



Cinemas and film industry in Medan, Indonesia in the 1960s–1990s

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the dynamics of the growth of cinemas and the variety of films to provide entertainment for the community in Medan from the 1960s to the 1990s. This study employs a historical method consisting of four stages: heuristic, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. This research indicates that various government policies and the prevailing regime influenced the development of cinemas and the film industry. Various policies of the New Order government sought to boost the national film industry by implementing regulations on film imports, restrictions, surveillance, and censorship of films. Medan, as one of the metropolitan cities since the 1960s, had flourished with various forms of entertainment, especially the growth of cinemas and the film industry, which attracted the interest of city residents in expressing their need for entertainment. Cinema buildings that had existed since the Dutch colonial era were managed as places for the community to watch both national and foreign films, supplemented by the emergence of People's Entertainment Stages. Eventually, the glory of cinemas and the film industry in Medan began to decline in the 1990s due to the stagnant national film industry and the shift in urban community entertainment with the advent of television and video technology.

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Introduction

Cinemas, as a means of entertainment for urban communities, grew in tandem with the development of film production. The growth of film in Indonesia can be divided into several phases. Nugroho and Herlina (2015) identify the development of Indonesian film in six periods. First, the period from 1900 to 1930 was called the stage

of urban art. Second, the period from 1930 to 1950 saw the development of entertainment films amid the world economic depression. Third, the period from 1950 to 1970 was characterized by ideological tension. Fourth, the period from 1970 to 1985 was pseudo-globalism. Fifth, the period from 1985 to 1998 was a crisis amid globalization. Finally, the period from 1998 until now was the stage of democratic euphoria (Nugroho & Herlina, 2015).

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The introduction of cinema technology began with moving picture shows introduced in Batavia (now Jakarta) in the late 19th century, which subsequently spread to the Malayan Peninsula and reached Medan, East Sumatra. From then, the cinema industry began to flourish in Medan, from establishing show tents to constructing various city cinema buildings (Agustono et al., 2022). Before the development of cinema entertainment in Medan, various performances were already present, including theater, stage plays, and local entertainment. Stage plays, commonly called “*tonil*” or Royal Comedy or *Stambul*, were prevalent. Some performance groups that staged shows in Medan included Indian Ratu, Malaya Opera of Selangor, Malaya Opera of Johor, and Dardanella. These performances were typically held at Esplanade Field (To’wan Haria, 1992, pp. 46–47).

The cultural and entertainment development in Medan after independence was more connected with the region of Peninsular Malaysia than Java. Plomp (2012) states that the cultural life spread across Medan was connected within the dynamics of Malay culture, Peninsular Malaysia. As a major city in Sumatra, Medan is part of the Malay region’s trajectory, which includes the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, the coastal areas of Kalimantan, and Sumatra. This region serves as a center for cultural activities and artistic growth (Plomp, 2012). In addition, Medan had grown as the economic hub of Sumatra since the early 20th century. Since then, Medan has evolved into a modern city with a heterogeneous population. Agustono et al. (2022) explain that the growth of plantation economies influenced the development of cinemas and the film industry in Medan, the heterogeneity of the urban population, transportation networks, and the mobility of people and goods between East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Furthermore, cinemas and films were among the factors contributing to the modernization of Medan in the early 20th century (Agustono et al., 2022). The growth of entertainment in Medan found its dynamics after the national revolution, coinciding with the struggles of thought and ideology in the 1950s and 1960s.

Based on the background above, this article will discuss the dynamics of the growth of cinemas and the film industry, and to what extent they influenced the entertainment preferences of the community in Medan from the 1960s to the 1990s. This period was chosen as the study timeframe because cinemas and the film industry experienced significant success in Indonesian film history during this period. In addition, this study will focus on the start of the Soekarno era in the 1960s

to the end of the Soeharto era in the 1990s to demonstrate the changes in the dynamics of cinema entertainment and the film industry in Medan society under different ruling regimes. Before delving into this explanation, Medan’s residents’ entertainment situation and societal conditions leading up to the 1960s will be described.

