and reactions throughout Asia to the War.

In 1902, Britain and Japan formed an alliance, after establishing a less formal agreement in 1894, and for the first time a European nation had formed an alliance with a non-Western state against another European nation, to the protest of many European communities in the Far East.180
attitude toward Japanese people varied among Westerners. Willard Straight, a U.S. diplomat and reporter, captured the prevalent prejudiced view among many Westerners towards Japan in 1905: ‘The Japanese … certainly seem very much less human than others.’\textsuperscript{181} As Russia lost the Russo-Japanese War, many commentators, such as the French writer René Pinon, stressed a transnational imagined community of white men and described it as a war of races: ‘this was not Russia beaten by Japan … it was the victory of one world over another. […] I completely forgot that these captives were Russians, and I would add that the other Europeans there, though anti-Russian, felt the same malaise: they also were forced to feel that these captives were their own kind.’\textsuperscript{182} Sidney Lewis Gulick, on the other hand, who was an American author and missionary that worked toward U.S.-Japanese relations described the outcome of the War as a way ‘to halt the territorial expansion of white races and to check their racial pride’.\textsuperscript{183} There were many more contemporary Western accounts of the War, surprisingly many of them being positive toward Japanese development.\textsuperscript{184} There were reportedly eighty-four whereas Russia and its ally France had nine. The agreement stated that if two Powers were in war with either of the countries, the other country would assist. The treaty was renewed and revised in 1905 and 1911. Britain could leave the defence of the Far East to Japan. (Nish, 353). In 1895, Norman wrote: ‘Great Britain and Japan allied in the Far East would be irresistible. The one would command the sea, the other would dominate the land: the British Fleet would keep communication open, and nothing could resist the troops of the Emperor.’ (Norman, 400).

\textsuperscript{181} Quoted in Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1994 [1972]), 109. Straight continued: ‘One cannot feel the individuality of the men themselves… [Russians] are white, and that means much… One recognizes him [a Russian] as a man, and the Japanese will have to change a good deal before they cease to cause one to look for the tail.’

\textsuperscript{182} Pinon, ‘La Lutte pour le Pacifique’, 165, quoted in Stoddard, 206.

\textsuperscript{183} Gulick, 5. Gulick’s final words are a call for Japan to take the leading role as a representative of Asia: ‘Lasting peace will not come to the orient until an occidental people is ready to champion the cause of the Asiatic, but thereafter both the white peril and the yellow, will cease to threaten the peace of the world.’ (Gulick, 191). Gulick still, however, clearly expresses Eurocentric attitudes on a multiple occasions: ‘So far then as we judge Japan's treatment of Russian prisoners to be the genuine expression of her inner life must we count her as belonging to the occidental rather than to the oriental system of civilization.’ (Gulick, 106) And again: ‘As already indicated Japan stands for the essentials of Anglo-Saxon civilization. She emphasizes the inherent value and rights of the individual, his freedom of travel, of occupation, of intellectual and religious belief, of universal education and of representative government.’ (Gulick, 155) Russia, on the other hand, represented absolute imperialism, and would close trade for the West. This was also true to some degree for France and Germany. (Gulick, 158-160).

war correspondents covering the Russo-Japanese War. Eighteen Western war correspondents and military observers, from Britain, United States, Spain, Germany, and Chile, were with the Japanese forces in Port Arthur. Among them were Frederic Villiers, James Ricalton, neither of whom was filming the War, and Richard Barry. Villiers, who had covered many wars sometimes accompanied by a cinematograph, was very impressed by the Japanese siege and capture of Port Arthur: ‘I never saw a finer spirit displayed by fighting men in the whole course of my campaigning career than by the Japanese army this day confronting these terrible fortifications at Port Arthur.’ His sentiment toward the Japanese as he was leaving the War was very positive: ‘They are wonderful little men, these Japs […] I never left any army in the field with greater regret, nor have I been treated with more consideration and kindness by all ranks, from privates to generals, than with the Third Imperial Army of Japan.’ Words filled with respect, yet spiced with patronisation.

The Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905 made the Japanese realise they could defeat white Europeans. The present non-Japanese Asians shared the joy and many, including Chinese, saw it as the rise of the Asian ‘races’. Japan, in effect, became a model nation for the rest of Asia, and the Japanese victory resonated among independence activists throughout the region. The echoes of Japanese victories reverberated throughout Southeast Asia and as far as India, Egypt, the Arab Peninsula, Persia, and Afghanistan. The War received much attention in the local papers in India, and Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi both hoped that the Japanese would inspire Indians. The idea of pan-Asian identity spread in Southeast Asia. There was an increased movement in overseas settlers and students around the turn of the century, and many people from other Asian countries went to Japan to study

with the Besiegers; A Diurnal of Occurrents (London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905); Richard Barry, Port Arthur: A Monster Heroism (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1905); Maurice Baring, With the Russians in Manchuria (London: Methuen & Co., 1905); Ian Hamilton, A Staff Officer’s Scrap-Book: During the Russo-Japanese War (London: Edward Arnold, 1907).

Barry, 34, 40. And Barry echoed those sentiments, calling the battle of Port Arthur ‘the finest work done by any army in any age’ (Barry, 17). The esteem and respect for the officers was considerable, as illustrated by Barry describing the meeting with General Baron Nogi: ‘So, naturally, coming to meet such a man we must have some awe, some curiosity and some respect for the master strategist, commander of the army which drove the Russians down the peninsula and which holds it now in a death trap.’ (Barry, 61).

