

The Identity of Indonesian Cinema in the Collection of Film Archive Sinematek Indonesia 1975–1995

Muhammad Rivai Riza¹, I Wayan Adnyana², I Wayan Setem³, I Made Bayu Pramana⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Institut Seni Indonesia Bali

ABSTRACT: This article is an attempt to trace the identity of Indonesian cinema based on the collection of Sinematek Indonesia (SI), a film archive in Indonesia. Especially from 1975, from the establishment of the organization, to the year of 1995. Based on a collection list from the archive of SI itself, periodization was divided into films released in the pre-independence era (before 1945), in the Sukarno era (1945–1965), and in the New Order era (1966–1995). Sample films from the collection were made to be analyzed. Preliminary findings through those periodization identify several traces of identity in the SI's collection as an archival institution: a) the traces and influence of performing arts—both traditional and modern—in Indonesian films; b) the legacy of film production as a propaganda tool during the colonial era; c) the dominance of male film directors; d) the dichotomy of film as art and commodity.

KEYWORDS: indonesian cinema, indonesian film, national cinema, film archive, archive collection, sinematek indonesia

I. INTRODUCTION

Apart from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI) as Indonesia's national archival institution—which is a legacy of the colonial era—and focuses on collecting and managing state administration archives, Indonesia also has a special archival institution for film mediums. Specifically, a collection of Indonesian feature films. This institution is the Sinematek Indonesia (SI), a continuation of an initiative by director and writer Misbach Yusa Biran and several of his colleagues in the film industry at that time, such as Asrul Sani and S. M. Ardan, since becoming part of the teaching staff at the Jakarta Arts Education Institute (LPKJ)—now the Jakarta Arts Institute (IKJ)—around 1972. Then, it was officially established in 1975 and received support for its establishment from Ali Sadikin, the Governor of DKI Jakarta at that time (1966–1977), through the DKI Jakarta Provincial Government. The establishment of SI not only marked the establishment of a film archiving institution in Jakarta or even in Indonesia, but also the first of its kind in Southeast Asia.

Film archiving can be an asset for reading film historiography, including Indonesian films—as a multidimensional art form that encompasses economic, aesthetic, cultural identity, and state policy aspects. The establishment of the SI as film archive in 1975 was an effort that signified the collective awareness of this nation that film is a medium that has become part of Indonesian history, that film is a work of art that reflects the history, thoughts, and cultural wealth of the Indonesian people.

In archival study itself, there is a process known as appraisal, which can determine the historical narrative that will be passed down from generation to generation and even become part of an identity (Cook, 2011). Although this process is identical to the retention stage—which determines which records are destroyed or stored—it often takes place from the acquisition stage onwards. The same can be said in the context of film archiving. Film archiving institutions generally also involve a selection process to determine their collections. The selection process is an intellectual process involving research and assessment that determines the ownership of the collection (Edmondson, 2016). Film archiving institutions usually have their own collection policies.

The period from 1975 to 1995 is interesting to observe, not only because 1975 was the year SI was founded, but also because 1975 was an important turning point for the Indonesian people, who in the middle of the previous decade had experienced a socio-political crisis that led to the fall of President Sukarno. The political crisis of 1965 also had a strong impact on the cultural sphere, particularly popular arts such as film. The dynamics in the film industry occurred in the economic sphere because film was a popular entertainment that was an important part of society, as well as in the cultural-political arena, which was marked by political influences that attempted to shape the identity of Indonesian film with ideological influences.

As such, cultural development in Indonesia, particularly in Jakarta, strives to present a more open face, free from political influences, and to propose new perspectives that are more modern and open. An important moment was the government's support for the establishment of a cultural center in the Cikini area: the inauguration of the Taman Ismail Marzuki arts complex in 1969, which reflected a strategic approach to cultural management that involved all groups. Therefore, 1975 was the first peak of the New

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Order government's success under Suharto, which made culture an important determinant of development stability. The inauguration of SI as part of the Film Center supported by the Jakarta Capital City government was a recognition of the existence of national cinema, a field which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, is a constellation of institutions that form a cultural field.

Based on the above, this article seeks to explore and examine the identity of Indonesian cinema based on the collection compiled by SI as a film archiving institution, especially during the period 1975–1995.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative descriptive studies aim to describe and illustrate existing phenomena, both natural and man-made, with a greater focus on characteristics, qualities, and interrelationships between activities (Sukmadinata, 2011). This type was chosen because it was in line with the research needs, both to describe the collection compiled in SI for the period 1975–1995 and to analyze the construction of Indonesian national cinema identity from the sample film collection.