Literature Review

Several studies on films and cinema in North Sumatra explain progress from different periods. To’wan Haria (1992) describes the dynamics of entertainment performances in North Sumatra, namely theater and film, over a long period from the arrival of Western influence until the Soeharto government. A more contemporary study regarding cinemas and films in Medan, North Sumatra was conducted by Ruppin (2015), Batubara (2021), and Agustono et al. (2022). Ruppin’s (2015) and Agustono’s (2022) studies focus on the period of Dutch colonialism when cinema as entertainment for urban communities became an alternative for the upper middle class and shaped the identity of colonial urban communities in the early 20th century. The research by Batubara (2021) explains the influence of cinema entertainment on the people of Medan city over a long period from the beginning of the 20th century to after independence. So far, there has been no specific research regarding the development of cinema and films in Medan from the end of the Soekarno to the Soeharto government. Since the Dutch colonial period, the development of movies and cinema has been influenced by various interests, including the variety and type of films, the situation of the audience, the government’s political policies, and the economy and market (Jauhari, 1992).

Following independence, cinema entertainment and the development of the film industry began to grow in line with the dynamics and national political situation. According to Khrisna Sen (1994), the political situation of the regime influenced the sustainability and dynamics of the Indonesian national film industry. Several policies related to filmmaking were implemented by the ruling regime, including film censorship or editing, subsidies, distribution supervision, and regulations on the importation of foreign films (Sen, 1994). This continued until the onset of the dark age of the national film industry in the late 1990s. Following the reform era of 1998, a new direction in the politics and culture of film in Indonesia strengthened the identity ingrained in the minds of the Indonesian people (Heryanto, 2018).

Methodology

This study employs a historical method comprising four stages. The stages of the historical method are as follows:

1. Heuristic: This involved the collection of historical sources, including archives, documents, government regulations, decrees, reports from the central statistical agency (such as cinema statistics in Medan), and newspapers from the relevant period. These sources were obtained from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia and the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta.

2. Source Criticism: Source criticism involves external and internal critique processes. External critique consisted of assessing the collected sources' authenticity and credibility, while internal critique involved critiquing the sources to determine their reliability as historical facts.

3. Interpretation: This stage involves analyzing the historical facts gathered during the heuristic and source criticism stages to construct a historical narrative.

4. Historiography: Historiography encompasses the process of writing and constructing history based on the interpreted historical narrative.

Results and Discussion

Urban Entertainment in Medan

As the introduction explains, Medan has evolved into a modern city with public facilities since the early 20th century. Being a modern city, Medan massively improved infrastructure and public facilities, especially after it was designated as the administrative center of the Dutch colonial government, serving as the capital of the East Sumatra Residency (Agustono et al., 2021). Being the administrative center of the Dutch colonial government on Sumatra Island, Medan experienced economic growth and attracted public attention within the Dutch East Indies and the Malay Peninsula. This relationship was not limited to economic ties but extended to cultural and entertainment exchanges between Medan and cities in the Malay Peninsula and Singapore. This relationship was supported by maritime and transportation networks between East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula (Ruppin, 2015).

Transportation networks and human mobility supported the economic growth in Medan, East Sumatra, and the Malay Peninsula, accelerating the spread of entertainment favored by the society. Medan burgeoned as a modern city due to economic development and modernization in the early 20th century. Various forms of entertainment, both traditional and modern, flourished in this city. Initially, Esplanade Field served as a bustling center where tents were erected to showcase films and other spectacles. From the 1910s onwards, permanent buildings were constructed, managed by cinema entrepreneurs, and utilized by the government for various meetings. The city government also generated revenue through entertainment taxes and building rentals (Agustono et al., 2022).

The glittering entertainment scene reflects the modernity of Medan's urban society. One area of the city that epitomizes this was Kesawan in the early 20th century. The Kesawan business district has showcased the modernity of Medan's inhabitants since colonial times. Cafes, shops, and cinemas in the area have been common since the early 20th century. The glamorous lifestyle of the city's residents was evident from both men and women frequenting cinemas and Bangsawan Opera performances in Medan. The cinemas in this area included Empire Bioskop, Oranje Bioskop, Royal Bioskop, and Deli Bioskop. Through the movie screens and cinemas, the people of Medan absorbed the popular culture of urban Europe and America (Suryadi, 2019).