Villiers, 164, 176.

Iriye, 116-117.


Marks, 612-619; Lake and Reynolds, 167-168.
and learn. The victory in the War changed Japanese attitudes, and confirmed their view that they were equal to the West and superior compared with other Asian nations. As Ozaki Yukio, mayor of Tokyo, said in 1905: ‘[W]e must stop being content with crouching in a small corner of the earth. We must broaden our vision and venture out to all parts of the world – Africa, South America, North America, everywhere in east and west – in order to make the whole universe our sphere of action.’ After the Russo-Japanese War, the number of Japanese in Southeast Asia doubled which in turn led to an increase in Japanese cultural presence in the region. Japanese associations were formed, and several new Japanese newspapers were started in a few years.

Surprisingly little has been written about the reactions in Southeast Asia to the Russo-Japanese War. In the comprehensive anthology, *The Russo-Japanese war in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, there is only one, slightly dismissive, paragraph on the effects of the War on the British colonies in Southeast Asia. In another anthology, *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, one paper deals with the impact and resonance of the War on Singapore and the Dutch East Indies based on the political discourse of two different contemporary journals. Local press in Southeast Asia regularly wrote about the progress of the War. In addition, cinematic exhibitions were important in spreading the news of the War in Southeast Asia. The interest for seeing images from the Russo-Japanese War in Southeast Asia was considerable, and could not be met by film exhibitors during the first few months of the War in 1904. In Bangkok, it had the effect of two Indian peep-show exhibitors showing images of the Boer War and labelling them as Russo-Japanese War pictures in August 1904. The earliest traces I have found

---

192 Iriye, 98-100 (quote from page 100).
194 ‘With the ruling elite thoroughly incorporated into the colonial system, news of East Asia’s 1905 war was little more than a source of speculation for a small group of royals whose very existence was the antithesis of nationalism. Meanwhile, Singapore was a tightly controlled British port city with a Chinese immigrant merchant population whose primary concerns were not political. However, had Singapore’s Chinese residents expressed any political sentiment, it undoubtedly would have been opposed to the Japanese who had humiliated the Qing dynasty in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895.’ Paul A. Rodell, ‘Inspiration for Nationalist Aspirations? Southeast Asia and the 1905 Japanese Victory’, in John W. Steinberg, et. al. (eds.), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 633. He continues by stating that only in the Philippines and Vietnam were there nationalist responses to the Russo-Japanese War (Rodell, 635).
196 ‘A Bangrak show’, *Bangkok Times*, 17 August 1904, 2.
concerning exhibition of moving images from the Russo-Japanese War in Southeast Asia are from Manila and Batavia in June 1904.

It is difficult to establish what War films were being exhibited in Southeast Asia, and whether different countries in the region showed films to suit their respective political needs. For instance, considering that Russia and France were close allies, I surmise that many of the War films exhibited in French Indochina took the Russian perspective. Charles Urban sent two cameramen to film the Russo-Japanese War. George H. Rogers filmed the Russian side, and Joseph Rosenthal the Japanese side. In Batavia, they exhibited and advertised films shot by Joseph Rosenthal, and they even called the films Japanese-Russian War films. There were also Japanese-produced War films that were exhibited in Southeast Asia, primarily by the many Japanese Cinematographs. As demonstrated in section 2.5, the number of Japanese entrepreneurs exhibiting films in Southeast Asia during and directly after the War multiplied.

In Manila, the ‘sensational’ films depicted views from several episodes of the War, both from land and at sea, and it was stressed that the views were real. There was no war-mongering, rather the war was described as a ‘horrible tragedy’, but the proprietor of the Cinema Walgraph promised that they would periodically receive ‘graphic and authentic reproductions’ from the War. The films from the War proved to be very popular and successful. The audience was described as a ‘compact mass’, and people were reportedly gathered in the waiting room and canteen of the film venue, as well as the sidewalk outside waiting for the next session of the film programme. The programme included A Naval Battle, Blowing Up a Sea Mine, Landing of Troops and Canons and Advances of the Russian Army. Two months later, films from the Russo-Japanese War were being exhibited at Cinematógrafo Rizal, Cinematógrafo Luzon, and Cinematógrafo del Oriente. The latter cinema exhibited The Bombardment of Port Arthur by the Japanese Fleet, which was described as ‘one of a kind’, although the local press questioned whether it was real or a ‘fake’, or rather if it was an actuality or a re-

199 ‘La guerra en Manila’, El Mercantil, 14 June 1904, 2. Emphasis in original. The Wargraph seems to have been called Walgraph in Manila (Advertisement, El Progreso, 15 November 1903, 4; Advertisement, Libertas, 1 February 1904, 3; Cinematografo’, El Mercantil, 15 June 1904, 3). The scenes were described as ‘tomada del natural’.
enactment. The war films were advertised together with *The Drama of Love*. Later the same year Cinematógrafo del Oriente exhibited *Outskirts of Port-Arthur*.201

