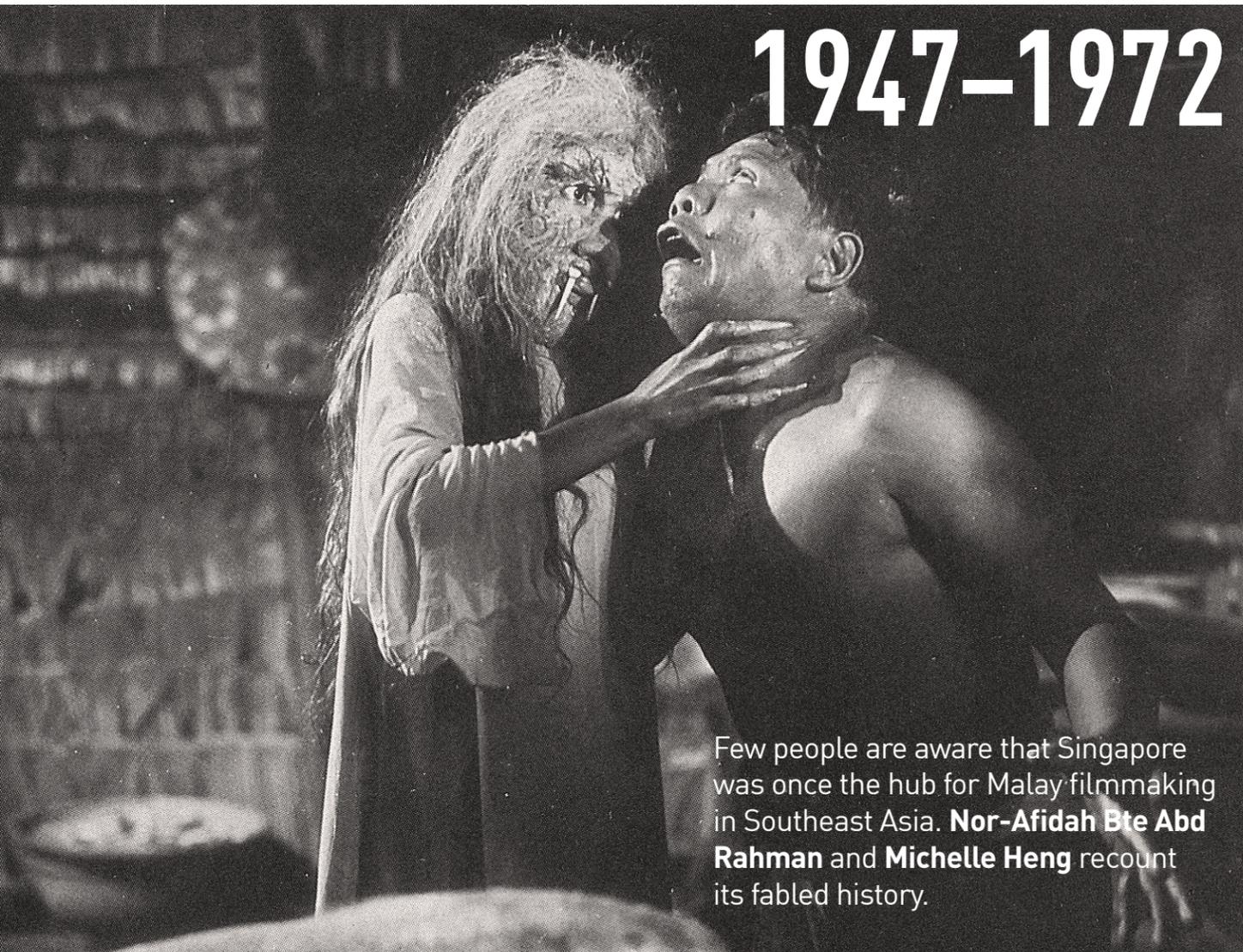


THE GOLDEN AGE OF MALAY CINEMA



1947-1972

Few people are aware that Singapore was once the hub for Malay filmmaking in Southeast Asia. **Nor-Afidah Bte Abd Rahman** and **Michelle Heng** recount its fabled history.