Entertainment performances gradually declined in Medan entering the 1940s. When Japan militarily occupied the Dutch East Indies in 1942, it altered the conditions in this region, including in Medan. The Japanese military occupation isolated the territories under its control. On March 13, 1942, Japanese military forces entered Medan to take over power from the previous administration, namely, the Dutch. Japan's ambitions in the Pacific War sought to exploit the economic resources in East Sumatra for wartime needs (Agustono & Wargadalem, 2022). In addition, the anti-Western (Dutch, British, and American) propaganda policies of the Japanese occupation regulated entertainment performances according to Japanese interests and propaganda. This regulation was carried out by organizing artists into an organization called *Bunka Ka*. At that time, cinema buildings were used as venues for drama and music performances, especially Japanese song performances. The themes of the dramas and Japanese songs performed undoubtedly supported Japanese propaganda. Popular Japanese songs in Medan at that time included Teiho Kosinkoku, Gukanmaci, Wakare Dume, Sakura, and Sinano Yoru (Bangun et al., 1977, pp. 152–155).

One of the anti-Western policies implemented by the Japanese military government was the prohibition of screening Western films in city cinemas. Japanese propaganda policies mandated screening Japanese films containing the spirit of work and the refinement of Japanese culture. In addition, Japan also screened Indonesian films. However, the situation of the Japanese occupation, filled with propaganda and its interests, focused on theater performances and music (orchestras). This variety of entertainment was presented to the city's residents throughout the Japanese occupation from 1943 to 1945. These performances targeted the urban population, which was quite sizable at that time (Bangun et al., 1977, pp. 116–117).

Before the War of Independence, the population of Medan was estimated to be less than 80,000 inhabitants. When Japan occupied this territory, data on Medan's population were unavailable. After independence, the urban population increased sixfold to nearly half a million (Plomp, 2012). The factors contributing to the increase in the population of Medan included the expansion of the city's territory after it was designated as Kotapraja Medan in 1950. In addition to this factor, the migration of people from the surrounding areas of Medan also contributed to the increase in the city's population at that time. Since then, the urban population has continued to increase, reaching 635,562 in 1971. From 1980, the population of Medan increased to over one million, precisely 1,378,953. In 1990, it experienced further growth, totaling 1,730,752 inhabitants. The following is a table depicting Medan's population growth from the Dutch colonial era until the New Order era of Indonesia in 1990.

Table 1 Population in Medan, 1905–1990

Years	Populations
1905	13,250
1912	26,980
1920	45,248
1930	74,976
1961	479,098
1971	635,562
1980	1,378,953
1990	1,730,752

Source: Sumawinata (1962); Abdulmadjid (1972); Abdulmadjid (1981); Rasjid (1991); Hamdani (2012).

The increase in Medan's post-independence population also influenced the city's social conditions. After the revolutionary period, the city was filled with vagrants and former *romusha* (forced laborers during the Japanese occupation) who often roamed the streets. These individuals, along with independence fighters, were not

integrated into society. In addition, high urbanization rates and a generation of illiterate youth due to a lack of proper education during the war for independence further contributed to the city's population growth. After this war for independence, various public facilities in the city could not meet the needs of the growing urban population. Schools, libraries, streets, transportation, markets, and hospitals could not fulfill the city's needs (Plomp, 2012, p. 374). However, the city's deteriorating social and economic conditions did not hinder Medan's growth of dynamic cultural life. New forms of visual culture such as cinema and cartoons emerged, attracting widespread public interest. According to Plomp (2012), the increasing interest of the city's public in watching movies was attributed to the high illiteracy rate among urban residents at that time (Plomp, 2012, p. 376).

The situation and conditions of urban society influence the enthusiasm for entertainment chosen by city residents. On one hand, rapid urban population growth requires public space and alternative entertainment for urban communities. Medan, which had developed infrastructure and city facilities since the early 20th century, continued to grow as one of Indonesia's largest cities. The increase in the urban population from the 1960s to the 1990s, which was fourfold, indicates rapid urban growth. In addition, the dynamic political situation and fluctuating economy in the 1960s also influenced the types of entertainment and spectacles favored by urban society at that time.