Most newspapers in Manila papers took a neutral position towards the War, which was also the official position of the United States, and thus the Philippines. Many films that were exhibited seem to have been filmed from the perspective of the Russian Army and Navy. This observation becomes more tangible when considering the War films that were exhibited in at Cinematógrafo Colón in Iloilo in February 1905. The War films were described as ‘very real scenes’, and included *The Sinking of the "Petropavlok", A Review of the Troops by General Kuropatkin and Attacks on Port Arthur*. One week later they promised new films that ‘perfectly portrayed scenes’ from the War, which indicates that they were re-enactments.202 This was confirmed the following week when the War films were presented as ‘realistic reproductions of the scenes that take place in the theater of war’. The films that were exhibited were *The Sinking of the "Petropavlok", Passage of the Baltic Fleet through the Suez Canal, The Defence of Port Arthur, A Street in Mukden and A Surprise for a Russian Detachment*.203 In July 1905, Cinematógrafo Insular in Iloilo exhibited a War film that was recognisably from a Japanese perspective, *Manoeuvres and Exercises Aboard the Battleship "Asama"*.204

The programmes of the Japanese Cinematograph in Southeast Asia during the war years naturally featured War films prominently. Advertisements for the company in Singapore in January 1905 stated: ‘Russian Japanese War. Fighting at Mukden, Liaoyang, Port Arthur, Yantai. Views taken at the seat of war;’205 ‘Great Victory. Last News. The Second Shipment of films has arrived. The new scenes of the Russian-Japanese War will be shown. [...] The biggest success ever seen.206 One week later, as the Japanese inched closer to victory, the Japanese Cinematograph started calling the war films for ‘Japanese-Russian War’, and promised to exhibited ‘Many land battles at Kiu-Len-Chan, Kinchow, Teriji, Taisekyo, Liao Yang, and a Naval Battle of Port Arthur.’207 The Paris Cinematograph exhibited films at the Malay Theatre in Singapore from November 1904, but did not advertise films from the Russo-Japanese War until January 1905. Figure 4.9 indicates that the senti-

---
201 ‘Novedad cinematográfica’, *El Mercantil*, 5 August 1904, 2; ‘Cinematografo del Oriente’, *El Mercantil*, 30 August 1904, 2; ‘Nuevas películas’, *El Mercantil*, 4 November 1904, 2. The latter film was 200 metres.
203 ‘En el Cinematógrafo Colon’, *El Tiempo*, 18 February 1905, 2.
204 Advertisement, *El Tiempo*, 10 July 1905, 3. The film was 400 metres.
ment of the exhibitor, or rather the presumed sentiment of Singaporean audiences lie with the Japanese, as they were close to winning the War at that stage. The exhibition of the War films appears to coincide with S. Kassim from Wayang Kassim buying the cinematograph, and they were reported to be the highlight of the programme: ‘The Russo-Japan war pictures are, naturally, the most popular. Some of these views are very realistic.’

Dafna Ruppin has discovered how in the Dutch East Indies, the films were at times also advertised as Japanese-Russian War films, both actualities and re-enactments, and how the naming of the War reframes the relations, and indicates certain alliances. This argument is further strengthened by reports of cheers and applause from audience members. These films were exhibited by the Japanese Cinematograph, which makes the framing increasingly reasonable. The sudden reframing of the exhibitions in Singapore can also be explained by the effect of having another company, the Paris Cinematograph, exhibiting War films, and thereby wanting to distinguish oneself. It is also worth bearing in mind that the result of the War was known when many of the later exhibitions discussed below took place. The last battle of the War

---

was the naval battle of Tsushima (27-28 May 1905), and the peace treaty was signed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on 5 September 1905. The last battle of the war signalled an explosion of the exhibition of Russo-Japanese War films in Straits Settlements and the Malay States. The reason there was such a rapid increase in the availability and exhibition of films from around July 1905 is that Levy Hermanos started selling new films from the Russo-Japanese War. The company still advertised films from the War in early 1906.  

The following part examines the exhibition of Russo-Japanese War films in Penang where they were also prominently featured and advertised. The Japanese Cinematograph on Chulia Street by the Malay Temple was the first company exhibiting films from the War. In January 1905, their advertisements stated: ‘The War. See the Latest Views of the Russo-Japanese War […] Come and See Vivid and Realistic Battle Scenes’, and half the films in their programme were about the War, including the films Fight at Nan Shan [which took place 25 May 1904], Fight at Kin-Chow [26 May 1904], Fight at Terisu [Te-li-ssu, 14-15 June 1904], Battle of Tai-Sekyo [Tashihchiao, 24-25 July 1904], Fight at Liaoyang [24 August-4 September 1904], Battle of Kullenchau [26 October 1904], and The Naval Battle at Port Arthur [8-9 February 1904].

In July 1905, the Grand American Bioscope advertised that they were exhibiting ‘Up-to-date’ scenes from the ‘Great Russo-Japanese War’ (together with ‘Life of Christ’) in Penang. In another advertisement a programme was mentioned: ‘1. Naval Battle at Port Arthur; 2. Battle of Liaoyang; 3. Fierce Battle of Mukden [20 February-10 March 1905]; 4. Surrender of Port Arthur; and scenes of all the other battles in the war, up-to-date.’ Bearing in mind that these films were exhibited around a month after the last battle of the War, and before the peace treaty was signed, the enthusiasm of the audience is noteworthy. Audiences filled the King Street Theatrical Hall with 2,000 people a night during its five-week run in the city, and they especially appreciated ‘[t]he battle scenes [which] created a sensation as usual’ and ‘kept the vast audience in a continual bubble of excitement’. Initially, the programme was divided in two sessions where the first one only included War films, such as The Attack on a Fortress, The Arrest and Execution of Spies, The Defence and Surrender of Port Arthur, Outpost Skirmishing, The

210 Advertisement, Straits Times, 18 July 1905, 1; Advertisement, Straits Times, 6 January 1906, 3.


212 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 8 July 1905, 5.