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Azizah, the alluring customer-turned-love-interest of trishaw-rider Amran (played by screen legend P. Ramlee) visits his run-down hut for the first time in *Penarek Becha* (1955). When Amran bemoans his humble station in life, she delivers a sagely line in return, "Tuhan tidak akan memberi sahaja kalau manusia tidak berusaha (God won't just help people unless they make an effort)."¹ The audience watches with bated breath as this beauty-with-brains helps her humble beau make a success of his life. Azizah (played by the sweetheart of Malay movies, Sa'adiah) vows to help him attend night school. This turns out to be just the kind of push an honest-but-poor trishaw rider needs to scale the rigid social ladder of the time and seek the blessings of her parents. For cinema audiences, the film's central theme – the rejection of inequality through the pursuit of education – was a timely reminder of the need for self-reliance.² Malaya was in the midst of agitating for independence from her British colonial administrators.

Penarek Becha (*The Trishaw Puller*) was a major box office hit when it was released in 1955 and was a watershed film³ for both its actor-director, P. Ramlee – the multi-hyphenate Renaissance Man of the Malay silver screen – as well as the local film



industry. The success of this film paved the way for other Malays to direct films that suited the community's sensibilities and ignited far-reaching changes in the screen image of the modern Malay and his struggle to come to terms with a rapidly changing world.⁴

Shaw Brothers vs Cathay-Keris

The winds of change, as far as post-World War II domestic film production was concerned, had already swept through Singapore with the 1947 release of the first post-war Malay film, *Seruan Merdeka* (*The Call For Freedom*),⁵ produced by S.M. Chisty of Malayan Arts Productions, and directed by the influential Calcutta-born auteur, B.S. Rajhans, who was also the director of the first Malay-language film in Singapore, *Laila Majnun* (1934).⁶ Starring Salleh Ghani and Siti Tanjung Perak, *Seruan Merdeka* focused on how young Malay and Chinese Singaporeans came together to resist the Japanese occupiers. It was a rare screen outing as it was unusual to see both Malay and Chinese actors on the screen. Although the film was a commercial failure due to a lack of cinemas, and consequently, limited exposure, *Seruan Merdeka*⁷ marked the start of what was to become the 25-year-long golden age of Malay cinema in Singapore.⁸

Shortly after World War II, Shaw Brothers reopened their film production studios at 8 Jalan Ampas, which had closed during the Japanese Occupation. In a shrewd business move, Shaw Brothers started Malay Film Productions (MFP) Ltd in order to tailor-make movies for the growing number of Malay film-buffs in Singapore and Malaya, which at the time was the most rapidly expanding regional market.⁹ Adopting the lucrative, vertically-integrated models of Hollywood

studios such as MGM and Paramount, Shaw enjoyed an almost unrivalled monopoly of the Malay film industry. Between 1947 and 1952 alone, the prolific MFP produced 37 feature films, the first of which was B.S. Rajhans' *Singapura Di Waktu Malam* (1947, *Singapore Night*).¹⁰

While the Shaws' pre-World War II Malay films featured *bangsawan* actors and were helmed by Chinese directors including Hou Yao and Wan Hoi Ling, MFP's stable of experienced Indian directors brought in from the subcontinent ensured a steady flow of Indian-influenced films with 'overstylised' acting as well as song and dance sequences.¹¹ Certain cultural barriers, however, proved difficult to overcome as the direct translation of movie plots, dialogues and style carried over from Indian films caused rifts between foreign and home-grown talents at MFP.¹²

At this point, Rajhans recognised the need to infuse his crew with fresh blood instead of relying solely on the local traditional *bangsawan* (Malay opera) performers who had crossed over into the world of moving pictures. Whilst on talent-scouting trips in the Malay Peninsular and Singapore, Rajhans spotted the young musician P. Ramlee and

(Facing page) Maria Menado as the *pontianak* in B.N. Rao's 1957 *Dendam Pontianak*. © Dendam Pontianak. Directed by B. Narayan Rao, produced by Cathay-Keris Films. Singapore, 1957.

(Top left) P. Ramlee was an actor-singer who starred in many of Shaw's MFP's films. © 120 Malay Movies, Amir Muhammad, published by Matahari Books, 2010.