As mentioned, the growth of the city and the increasing population necessitate public spaces for urban community entertainment. Among the available public spaces in the city were Merdeka Square, Heroes Cemetery Park, W.R. Supratman Park, Sri Deli Park, and Scout Park. In addition, in the 1960s, Margasatwa Park was constructed in Kampung Baru. Apart from these public spaces built by the city government, 15 cinemas in Medan already provided entertainment venues for the residents before the 1960s (Anonymous, 1969, p. 912).

After independence and during the revolutionary period, from the 1950s to the 1960s, the people of Medan were presented with various entertainment options to be enjoyed by city residents. Among these were *ronggeng* or *joget* (traditional dance) and *Jaran Kepang* (a traditional Javanese dance involving a horse figure). *Ronggeng* or *joget* entertainment was accompanied by Malay music, while *Jaran Kepang* was popular on the outskirts of the city, particularly in the plantation areas of Medan. These entertainments often coincided with night market performances that were frequently held in large fields

in Medan (Ratna, 2006). Despite the emergence of various forms of entertainment for the enjoyment of city residents, the presence of cinemas and film screenings began to be favored by certain segments of the urban population, which was in line with technological advancements and changes in government policies at that time.

The Growth of Cinemas

Since the early 20th century, cinemas in Medan have grown as a form of urban entertainment, reflecting modernity, city infrastructure development, and the diversity of its population. The economy of plantations and mining industries in East Sumatra, as an enclave of Dutch colonial economic development in the 20th century, contributed to the modernization of the city and the development of modern entertainment, namely, film and cinemas (Agustono et al., 2022). Private cinema entrepreneurs constructed and managed cinema buildings, providing profits and taxes to the city government.

After Indonesia's independence, especially following the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, cinema buildings and companies shifted to be managed by private entrepreneurs or municipal governments. Broadly speaking, cinema businesses served as venues for film screenings targeted at all segments of society. These cinema businesses were categorized into three types: traveling cinemas, special cinemas, and regular cinemas. Traveling cinemas were those without permanent buildings for film screenings. Special cinemas were those that screened films for specific groups of audiences, such as employees of particular institutions. Lastly, regular cinemas were commercial cinemas with buildings that screened films for the general public (Anonymous, 1983).

The development of cinemas was classified into several categories, such as classes A, B, and C. Similar to the colonial era under Dutch rule, cinemas in Medan after independence were also classified into different classes. This classification followed the pattern of the Komedi Stamboel performances during the colonial period. During the Dutch colonial era, cinemas were divided into special classes for Europeans, classes I, II, and III, aimed at attracting more native audiences. This strategy was related to the differentiation of ticket prices, which continued until the 1990s. In addition to classification based on class and ticket prices, some cinemas exclusively screened certain types of films, such as Western films, Chinese films, Indian films, and Indonesian films (Pasaribu et al., 2017, p. 27).

In 1964, data indicated that North Sumatra Province had the most cinemas on the island of Sumatra. There was a total of 76 cinemas in North Sumatra. Among these, cinemas classified as Class A numbered 8 cinemas, Class B numbered 10 cinemas, Class B II numbered 9 cinemas, and Class C numbered 48 cinemas (NARI, 2013). Out of the total of 76 cinemas in North Sumatra, there were 16 cinemas in Medan. This number represented the highest count compared to other regions in North Sumatra. The following is a table of cinemas in Medan in 1964.

The table above illustrates the cinemas in Medan classified based on the rankings A, B, and B II. In Medan, there were 8 cinemas classified as ranking A, namely, Ria, Raya, Astanaria, Purnama, Megaria, Surya, Medan, and Deli. There was only one cinema classified as ranking B, which was Bioskop Riang. Furthermore, there were 7 cinemas classified as B II, namely, Asia, Karya, Djaya, Horas, Minang, Nusantara, and Rentjong. Of the 16 cinemas in Medan, 3 companies were managing them. They were P.N. Ria Concern managing 3 cinemas, N.V. Sin Kok Tai managing 3 cinemas, and PT. O.D.B. (Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope) managing 6 cinemas (NARI, 2013).