213 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 4 July 1905, 5.

214 ‘American Bioscope Co’, Straits Echo, 8 July 1905, 4; Notice, Straits Echo, 13 July 1905, 4; Notice, Straits Echo, 24 July 1905, 4; Notice, Straits Echo, 5 August 1905, 4.
Catastrophe to the Petropavlovsk [12 April 1904] and Fighting on the Yalu, and the second session consisted mostly of comedies. Later during their stay, the large number of War films during an exhibition decreased, but the War films still seemed to have been the highlight of the programme for the audience, who actively showed their emotions: ‘the audience applauded frequently – especially when pictures of battles in the Russo-Japanese war were thrown on the screen.’ There was a very large audience, who cheered frequently, especially when pictures of stirring battles in the Russo-Japanese war were thrown on the screen. Since these exhibitions took place after the War, I am confident in presuming that the cheering was for the winning side, the Japanese.

Before the American Bioscope left Penang, the Moving Pictures Exhibition with their Grand Kinetoscope started advertising ‘stirring events of the Russo-Japanese War’ at the New Theatrical Hall on Campbell Street, where they would exhibit films from the commencement of the War to the final battle. The only specific film mentioned in advertisements was Battle of the Yalu [30 April-1 May 1904], which was divided in four scenes and dispersed throughout the programme. In September 1905, the Cinematograph Company arrived in Penang where they were said to exhibit real films from the War, indicating, that there were many war reenactments in circulation. Management assured the audience that all films ‘were actually taken at the front under Generals Kuroki and Nogi’. This indicates that the cameramen who shot the film was embedded with the Japanese troops, which is further hinted at by calling the films ‘Japanese War Pictures’ in advertisements. Exhibited War films included: The Battle of Yalu, The Ambush, The Capture and Execution of Spies, The Attack on a Fortress, The Landing of Russian Prisoners, and A Review of Japanese Troops, and the programmes also in-

215 ‘American Bioscope Co’, Straits Echo, 8 July 1905, 4. Included in the second part of the programme were Masks and Faces, Up-to-date Wrestling, The Lovers and the Naughty Boys, Railway Collision, and scenes of the King and Queen returning from their trip on the Shamrock.
216 Notice, Straits Echo, 24 July 1905, 4. Also see, ‘American Bioscope Co’, Straits Echo, 8 July 1905, 4.
217 Notice, Straits Echo, 4 August 1905, 4.
218 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 4 August 1905, 5; Notice, Straits Echo, 4 August 1905, 4; Advertisement, Straits Echo, 14 August 1905, 4.
219 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 2 September 1905, 4.
220 ‘The Cinematograph Exhibition’, Straits Echo, 26 September 1905, 4. The War films were exhibited together with comic pictures, such as Boys stealing a Bird’s Nest, The Ladrones Nocturnos, and The Honeymoon at the Bottom of the Sea. The latter film was reportedly thirty minutes in length.
221 Advertisement, Straits Echo, 23 September 1905, 4. This also, partly, explains why the company at one instance was referred to as the Japanese Cinematograph (Notice, Straits Echo, 30 September 1905, 4).
cluded lantern slides from the War.\footnote{222} Again, before one film company had left Penang, the next one opened their exhibition. The Oriental Kinetograph, exhibited films for three weeks at Kimberley Street. Their programme consisted of *King Edward’s Coronation Procession*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Robinson Crusoe*, several scenes from Britain, many comic pictures, and Russo-Japanese War films. The War films were described as ‘most realistic and very exciting’, and included *The Battle of Chemulpo Bay*, *Cossacks Fearing Camp*, *A Japanese Ambush*, *The Return of Survivors*, *A Camp Taken*, *A Japanese Outpost on the Yalu*, *An Attack*, *The Capture* and *The Retreat*.\footnote{223}

The last two months of 1904, the Japanese promoter Watanabe Tomoyori exhibited films from the Russo-Japanese War in Bangkok. Scot Barmé imagines that these films had a significant impact on Siamese audiences as the films displayed ‘images of a “progressive” Asian nation defeating a European power in war and forcefully assuring its own independence’.\footnote{224} I have been unable to find any advertisements for Russo-Japanese War films in Bangkok until early 1906 when both the British Cinematograph and the Grand Cinematograph exhibited War films. The programme of 12-15 films at the Grand Cinematograph consisted of 3-4 films from the Russo-Japanese War, most of them labelled ‘Russo-Japanese War’, and including *Engineering Troops in Russian Army*, *A Fierce Battle Under the Forts of Port Arthur*, *Fighting on Land and Sea*, and *The Most Honorable Soldier in the Army of Japan*.\footnote{225} The same company (or another company calling itself the Grand Cinematograph) continued to the Federated Malay States. In July 1906, the Grand Cinematograph exhibited films on Eastern Road in Taiping, including Russo-Japanese War films.\footnote{226} The following month, the Grand Parisian Cinematograph exhibited films in Kuala Lumpur, where the Russo-Japanese War films were described as ‘a speciality’ and ‘the chief feature’ of the programme.\footnote{227} The War films were successful, and a few weeks later the London Chronograph had a programme with several scenes from the War, described as ‘though somewhat hackneyed from the point of view of the Euro-