(Top right) A 1948 flyer advertising *Singapura Di Waktu Malam* (*Singapore Night*), one of MFP's earliest Malay films and starring Siput Sarawak and Bachtiar Effendi. © Singapura Di Waktu Malam. Directed by B.S. Rajhans, produced by Malay Film Productions, 1947. Courtesy of Wong Han Min.

quickly hired the charismatic singer-actor. Ramlee made his screen debut in the 1948 film *Chinta (Love)*, playing the supporting role of a swarthy villain opposite screen siren Siput Sarawak.¹³

Not to be eclipsed was rival Cathay Organisation's Cathay-Keris Films with its studios at Jalan Keris in the East Coast area. In 1953, Cathay's chairman Loke Wan Tho teamed up with Keris Film Productions' managing director Ho Ah Loke to form the Cathay-Keris Studio. Cathay-Keris was to pose a serious challenge to Shaw Brothers MFP's dominance in the Malay film industry.¹⁴

Ho was a maverick producer who cut his teeth in the industry in 1925; not only did he buy a cinema in Ipoh at the age of 25, he also rode his bicycle to small neighbouring towns to screen his reels of films.¹⁵ After a former partnership with Rimau Film Productions had run its course, Ho formed his own company, Keris Film, in 1952. Not long after, Cathay's Loke collaborated with Ho in the production of *Buluh Perindu (Magic Flute)*, believed to be the first Malay-language film shot in colour and released in 1953 under the Cathay-Keris Films banner.¹⁶ Due to the paucity of expertise and limited supply of filmmaking talent, Ho was said to have recruited directors of Indian origin from MFP as these auteurs had the requisite years of experience from working with the Shaw Brothers. Among the talented directors were Dato L. Krishnan, B.N. Rao and K.M. Basker.¹⁷

A turning point in the Malay film industry occurred in 1957 when a dispute broke out between the film workers union, PERSAMA (Malayan Artists Union) and executives at Shaw Brothers following the dismissal of five Malay film actors and actresses employed by MFP and agitations for wage increases and better employee prospects.¹⁸ A strike soon followed. When negotiations remained at an impasse, Cathay-Keris' Ho allegedly muscled in on the situation by sending rice supplies and encouraging notes to the strikers in order to lure actors, directors and technicians to his studios where better remuneration and equipment beckoned.¹⁹

Following the strikes, Cathay-Keris released one of the most notable cult films in the Malay movie industry, *Pontianak* (1957), starring the radiant *kebaya*-queen from Indonesia, Maria Menado. The ghoulish tale of a beauty-turned vampire who could only be killed with a nail driven into her skull was directed by B.N. Rao. The phenomenal success of *Pontianak* – which spawned the sequel *Dendam Pontianak (Pontianak's Revenge)* in the same year and consequently the horror film genre – heralded the arrival of Cathay-Keris as a formidable opponent in the industry.²⁰ Menado, too, rode the crest of her success in the *Pontianak* films to become



Actress-producer Maria Menado (of the *Pontianak* movie fame) in 1960. K.F. Wong collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.

Malaya's first film-star producer with her own company, Maria Menado Productions, rivalling P. Ramlee's status in the filmmaking sphere.²¹

A Steady Decline

Following the 1957 strike at Shaw Brothers, tensions among the Malay staff and resentment over labour disputes lingered at MFP. In a few years, most of Shaw Brothers' Malay-language film production had moved to Kuala Lumpur.²² Its one profitable star, P. Ramlee, was given the opportunity to make a film, *Seniwati (Female Artiste)*, in Hong Kong but this deal fell through amid fears that such a venture would lack cultural resonance among the Malays and deal a blow to the local film industry.²³ With diminished prospects, Ramlee moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1964, which coincided with a series of events leading to the decrease in Shaw Brothers' Malay film production efforts in Singapore. By 1967, MFP had closed.²⁴

Meanwhile, Cathay-Keris faced stiff competition from television and the loss of the Indonesian cinema-goers' market due to the Konfrontasi (Confrontation) crisis between 1963 and 1966 that saw armed incursions and bomb attacks by Indonesian forces in Singapore. Cathay-Keris responded by retrenching 45 studio staff in 1965, and a further 17 staff in 1966.²⁵ By 1972, Cathay-Keris had produced its last film, *Satu Titik Di-Garisan (A Drop at the Line)*, marking the end of Malay film production in Singapore.

After Shaw and Cathay shut down their studios in Singapore and moved their operations to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore lost

its status as the hub of the Malay film industry. The emergence of television as an alternative medium was one of the key factors that led to the demise of the homegrown tinsel towns along Jalan Ampas and Tampines.²⁶ While marquee names like P. Ramlee tried to gain a foothold in the Malaysian film industry, film talent in Singapore decided to focus their efforts on the small screen. New made-for-TV Malay movies started trickling into the vacuum as demand for entertainment was picked up by Radio and Television Singapore (RTS), which released popular series such as *Awang Temberang*²⁷ and *Sandiwara*.²⁸ The void left by the end of the golden age of Malay cinema was also filled by Indonesian Malay-language films with stars such as Brorey Marantika and Dicky Zulkarnain.²⁹