The locus of this research is SI, the film archiving institution that was officially established in October 1975 in Jakarta. Physically, SI currently occupies several sections of the H. Usmar Ismail Film Center Foundation (PPHUI) building, located at Jl. H. R. Rasuna Said Kav. C-22, Karet Kuningan, Setiabudi, South Jakarta, DKI Jakarta. SI consists of a) a film vault area in the basement, which is used to store and maintain the film collection, especially celluloid films; b) an operational office area in the fourth floor; and c) a library area in the fifth floor.

A series of data collection techniques were carried out, consisting of literature studies and documentation and archive studies to collect relevant data. Data collection techniques were also carried out using purposive sampling techniques to determine samples based on relevant considerations. The film collection that will be the object of study is a collection of Indonesian films curated by SI during the period 1975–1995, which are generally Indonesian films produced between 1950 and 1992.

III. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Efforts to examine the identity of Indonesian cinema in the SI collection as a film archiving institution were carried out by tracing the documentation and archives contained in the SI regarding the inventory list or list of film collections available at the SI. During this search, several inventory lists were found regarding the films collected by the SI, regardless of their physical condition. From several of these film collection inventory lists, one document dated February 23, 1983, and titled “BAHAN UNTUK SERAH TERIMA DARI SDR. SLAMAT SIAHAAN PADA TEAM” (“MATERIALS FOR HANDOVER FROM MR. SLAMAT SIAHAAN TO THE TEAM”), included information about the status of film acquisition and reel length in feet. Although not all of the information is complete, this document is a significant archive that is quite representative of the collection process carried out by SI, particularly in the period from 1975 to 1995.

Table 1. Categorization of SI Collection List as of February 23, 1983

Type of Content	Type of Film Gauge	Type of Film Copy	Type of Color
Feature	35mm	Negative	B/W
Documentary	16mm	Release Copy	Color

Source: by Researcher (2024) based on archive of Sinematek Indonesia's collection (1983)

Based on this list, it can be identified that SI also collected several films categorized as documentaries, which can show part of the history of film production in Indonesia to record events or news. Among others, there are several Gelora Indonesia collection series which are PPFN production series. As for narrative films, they can be periodized by sorting them based on their production period: the pre-independence era (before 1945), the Sukarno era (1945–1965), and the New Order era (1965–1998). The following are samples of feature films from the SI collection that illustrate Indonesian film production in each period.

Table 2. Samples of Indonesian Film in SI Collection 1975–1983 Periodization

Periode	Title	Director	Release Year	Collection Year
< 1945	See You Tie Pat Kai (Siluman Babi Kawin)	The Teng Chun	1935	1977
	Gagak Hitam	Wong Bersaudara	1939	1977
	Tengkorak Hidoep	Tan Tjoei Hock	1941	1976
1945–1965	Darah dan Doa	Usmar Ismail	1950	1981

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	Tengkorak Hidoep	Tan Tjoei Hock	1941	1976
	Inspektur Rachman	Nawi Ismail	1950	1977
	Tjambuk Api	D. Djajakusuma	1958	1981
1965–1983	Operasi X	Misbach Yusa Biran	1968	1972
	Wadjah Seorang Laki-Laki	Teguh Karya	1971	1979
	Si Mamad	Sjuman Djaya	1973	1980
	Suci Sang Primadona	Arifin C. Noer	1977	1980

Source: by Researcher (2024) based on archive of Sinematek Indonesia's collection (1983)

The above samples are only a small part of the collection recorded in the February 23, 1983 list. A single film title may be available in different film gauges and types of copy, and may have been acquired in different years. Patterns can be identified in the sources of film collection, ranging from independent purchases, deposits by production companies (such as Perfini), donation from the Jakarta Arts Council (DKJ), and as well as from the Indonesian Film Festival (FFI).

Based on these samples, the films released before independence in 1945 that were collected by SI were films made by Chinese directors, even though they involved Indonesian actors. *See You Tie Pat Kai* (*Siluman Babi Kawin*)—which is listed in the 1926–2005 Indonesian Film Catalog (KFI) (Kristanto, 2007) as *Tie Pat Kai Kawin*—and *Tengkorak Hidoep* are set in a fantasy world involving creatures and gods. Meanwhile, *Gagak Hitam*—listed in the KFI under the title *Gagak Item*—tells a story of romance and masked heroes.

The period from 1945 to 1965 began with stories of the post-war independence revolution through *Darah dan Doa*, which is considered the first national film because it was produced by the national film company Perfini, founded by Usmar Ismail. *Inspector Rachman* was directed by Nawi Ismail and produced by Produksi Perusahaan Film Negara (PPFN), which had a long history as a film studio since the Dutch and Japanese colonial eras. Director D. Djajakusuma was known for his works that incorporated local traditions, including in *Tjambuk Api*.