The government-owned company managing cinemas was P.N. Ria Concern (Regional Company of North Sumatra-PDSU "Entertainment"). This Regional Company was located at Jalan Letjend Harjono No. 13, Medan. In 1969, the company was led by AKBP I.M. Marpaung as the Chief Executive Officer, Captain K. Barus as the Director of Tata Arta (Finance), and John Panggabean as the Director of Tata Niaga (Marketing). Throughout North Sumatra, this company managed 10 cinema units located in cities such as Medan, Pematang Siantar, Tebing Tinggi, Binjai, Berastagi, and Kalandjaja (Anonymous, 1969, p. 21).

This company managed the Ria Cinema Unit, Riang Cinema Unit, and Raya Cinema Unit in Medan. In addition, there was also a Mobile Cinema Unit within the Ria Cinema Unit. Each cinema business unit was led by a director. In 1969, the Ria Cinema was led by Director Das Tagor Lubis, the Riang Cinema was led by Director Sjahrial Bustaman, and the Raya Cinema was led by Director A. Manan Effendi (Anonymous, 1969, pp. 675–677). The government's cinema business development not only utilized cinema buildings for film screenings but also leased them as meeting venues, for example, the Raya Cinema Building in Medan was leased to the Medan City Government. The revenue from these rental fees was utilized for building repairs, renovations, and replacement of equipment inside the cinema rooms (Anonymous, 1969, pp. 675–677).

In addition to cinemas managed by regional companies, there were cinemas managed by private entities, as indicated in [Table 2](#). The management of cinema buildings was not only used for film screenings but also as a means of entertainment for the community. Generally, venues for watching films or performances are divided into two categories: cinema buildings and People's Entertainment Stages (PHR). The differences between cinema buildings and People's Entertainment Stages can be seen in seating facilities, security levels, and other supporting facilities such as parking areas. The management of cinema buildings typically offers better facilities compared to PHRs. In addition, cinema buildings were usually located in the city center or areas close to the city center, while People's Entertainment Stages were typically situated on the city's outskirts.

Table 2 Cinemas in Medan, 1964

Cinemas	Company Managing Cinemas	Class
Ria	PN. Ria Concern (PDSU)	A
Raya	PN. Ria Concern (PDSU)	A
Riang	PN. Ria Concern (PDSU)	B
Astanaria	Unknown	A
Purnama	Unknown	A
Megaria	Unknown	A
Asia	Unknown	B II
Karya	NV. Sin Kok Tai	B II
Djaya	NV. Sin Kok Tai	B II
Surya	NV. Sin Kok Tai	A
Medan	PT. Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope (ODB)	A
Deli	PT. Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope (ODB)	A
Horas	PT. Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope (ODB)	B II
Minang	PT. Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope (ODB)	B II
Nusantara	PT. Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope (ODB)	B II
Rentjong	PT. Oscar Deli of Medan Bioscope (ODB)	B II

Source: NARI (2013)



Figure 1 Astanaria Cinema in Medan, 1960

In addition to cinemas' physical buildings, comfortable seating became a concern for the audience when watching movies. By the late 1970s, the classification of cinema seating was still applicable. The seating in cinemas was divided into three classes or tiers. First, the balcony class or class A, located at the top, had the best facilities and comfort. Second, the middle class, or class B, seating for the audience was situated in the middle directly below the balcony class. Third, the goat (kambing) class, seating was located at the bottom and very close to the cinema screen. At the Astanaria Cinema from 1977 to 1979, to attract an audience, the cinema management implemented a policy of equalizing ticket prices for every cinema class every Saturday. The affordable ticket prices made crowded audiences flock to the Astanaria Cinema every Saturday.

Unlike cinema buildings with audience classes, the People's Entertainment Stage only provided long wooden benches without backrests or only wooden backrests as seating for the audience. Both movie-watching venues, whether urban cinemas or People's Entertainment Stages, continued to compete to attract moviegoers.

The 1980s marked the heyday of cinemas in Medan, specifically and generally in North Sumatra. In 1983, the number of cinema buildings in Medan ranked second highest after West Java Province. This region's social and economic development became one of the supporting factors for this growth. The highest increase in the number of cinemas occurred in 1987, with 57 cinemas and People's Entertainment Stages operating in Medan. From these 57 cinemas and People's Entertainment Stages, 36,590 seats were available. To see the seating capacity and the growth of the number of cinemas in Medan from 1985 to 1990, refer to [Table 3](#) below.