\footnotesize
222 ‘The Cinematograph Show’, *Straits Echo*, 9 October 1905, 4. The comic pictures in the programme were the same as two weeks previously, with the addition of *Tricks with Eggs*.  
pean, are popular amongst the natives’. By the end of the year (1906), the London Chronograph was criticised for still exhibiting War films in Taiping: ‘We were first treated to a war picture of which most people are tired of.’ Despite this complaint, films from the Russo-Japanese War were still exhibited, particularly by the Japanese Cinematograph, in the region for years. In January 1907, War films, in this case imported from France, were included in the programme: *Dashing the wires – a trap* was described as ‘a Russo-Japanese war scene, [which] is the best we have seen on that popular subject.’ In February 1908, the Besan Cinematograph exhibited a programme in Ipoh including *The Storming of Port Arthur*. Finally, in April 1908 the Japanese Cinematograph in Bangkok once again featured films from the War, *The siege of Port Arthur and Surrender of Port Arthur*, and cleverly advertised them as ‘great historical pictures’. The same War films were exhibited by the Besan Cinematograph two weeks later in Taiping.

The shelf-life of and interest in the War films was thus long-lasting and solid. Films about the War continued to be exhibited by the Japanese Cinematograph in Singapore and Penang for years. Battle scenes that had been taken more than a year earlier were still exhibited and promoted. A review in the *Eastern Daily Mail* in June 1906 illustrates who the audience, as well as the reviewer, was supporting: ‘The funeral of Japanese heroes evoked loud applause. […] The series of views depicting Russian oppression nihilism was a most realistic portrayal of present conditions in that unfortunate country.’

The Russo-Japanese War underscored Japan’s role as a notable world power, which was mirrored in their effort in the cinema industry. With the Japanese Cinematograph adorned with Japanese flags, populations throughout Southeast Asia were reminded about Japan’s new role as an important power. The flag was thus not only a symbol of the Japanese Cinematograph, but a metonym for a new era where white European domination had been disrupted. The Japanese victory resulted in new aspirations for the colonised countries throughout the region, and with the exhibition of Russo-Japanese War films, Asian audiences throughout the region found an arena where they could articulate their anti-colonial and pan-Asian sentiments.

This chapter has examined the movement of films being presented as a technological novelty and spectacle to a focus on individual film and their marketing. Most exhibited films in Southeast Asia presented stories depicting...
life in Europe and the United States, and captured ideas prevalent in Western society. There was a risk of cementing the Eurocentric worldview of the coloniser, since mostly films from Europe and North America were exhibited. I have, moreover, assessed the reception and impact of two mediated and emblematic events, the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria and the Russo-Japanese War films. Films from the Diamond Jubilee were very anticipated in Singapore and the other British colonies in the region, as it had been an event that was celebrated by all inhabitants. The Diamond Jubilee hailed the British Empire, and visualised the colonial hegemony. Nevertheless, it ambiguously signalled a sense of transnational community and inclusiveness, albeit a hierarchical one with white rulers on the top. The Jubilee films were still being exhibited and advertised more than two years after the Diamond Jubilee took place. The Russo-Japanese War is an illustrative example of how the racial line in colonial societies was not a non-negotiable issue. With the Anglo-Japanese alliance, the British had illustrated that geo-political concerns were more important than ‘racial’ identity. Exhibition of films from the Russo-Japanese War in Singapore and neighbouring regions during a period of more than three years, where multi-ethnic audiences frequently cheered and applauded the progress of the Japanese, blurred the racial lines even further.
Concluding Remarks

In *Blurring the Colonial Binary* I have examined the intersection of entertainment and colonialism. I have attempted to recover and recreate a lost history of cinema in Southeast Asia as a significant cultural and social space. The double nature of cinema, as a source of bringing people closer as well as strengthening their separation, has been at the heart of this history. The dissertation has also demonstrated how cinema was gradually institutionalised, developing from travelling film exhibitions, tents and temporary buildings to permanent movie houses and film distributors such as Pathé Frères. By assessing how film exhibition and distribution changed over time, regarding audience demographics, exhibitions context, and meanings audiences derived from the films, we can gauge the effect cinema had on colonial societies in the region. When new technologies were introduced in Southeast Asia in the 1890s, the context was often exclusive and white, and as the technologies reached the Asian populations, the great Western inventions were juxtaposed against the amazement and bewilderment of the ‘natives’. Racial depictions and differences were in the forefront of reports. A decade later, cinematic venues negotiated segregated, colonial racial politics by creating a common social space where people from all ethnic and social backgrounds gathered on a daily basis during their leisurely hours.

Cultural history is mostly written from a national perspective. Here I have viewed cultural history and popular entertainment from a transnational perspective, and demonstrated the transnational elements of entertainment culture in Southeast Asia and how closely it was linked to colonial development. The dissertation can therefore be described as a transnational cultural history of turn-of-the-century Southeast Asia, where I have explored the historical connections between Southeast Asian countries from the period before the birth of cinema through its first dozen years. This study could have been written, focusing on a single country and the development of cinema within those borders. I, however, wanted to emphasise the interconnectedness of Southeast Asia, as well as the colonially constructed nature of national borders in the region. This study could also have been written, focusing on a single city and the development of cinema there. To some extent it has, as I have anchored much of the work on Singapore. Nevertheless, I wanted to highlight the movement of films, people, ships, goods, and amusements across oceans and transcending national borders. Furthermore,
research in early film distribution around the world is a largely neglected area, which I have attempted to address to some degree.