Meanwhile, in a quirky departure from the past, independent producers made a string of English-language martial-arts-themed films: *Ring of Fury* (1973), *Bionic Boy* (1977), *They...Call Her Cleopatra Wong* (1978) and *Dynamite Johnson* (1978).³⁰ The latter trilogy, directed by Filipino auteur, Bobby A. Suarez³¹ drew inspiration from the kungfu mania following Bruce Lee's phenomenal success and the blaxploitation genre that had become hugely popular in the US.³² In particular, *Cleopatra Wong*, starring the 19-year-old Singaporean actress Doris Young (a.k.a. Marrie Lee) quickly reached cult status and eventually inspired a young Quentin Tarantino, who later referenced the spirited, fly-kicking Interpol agent heroine who could hold her own amongst the most violent thugs and villains in his *Kill Bill* movies.³³

In all, more than 250 Malay-language films were produced in Singapore over the 25-year reign of the golden age of local film, spawning a line-up of celebrity Malay stars in the process. These films have remained in the hearts of fervent fans who occasionally get to watch re-runs on television specials and during film festival screenings. The golden age of Malay cinema was symbolic for a generation of film audiences who had witnessed the transition from an oral storytelling tradition to a dynamic art form on the silver screen. While the study of Malay-language films remains somewhat overshadowed by other Asian cinematic arts, it is heartening to see the revived interest in these films, which are celebrated regularly at film festivals, tribute exhibitions to filmmaking talent of that era and, more recently, a permanent gallery at the Malay Heritage Centre in Kampong Glam.³⁴ ♦

The authors have jointly curated a book display "The Golden Age of Malay Cinema", at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Level 8, National Library Building. The display ends on 30 May 2015.

AKAN DATANG: THE ART OF THE FILM POSTER

It's been decades but I do remember some of the people my father [director Jamil Sulong] used to work with in Jalan Ampas. The one person I remember clearly was A. V. Bapat the art director for most of MFP's movie[s]. If you manage to get a glimpse of the old Malay film posters – more than likely that it was his handiwork (like the Raja Bersiong poster...) I like the way he painted his posters... Uncle Bapat has long since passed on, ... sad that sometimes his contributions to the Malay film industry is overlooked. As far as I know, he did sets, costumes and all art direction when he was at Jalan Ampas.⁴⁶

Shaw's Malay Film Production (MFP) Ltd and Cathay-Keris Films sustained movie-goers' interest in new releases through film tabloids and movie billboard posters. Movie posters used to be the only way people knew about what was playing at the cinemas⁴⁷ if they did not buy magazines and newspapers. In the absence of digital technology, poster painters had to draw and colour movie posters from scratch.

The late director Jamil Sulong, who joined the Shaw family in November

1951,⁴⁸ recalled that Shaw added new studios to accommodate the increasing workload with the success of MFP. One of the rooms of Studio No 9 at Jalan Ampas (in the Balestier area) was where the poster artists worked.⁴⁹

Shaw's first art director was *bangsawan* (Malay opera) backdrop painter, Mohamad Haniff (Pak Haniff).⁵⁰ When Pak Haniff died, other local painters replaced him, such as Mustafa Yassin who remained as art director until Shaw's last days in Singapore in 1967.⁵¹ China-born Lim Ying Chang was employed as an artist apprentice by Shaw after the Japanese Occupation. He stayed with Shaw for 10 years and eventually became chief artist.⁵² Eventually, Shaw brought in Indian expertise, with names such as J. S. Anthony and A. V. Bapat appearing as art director in the credit roll at the start of the MFP films.⁵³ Bapat was MFP's art director from 1957 until the Shaw Studio closed in 1967 and is remembered for his close collaboration with director P. Ramlee. One of Bapat's last artworks was for *Raja Bersiong*, a film written by the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman.⁵⁴

The poster painters normally copied from pictures they were given. Although the work did not stretch their imaginations it was more important that they drew the faces of the stars as accurately as possible. More challenging was enduring the long hours of squatting over the canvases as they painted. A team of two or three painters would work on a single billboard

poster, while a huge one would take four to five days to complete.⁵⁵

According to Chew Poi Yong, Cathay's painter in the early 1950s, two key ingredients for a good poster were proportion and colour: "...the first [was] to get the exaggerated dimensions right and the second to produce work that can be seen from afar". To get the right proportion, painters would first mark out squares on the canvas with white chalk. Once the sketch was made, they would go over the outline with a blue marker. White paint was then painted all over as background and through it the blue outline would appear as smudges. The "fun" would then begin as the painters added the other colours.⁵⁶