Table 3 Seating capacity of cinemas in Medan, 1985–1990

Years	Cinemas	Seating Capacity
1985	51	33.563
1986	54	34.344
1987	57	36.490
1988	54	32.008
1989	54	32.008
1990	55	34.870

Source: Anonymous (1992)

The number of cinemas in Medan continued to increase from the 1960s to the 1980s. In 1983, the number of cinemas in Medan totaled 54, scattered throughout the city center and its outskirts. According to cinema statistics in North Sumatra, there were several cinemas in Medan with more than 1000 seats. Cinemas with such seating capacities included Astanaria Cinema with 1000 seats,

Olympia Theater with 1057 seats, Juwita Theater with 1104 seats, Ria Cinema with 1028 seats, and Cathay Cinema with 1050 seats (Anonymous, 1984).

Competition between cinemas and People's Entertainment Stages is not only related to the facilities, comfort, and security available in these two types of movie-watching venues. The type of films screened also affected the audience's interest. Premieres of films considered to be Box Office hits were always shown in cinemas, leading urban residents to prefer cinemas over People's Entertainment Stages. This situation continued until the 1990s, marking a decline for cinemas and the national film industry.

In the early 1990s, several cinemas in Medan began to transform and consolidate into one building where other economic activities also took place. The emergence of plazas and shopping centers resulted in a shift in the exclusivity of cinemas screening movies. This shift was also driven by shifts in urban entertainment preferences and technological advancements, such as the rise of video games and the widespread availability of television.

Film and Community Entertainment

The public's interest in watching movies was influenced by several factors, including the community's income level, ticket prices, types of films, and residential areas. Urban residents typically had higher incomes than rural residents, leading to a higher number of cinema-goers in cities than districts in North Sumatra (Anonymous, 1984). In addition, the variety and diversity of films shown in urban cinemas, especially in Medan, also increased public interest in cinema. A wide range of foreign films from America, Hong Kong, India, Japan, and Europe provided many options for audiences when watching movies.

The influx of foreign films was due to the central government's policy of opening up film imports to boost national film production. This situation has been ongoing since the recognition of sovereignty in 1949. During the Second Cultural Congress in 1952 in Medan, a filmmaker from North Sumatra, Bachtiar Siagian, stated that cinemas tended to screen more American films. This was related to the presence of the American Motion Picture Association of Indonesia (AMPAI), which monopolized the business and brought American films into Indonesian cinemas. This condition continued until the cessation of film imports from America, related to political changes from liberal democracy to guided democracy and the strengthening of ideological and cultural conflicts post-1960 (Ardanareswari, 2018).

During the political crisis of the 1960s, many cinema buildings were taken over for traditional theatrical performances, such as *Ketoprak* and *Ludruk*, by left-wing organizations like Lekra and Sarbufis. In 1967, to reactivate cinema buildings, the government decided to import as many foreign films as possible. Not only did they import American films, but films from several countries also began to fill Indonesian cinemas, including those from England, Italy, Hong Kong, India, and Japan (Ardanareswari, 2018). The following is the number of imported films into Indonesia from 1967 to 1972.

Table 4 Number of imported films into Indonesia, 1967–1972

Years	Film Imports
1967	377
1968	459
1969	784
1970	737
1971	759
1972	407

Source: Jauhari (1992, p. 71)

These foreign films were imported into Indonesia to boost national film production. This was driven by the policy of Dana SK 71 issued on December 15, 1967. This policy aimed to collect taxes on imported films to be channeled into the development and production of national films. In addition to government intervention through the Department of Information, the National Film Council was also established to control and oversee the development of national film production (Ardanareswari, 2018). Moreover, the distribution of films, both imported and domestic, was carried out by the Film and Cinema Association, film importers and distributors, and the Department of Information.

The journey of a film from distribution to screening in cinemas involves a lengthy process. The distribution of national and imported films usually went through the Regional Film Distribution Company (Darfida) and the Association of All Indonesian Cinemas (GPBSI) after receiving authorization from the Ministry of Information. Once the government allowed the circulation of imported films, the Regional Film Distribution Company was obliged to distribute the imported films according to the class and category of cinemas. First, imported films could be distributed to class A, then to lower classes such as B and C, and finally to the People's Entertainment Stage.