Imperial ambitions of Western powers, colonial discourse, trade networks, and technological development affected and determined the travel paths of early film exhibitors and other transnational travelling entertainment companies. As European colonialism expanded in Asia, European entertainment companies followed government officials, merchants, missionaries, and soldiers. Itinerant entertainment companies used the same communication and transportation networks as the expanding western colonial empires did. New opportunities for transnational movement appeared because of the Suez Canal, railway networks, and increased shipping lines throughout the Pacific and Indian Ocean. Film exhibitors, circuses, minstrel shows, magicians, theatres, and operas could easily travel between countries and continents. These amusement networks and circuits were transnational both in their content and their performers. Moreover, the period around the turn of the century experienced a hitherto unmatched multiplication of itinerant entertainment companies in Southeast Asia. In my research I have identified more than one hundred itinerant amusement companies, and an additional fifty itinerant film exhibitors, many of the latter unnamed, beyond being called a cinematograph exhibition or a biograph company.

Early distribution and movement of films in Southeast Asia followed a similar path and pattern as the spread of itinerant entertainment companies. Regarding the movement of film exhibitors from one country to the next, the information in this dissertation is incomplete, and hopefully future research can fill in the gaps. As early as 1897, there were several different travelling film exhibitors in Southeast Asia, and their routes intertwined, and their ownership changed, which makes it difficult to map the exact movement of different exhibitors. Such an endeavour will positively be much easier when more newspapers in the region are digitised. Six main trends were, however, discerned regarding the distribution of films and other amusements. First, the most common way to enter Southeast Asia was via India. Second, Singapore was the hub of the itinerant entertainment companies. Third, the Straits of Malacca and not the Straits of Sunda was the main entry point to the Malay Archipelago and Southeast Asia. Fourth, itinerant companies often travelled between India, Southeast Asia, and Japan and India. Fifth, the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Dutch East Indies were the most visited places in Southeast Asia. Sixth, steamships were used to a much larger extent than railways.

One way of colonising and affecting attitudes is through popular culture, film, and entertainment. Assessing the entertainment companies that toured Southeast Asia around the turn of the century gives an indication of the international, pre-dominantly Western, entertainment world which influenced the popular culture of the region. Early film history can, in that respect, be regarded as a competition between different technological manufacturers,
particularly in Europe and the United States. Although the battles on the ‘homefront’ were the most important, it is interesting to see how they extended to Asia. From a Eurocentric position, Southeast Asia was an imperial extension of the homeland, and a way to ‘pegging out claims for the future’. Distribution and exhibition of films in Southeast Asia can thus be viewed as an imperial cultural battleground where cinematographs, biographs, vitascopes, projectoscopes, and bioscopes fought for hegemony and profit. As the Japanese Cinematograph(s) started exhibiting Russo-Japanese War films throughout Southeast Asia, and gradually expanding its reach, the metonymic image is complete.

Imperial ideas were spread among ethnic groups and social classes in Singapore and the Malay States through government ordinances, schools, literature, newspapers, and public attitudes. These ideas were reproduced for audiences with the exhibition of films depicting the Diamond Jubilee Procession of Queen Victoria, the Anglo-Boer War, the Delhi Durbar, and the coronation of Kings and Queens in Europe. Cinema, as a tool for education and visual newspaper, also reproduced a Eurocentric worldview by disproportionately exhibiting images from Europe and North America, as illustrated by, for instance, Hale’s Tours. Britain had a vision of creating an inclusive Empire, where the inhabitants throughout the colonies felt that they were part of an imagined, transnational community, the worldwide British Empire. Yet, within this community there was a well-defined hierarchy with the British on top. This is the context within which one should assess the universal celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The events and the films therefrom demonstrate how images of inclusivity as well as racial hierarchy were simultaneously reproduced.

I have explored the relationship between travelling entertainment and creating empire, and assessed whether films and amusements functioned as reproducer of imperial ideas and tools of colonialism; if they created a sense of imagined community between coloniser and colonised; or if they were merely a source of entertainment for people. A pragmatic answer would be that films had all those effects, and, in addition, with Russo-Japanese War films in particular, films also contributed to an anti-colonial sentiment and to independence movements. The amusement world in Southeast Asia can in that respect also function as a proxy for on-going social struggles between ‘native’, Western, and other Asian forces within the prevalent colonial structure. This is, of course, a generalisation as within each group, such as Europeans, Chinese, and Malays, there was a very large diversity, and issues of class and gender were also in effect.

For decades, people of different backgrounds lived in ethnically-allotted geographical areas, without really meeting other groups during their leisurely hours. Many evening entertainments were held in exclusive, white-only social clubs. Circuses were, in essence, the only social space in Southeast Asia where coloniser and colonised could interact and experience the same
entertainment before cinema. The circuses were, however, only visiting the city for a few weeks every year, and the common social space did not occur on a daily basis. The process of creating a joint social space, and overcoming the colonial abyss was therefore gradual, and initially audiences included the more wealthy portions of the non-European population. This quickly changed with the advent of cinema. Evenings in the colonies developed into a social occasion where people from different strata of society could be in the same social space, albeit often stratified in different seating arrangements. One could therefore argue that the divisions were based more on socio-economic status, rather than race. Nevertheless, a sharp racial division existed. Europeans were, for instance, not allowed to sit in the cheaper seats, as it would not be befitting for their status.