Hand-painted film posters went through a boom from the 1950s until the 1970s with as many as 100 posters commissioned per film. In the past, as many as 10 painters would be mobilised to complete a big billboard requiring 100 pieces of plywood for mounting. As experienced painters retired and new blood could not be attracted to join the profession, dwindling manpower meant that only one painter was assigned to a poster.⁵⁷ By 1980, Shaw had closed down its art studio that produced its posters⁵⁸ and by the end of the 1980s, hand-painted posters had given way to their digital rivals.

Hand-painted film posters were the rage from the 1950s to 70s but slowed down by the 80s. Here, Neo Choon Teck, one of Singapore's last surviving billboard artists, reprises his work for the Singapore Short Film Awards in 2011. Courtesy of SINDie (www.sindie.sg/).



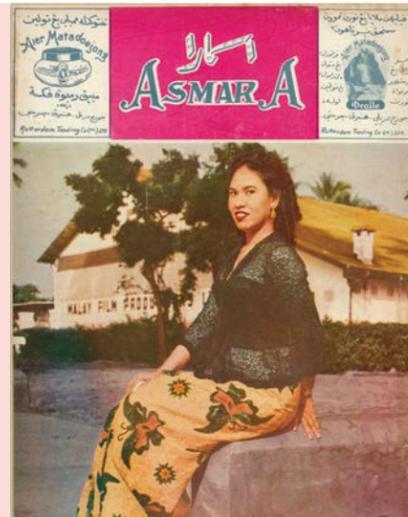
TAYANGAN AKAN DATANG: POSTER LUKISAN TANGAN

Beberapa dekad telah berlalu tapi saya masih ingat dengan sekumpulan teman ayah yang dahulu bekerja di Jalan Ampas. Seorang yang masih segar di ingatan saya ialah A V Bapat, Pengarah Seni untuk kebanyakan filem MFP [Malay Film Productions]. Kalau anda dapat melihat poster filem Melayu lama (seperti poster *Raja Bersiong*...), kemungkinan besar ia adalah hasil karya beliau. Saya minat dengan cara beliau melukis poster... Pakcik Bapat telah lama pergi dan ia menyedihkan kadang kala sumbangan beliau kepada industri filem Melayu dilupakan. Setahu saya, beliau bertugas sebagai pereka set, pakaian dan semua kerja artistik semasa di Jalan Ampas.

Shaw dan Cathay cuba memenuhi citarasa peminat filem Melayu terhadap perkembangan filem dengan mengeluarkan tabloid dan poster filem. Bagi yang tidak melanggan sebarang makalah, poster-poster filem yang dipamerkan di pawagam setempat adalah cara terunggul untuk mengetahui tayangan terkini dan yang dapat ditonton dalam jangkamasa terdekat. Di sebalik poster gah yang terpampang, mungkin ramai tidak dapat meneka yang banyak poster filem dihasilkan oleh pelukis-pelukis yang hanya bersinglet dan seluar pendek, dengan tangan comot belumur cat.

Waktu saya masih kecil, saya sering bermain di studio-studio [Jalan Ampas] ketika ibu-bapa saya sedang sibuk berkerja... Ada tiga buah studio di Jalan Ampas...Studio yang ketiga, di mana ayah saya bertugas (dan juga artis-artis yang melukis canvas untuk billboard filem) telah dirobokkan dan diganti dengan bangunan pejabat...

Studio No 9 Jalan Ampas adalah bangunan yang banyak melahirkan poster lukisan tangan Malay Film Production (MFP). Sambutan hangat terhadap filem MFP dan kegiatan perfileman yang meningkat mendorong, Shaw untuk menaikkan