The trend of the presence of imported films, which were favored by the public for cinema viewing, occurred in Medan. In 1982, the audience for films including Hong Kong films numbered 16,622 people,

American films numbered 10,880 people, Indian films numbered 11,233 people, followed by Indonesian films with 9,937 people, Italian films with 1,549 people, and other films with 2,611 people. In 1983, the audience for films including American films numbered 15,916 people, Hong Kong films numbered 15,095 people, Indonesian films numbered 12,443 people, Indian films numbered 9,281 people, Italian films numbered 1,749 people, Japanese films numbered 953 people, English films numbered 189 people, and other films numbered 1,631 people (Anonymous, 1983; Anonymous, 1984). These data indicate an increase in the number of audiences for American films and Indonesian films from 1982 to 1983.

Ticket sales at cinemas were also part of the management of city cinemas. Ticket sales provided revenue for the city government derived from taxes (fees) paid by cinema-goers. From the 1950s to the 1960s, this revenue contributed at least one-third of the total revenue budget for the city of Medan (Plomp, 2012). Cinema buildings owned by local governments were managed by P.N. Ria Concern (Regional Company of North Sumatra-PDSU "Entertainment"). For comparison, in 1966, the revenue of the North Sumatra province from cinema operations amounted to Rp. 3,690,000. A year later, in 1967, there was a massive increase in revenue amounting to Rp. 16,454,000 (Anonymous, 1969, p. 675).

Table 5 Number of cinema-goers and cinema ticket prices in Medan, 1981–1983

Years	Cinemas	Average per month		
		Cinema-goers	Ticket Prices	Income
1981	43	5.421	790	Rp. 4,285,000
1982	51	4.404	893	Rp. 3,934,000
1983	54	4.765	1030	Rp. 4,907,000

Source: Anonymous (1983)

The cinema ticket prices in Medan were relatively high compared to cinema ticket prices in other cities or districts in North Sumatra. In 1982, the average ticket price in Medan was the highest in North Sumatra at Rp893. Meanwhile, the cheapest average ticket price was in Langkat, which was Rp264. In 1983, Medan's average cinema ticket price remained the highest in North Sumatra at Rp1,030. The cheapest average ticket price was in Langkat at Rp209 (Anonymous, 1984). The difference in average ticket prices was influenced by the urban and rural situations in North Sumatra. Medan, as the administrative center and economic hub of North Sumatra, has an impact on cinema activities.

Statistical data show that, generally, urban areas like Medan could attract an average of 5,000 people to watch movies every month. Meanwhile, rural areas, predominantly villages, could only attract an average of fewer than 4,000 people to watch movies (Anonymous, 1984). This situation also affected the cinema ticket prices, where in urban areas, the average was above Rp500, while in rural areas, the average was below Rp400.

The high cinema ticket prices in Medan did not reduce the interest of city dwellers in watching movies. Besides the variety of films shown and the abundance of cinemas in the city, the frequency of film screenings, averaging 105.3 per month, indicated that 3 to 4 films are screened in cinemas daily (Anonymous, 1984). The relatively stable film screenings in cinemas in the 1980s also indicated the high interest of urban residents in watching movies.

Conclusion

The history of cinemas and filmmaking in Medan exhibits characteristics that were not significantly different from the situation during the Dutch colonial period. Like in other regions of Indonesia, the development of cinemas and filmmaking in Medan was influenced by various government policies and the prevailing regime. Policies such as subsidies, film censorship, and the classification and categorization of cinemas were implemented to attract the population's interest in watching movies in cinemas.

As one of the metropolitan cities since the 1960s, Medan grew with various entertainment options, particularly the development of cinemas and filmmaking that attracted the interest of urban residents to fulfill their entertainment needs. The presence of cinemas, with all its dynamics, became one of the entertainment options for the people of Medan. The heyday of cinemas in Medan in the 1980s can be seen from the numerous cinema buildings operating and screening various films, including those from America, Hong Kong, India, and Indonesia. However, cinemas and filmmaking in Medan experienced a decline with the rise of video game technology and television in the 1990s.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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