The film *Operasi X* by Misbach Yusa Biran was produced to tell the story of Army intelligence officers conducting operations to crush underground movements. It was released three years after the tragedy of 1965. *Wadjah Seorang Laki-Laki* and *Suci Sang Primadona* are films by Teguh Karya and Arifin C. Noer, who previously worked mainly in theater. *Si Mamad* deals with the theme of corruption, a work by Sjuman Djaya, whose films are heavily imbued with social criticism. Djaya also studied film in Moscow, Russia.

The above sample summary provides a glimpse into the identity of Indonesian cinema within the SI collection as an institution that archives films—particularly feature films—in Indonesia.

In general, the availability of archives as records of events plays a role in the construction of identity, from the individual level to that of a nation. According to Schwartz & Cook (2002), archives as records control the form and direction of historical studies, collective memory, and national identity, in terms of how a person recognizes themselves as an individual, a group, and a community. The same can be true in the context of film archiving. Through film archives, the identity of Indonesian cinema can continue to be studied and spark various interpretations.

When discussing national cinema, Higson (1989) notes a tendency to use the term in a prescriptive rather than descriptive manner. He identifies that the term national cinema is often used in relation to the following four aspects: a) the economic aspect, equating it with the domestic film industry; b) a text-based approach to films; c) an exhibition or consumption-based approach—who are the film audiences?; and d) a criticism-based approach which, according to Higson, tends to reduce national cinema to the framework of quality art cinema. Higson then argues that the process of identifying national cinema generally begins with determining coherence and unity—declaring a unique identity and a stable set of meanings. According to him, this process cannot be separated from the process of hegemony and mythologization of what is considered national itself. Meanwhile, Stoddart (1995 in Barker, 2010) notes that national cinema is a form of culture that embodies and reflects the nation, and serves as a useful framework for understanding films and the film industry around the world.

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In this study, examining the identity of Indonesian national cinema cannot be separated from the history of Indonesian film and cinema itself. Previously, it has been explained that the arrival of film or motion pictures was a new culture or discovery that strongly influenced the lives of people in major cities in Java (Ruppin, 2017). In an in-depth study conducted by Misbach Yusa Biran in his book *Sejarah Film 1900–1950: Bikin Film di Jawa* (2009), it is revealed that film also developed as part of a new social consciousness that was also connected to various social phenomena of enjoying the arts, particularly traditional theater performances, wayang kulit, wayang orang, and other traditions that were widely developed in public. This includes cities that were also influenced by theater, which had already developed and become popular among European communities. When viewed from the SI collection samples in the aforementioned period, the traces and influences of performing arts—both traditional and modern—can be identified from the pre-independence period to the era of Teguh Karya and Arifin C. Noer, who were born from the world of theater.

The next identification is that, as a former colony, film production as a propaganda tool is quite prominent in Indonesian cinema. Although in a different context from the propaganda mission for colonization, for example, the birth of *Darah dan Doa* and then concepts regarding national films were also present—consciously or unconsciously—in the production of Indonesian films as “propaganda” to become post-independence nationalists. The concept of national cinema, as expressed by director Soemardjono in 1979 (in Barker, 2010), for example, states that national cinema a) must be a product of Indonesian culture; b) replace the dominance of foreign films; c) serve the Indonesian people in developing character and nation building. Barker then notes that the concept of national cinema in Indonesia stems from a concept developed by the cultural elite, which positions film in an educational and propagandistic role. Looking at the sample above, this is also evident in the production of *Operasi X*. On the other hand, in terms of archival collection, the lack of attention to pre-independence films, which were mostly produced by Chinese directors and/ or producers, meant that they were not considered national films, resulting in a limited number of films in the collection.

Another thing that can be examined based on the existing collection and the samples mentioned above is the dominance of male directors over female directors. Although the film collection of female directors such as Ratna Asmara and Sofia WD is available at SI—albeit in limited titles—their prominence as part of Indonesian cinema history and identity is rarely highlighted. Discussions of the canon of Indonesian film directors, which are also stored in the SI collection, focus on canonical and auteur directors who are considered to produce higher quality work than films that are considered commercial. The dichotomy between film-as-art and film-as-commodity is also part of the national film discourse in Indonesia (Barker, 2019) and its traces can still be felt today.

IV. CONCLUSION

The search for the identity of Indonesian cinema based on the collection at the SI film archive is still a fragment of a more comprehensive picture, so it requires ongoing study. This is not only because archiving institutions also have limitations—even biases—in selecting the films for their collections, but also because SI's conditions and capacity to carry out proper and sustainable archiving are also limited. Therefore, studies of national cinema and questions regarding the identity of national cinema in Indonesia itself need to be aligned and accompanied by efforts to improve archiving and preservation. However, preliminary findings in this paper identify several traces of identity in the SI's collection as an archival institution: a) the traces and influence of performing arts—both traditional and modern—in Indonesian films; b) the legacy of film production as a propaganda tool during the colonial era; c) the dominance of male film directors; d) the dichotomy of film as art and commodity.

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