It is significant to bear in mind that audiences at circuses and cinemas throughout Southeast Asia were predominantly Asian. Cinematic exhibitions originally followed the price and audience structure of other travelling entertainments. These exhibitions brought diverse audiences together to visit and view the same spectacle. Prices of admission tickets, however, quickly decreased, and went far below even the most inexpensive circus ticket. The cheapest ticket to a circus in Singapore was never below twenty-five cents, whereas cinematic exhibitions could be visited for less than ten cents. The question of pricing is closely related to issues concerning the demographics of audiences. Lower prices had the effect that people from different social and ethnic backgrounds gathered in the same social space to experience the same entertainment programme. By comparing the admission prices to salary levels and basic costs of living, I have argued that the tickets were widely affordable for manual labourers, rickshaw drivers, cooks, domestic servants, and other labourers.

Cinematic exhibitions in Southeast Asia had many simultaneous effects. The local elite managed to reach a hegemonic identification with the foreign population by enjoying the same entertainment sitting side by side with them, and it made the local hegemony more visible. These entertainment forms could also be used as a way of passifying the local audience, similar to the role of education. By giving the colonised certain rights and privileges, and allowing them to take part of previously exclusive performances, they were included in a racially biased imagined community. Issues of imagined communities and identities have been an undercurrent throughout this work. Using a pan-national approach has, however, naturally made the issue of national identity less pertinent. Singapore, in particular, was a very ethnically diverse city, and being in the same social space helped decreasing the distance between colonisers and colonised, as well as between different ethnic groups. Cinematic venues can be regarded as shared public spheres where a time-limited imagined community is formed. Considering that reading the same newspapers and novels can help form an imagined community among people who have never met face-to-face, and yet sense a horizontal
comraderie; then, being in the same social space and sharing each other’s leisure time can have similar effects, even if it only lasts for two hours every evening. It is not an issue of shared identities, but rather it is the construction of an artificial space where a form of imagined community is created for an hour or two.

In line with arguments made by Bernard Cohn as well as Edward Said, the British created a colonial knowledge hegemony by, for instance, classifying and categorizing, and defining other people through censuses. This amplified the imbalance of power relations. The census for Straits Settlements reflects the view of a segregated society, with people being divided into different ‘races’. Censuses divided the population into the following subsections: Europeans and Americans; Eurasians; Chinese; Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago; Tamils and other Natives of India; and Other Nationalities. The identities between coloniser and colonised were not fixed and binary, but rather intersecting. In the early twentieth century, the distance between coloniser and colonised started decreasing as many Asian people became increasingly wealthy, more educated, owners of film equipment and cinematic venues, started playing cricket, and adopted many other ‘Western’ traditions. As distances and distinctions decreased, other dividing lines were emphasised, such as skin colour. Binary divisions were also destabilised by the progress of Japanese people, and the many Eurasians in the region. Issues of gender, class, socioeconomic status, and to some extent religion further complicate racial hierarchies and binary divisions. Nevertheless, throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, we have seen many colonial binaries being presented, reproduced, and upheld by British officials and in local newspapers. We have also seen many similar colonial binaries being bridged, blurred, and broken.

A limitation of having a macro perspective is that many remarkable micro-histories within this narrative have not been discussed fully. Several different case studies, such as Charles Barney Hicks, Jane Harmston Love, Khurshed Baliwala, F. Dreyfus, S. Kassim, Ada Delroy, Carl Hertz, K. Harima, and Matsuo, have been intertwined in the story of the distribution and exhibition of early film in Southeast Asia. Many of these micro-narratives could be developed further. Moreover, to advance issues of distribution routes one can examine film advertisements in various newspapers throughout Southeast Asia. By establishing when and where a particular film was exhibited, one can attempt to recreate and visualise paths and patterns for individual films. Such an approach was part of my initial plans, but it proved to be more difficult than I imagined, as there were too many gaps. Local film histories in the region can also be examined by, for instance, exploring the geography of travelling film exhibitors and early movie houses in Singapore, Manila, Batavia (Jakarta), and other cities, determining where movie houses were located, how location affected pricing and clientele, and who owned the movie houses. One could delineate and map the spatial role of movie
houses in the urban landscape in terms of location and the tendency to cluster geographically, and assess the implications of these developments. New perspectives on the local history of cities can be examined by studying the demography of selected cities, assessing aspects such as city structure, and where different ethnic groups lived in the city.

I hope this work has provided a good orientation to the subject of cinema and colonialism in Southeast Asia, as well as a starting point for more discussion and research in this field. In that sense I am confident Blurring the Colonial Binaries has contributed to film history, Southeast Asian cultural history, as well as colonial history. More voices and new perspectives will hopefully gradually unearth new aspects of a largely forgotten history.
Bibliography

Archives:

**Indonesia:**
National Archives, Jakarta: Microfilm collection
National Library, Jakarta: Microfilm collection
Sinematek Indonesia, Jakarta: Newspaper clippings

**Malaysia:**
National Archives, Kuala Lumpur: Newspaper collection
National Library, Kuala Lumpur: Microfilm collection

**Philippines:**
National Archives, Manila: Microfilm collection
National Library, Manila: Microfilm collection
University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City: Microfilm collection

**Singapore:**
National Archives: Microfilm collection
National Library: Microfilm collection
*NewspaperSG*, Singapore’s National Library’s online resource of Singapore and Malaya newspapers. Available at: <newspapers.nl.sg>

**Thailand:**
National Archives, Bangkok: Microfilm collection
National Library, Bangkok: Microfilm collection

**United States:**
Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Microfilm collection.

**Vietnam:**
National Archives, Hanoi: Newspaper collection
National Library, Hanoi: Newspaper collection
Administrative Records:

Business Directories:
The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1906; containing also Directories of The Federated Malay States: Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang; Johore, Labuan, British North Borneo, Sarawak, Sumatra (East Coast), Western (Dutch) Borneo, Riau and Dependencies, Saigon and Siam. Singapore: Fraser & Neave, 1906.
British Malaya: Return of Foreign Imports and Exports, 1924-1927.
Straits Settlements: Return of Imports and Exports, 1924-1927.

Censuses:

Newspapers:

Straits Settlements (Singapore and Penang):
Eastern Daily Mail, Singapore, English, daily, 1905-1907.
Mid-day Herald, Singapore, English, daily, 1895-1896.
Pinang Gazette, Penang, English, daily, 1892-1896.
Straits-Chinese Herald (Surat Khabar Peranakan), Singapore, English and Malay, daily, 1894.
Straits Echo, Penang, English, daily, 1903-1907.
Straits Mail, Singapore, English, bi-weekly then daily, 1894-1895.
Straits Observer, Penang, English, bi-weekly, 1897.
Straits Times, Singapore, English, daily, 1890-1910.

Federated Malay States (Malaysia):
Times of Malaya, Ipoh, English, daily, 1904-1910.
Dutch East Indies (Indonesia):
Bintang Barat, Batavia, Malay, daily, 1897.
Bintang Batavia, Batavia, Malay, daily, 1905.
Bintang Soerabaia, Surabaya, daily, 1899-1903.
De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden, Surakarta/Solo, Dutch, four times a week, 1897.
De Sumatra Post, Medan, Dutch, daily, 1906.
Deli Courant, Medan, Dutch, tri-weekly, 1897-1906.
Makassarsche Courant, Makassar, Dutch, tri-weekly, 1897-1903.
Pembrita Betawi, Batavia, Malay, daily, 1903-1907.
Perniagaan, Batavia, Malay, daily, 1907.
Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, Surabaya, Dutch, daily, 1897-1901.
Soerabaija-Courant, Surabaya, Dutch, daily, 1896.
Thieme’s Nieu Advertentieblad, Surabaya, Dutch, daily, 1897.

Siam (Thailand):

French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos):
L’Avenir du Tonkin, Hanoi, French, daily, 1897-1907.
La France d’Asie, Saigon, French, bi-weekly, 1906.
Le Courrier d’Haiphong, Haiphong, French, daily, 1907-1908.

Philippines:
Ang Suga, Manila, Tagalog, daily, 1902.
Cablenews-American, Manila, English, daily, 1907-1908.
El Mercantil, Manila, Spanish, daily, 1903-1909.
El Progreso, Manila, Spanish, daily, 1900-1904.
El Tiempo, Iloilo, Spanish, daily, 1904-1908.
La Independencia, Manila, Spanish and Tagalog, daily, 1906-1907.
Libertas, Manila, Spanish, daily, 1901-1905.
Manila American, Manila, English, daily, 1901-1907.
Manila Freedom, Manila, English, daily, 1899-1903.
Vida Filipina, Manila, Spanish and Tagalog, daily, 1906-1907.

Burma (Myanmar):
Filmographies:


Books and Journals:


256


Christie, Ian. “‘The Captains and the Kings Depart’: Imperial Departure and Arrival in Early Cinema”. In Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, eds.


266


Ruppin, Dafna. ‘“Views from the Japanese-Russian War”: Re-titling Russo-Japanese War Film Programmes in the Netherlands and Netherlands Indies’. In Angel Quintana and Jordi Pons i Busquets, eds. *The Construc-

Ruppin, Dafna. “‘Waa…h!’ sounds rise from behind the screen”: Early Cinema Spaces and Multiple Spectatorships in Colonial Indonesia’, paper presented 20 June 2013 at NECS in Prague.


3. Therése Andersson, Beauty Box – Filmstjärnor och skönhetkultur i det tidiga 1900-talets Sverige (Beauty Box – Film Stars and Beauty Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Sweden) (Stockholm, 2006): 200 pp.


Orders for single volumes should be addressed to any international bookseller or directly to the distributor:
Stockholm University Library
SE-106 91 Stockholm
Web page: www.sub.su.se
E-mail: acta@sub.su.se
ACTA UNIVERSITATIS STOCKHOLMIENSIS

Corpus Troporum
Romanica Stockholmiensia
Stockholm Cinema Studies
Stockholm Fashion Studies
Stockholm Oriental Studies
Stockholm Slavic Studies
Stockholm Studies in Baltic Languages
Stockholm Studies in Classical Archaeology
Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion
Stockholm Studies in Economic History
Stockholm Studies in English
Stockholm Studies in Ethnology
Stockholm Studies in Film History
Stockholm Studies in History
Stockholm Studies in History of Ideas
Stockholm Studies in History of Literature
Stockholm Studies in Human Geography
Stockholm Studies in Modern Philology. N.S.
Stockholm Studies in Musicology
Stockholm Studies in Philosophy
Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature
Stockholm Studies in Scandinavian Philology. N.S.
Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, N.S.
Stockholm Studies in Sociology. N.S.
Stockholm University Demography Unit - Dissertation Series
Stockholmer Germanistische Forschungen
Studia Fennica Stockholmiensia
Studia Graeca Stockholmiensia. Series Neohellenica
Studia Juridica Stockholmiensia
Studia Latina Stockholmiensia