bangunan-bangunan studio yang baru. Di sebuah bilik di Studio No 9 yang baru inilah tempat pelukis-pelukis poster berkarya. Mereka bekerja di bawah arahan seorang Pengarah Seni (nama glamour untuk pelukis set). Awalnya di Shaw, jawatan ini disandang oleh Mohamad Haniff (Pak Haniff), seorang pelukis pentas bangsawan. Ia merupakan pencapaian yang membanggakan kerana Shaw pada era ini lebih banyak mengutamakan karyawan-karyawan import dari India, China dan Hong Kong untuk memenuhi jawatan pengarah dan juruteknik filem. Setelah pemergian Pak Haniff, jawatannya di ambil-alih oleh pelukis tempatan Mustafa Yassin yang terus berperan sebagai Art Director sehingga hari-hari akhir Shaw di Singapura. Pelukis kelahiran China, Lim Yin Chang, juga diambil oleh Shaw untuk berkhidmat sebagai pelukis perantis selepas perang Jepun. Beliau menimba pengalaman selama sepuluh tahun dan berjaya menjadi *Chief Artist* (Ketua Seni) sebelum meninggalkan studio Shaw. Namun Shaw turut menggajikan pelukis dari India untuk pimpinan artistiknya dan nama-nama seperti J S Anthony dan AV Bapat dapat terlihat sebagai Pengarah Seni di dalam credit roll bagi filem-filem MFP. Bapat menjadi sebagai Pengarah Seni MFP dari 1957 sehingga studio itu tutup pada 1967 dan banyak menyimpan kenangan manis ketika dia bergabung dengan pengarah legenda P Ramlee. Salah satu hasil terakhirnya adalah untuk filem *Raja Bersiong*, karangan mantan Perdana Menteri pertama Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Sebagai pelukis poster, mereka banyak meniru gambar yang tersedia ada. Hal ini tidak memeras kreativiti pelukis, namun melukis wajah-wajah pelakon



dengan tepat tetap diutamakan. Yang lebih mencabar ialah mereka terpaksa menahan lenguh dan letih akibat bercangkung berjam-jam untuk menyiapkan poster, sehingga mencetuskan gurauan yang pelukis berperut gendut tidak akan sanggup melakukan perkerjaan ini. Lazimnya dua atau tiga orang diberi sebuah poster untuk disiapkan dan poster ukuran besar memakan masa empat atau lima hari untuk siap.

Dua ciri utama untuk menjayakan poster ialah keseimbangan dan warna. Menurut Chew Poi Yong, seorang pelukis Cathay sejak tahun 50an, ciri pertama

penting untuk mencapai pinglebaran ukuran yang baik dan ciri kedua penting untuk membolehkan poster dilihat dari jauh. Untuk memudahkan pelukis dalam pinglebaran yang seimbang, mereka akan membuat tanda empat persegi dengan kapur putih. Selepas melakar gambar dengan marker biru, mereka mencurahkan cat putih ke atasnya untuk warna latar dan corengan dari lakaran gamabr tadi akan timbul. Maka bermulalah kegiatan mencorak gambar itu dengan warna-warna yang lain.

Permintaan untuk poster begitu rancak dari 50an ke 70an, hingga 100

keping boleh ditempah untuk setiap filem. Namun, pelukis-pelukis yang telah lama berkecimpung mula bersara sementara anak-muda tidak berminat untuk menceburi kraf ini. Kalau dahulu, seramai 10 pelukis dapat digembeling untuk menyiapkan sebuah billboard gah yang memerlukan 100 keping plywood sebagai *backing*. Dengan masa, tenaga yang sudah berkurangan menjadikan sebuah poster itu terpaksa disiapkan oleh seorang pelukis sahaja. Setelah berakhirnya tahun '80an, poster lukisan tangan mula akur dengan kehebatan poster digital. Bermula 1980, Shaw telah menutup studio yang

membuat poster filemnya. Pada 2005, hanya seorang pelukis poster, Neo Choon Teck, yang tinggal.

(Top left) Actress Normadiah on the cover of the now defunct Malay-language entertainment monthly magazine, *Asmara*. MFP studio at Jalan Ampas stands in the background. © *Asmara*, Issue 23. Published by S.O.A. Alsagoff for Geliga Publication Bureau (Singapore), 1956. **(Above)** *Raja Bersiong* is a 1968 historical film written by former Malaysian prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. © *Raja Bersiong*. Directed by Jamil Sulong, produced by Malay Film Productions, 1968.

NOT LOST IN TRANSLATION

Now, to increase my income, a friend of mine told me that, "Now, you can do some part-time work or subtitling for the film... In the pictures, we had to subtitle in English. He said, "You go to the studio, you write down the whole script yourself, then you write in English, you type it out, number it and then give it to the staff at the studio and they will do the work for you ... But the amount of work was so much ... after I'd finished my work in the evening at 5 o'clock, I go to the studio and work there until 12 o'clock..." (Bana Nazeem, 1981, November 22. *Pioneers of Singapore* [oral interview], reel 3, p. 3. Retrieved from the National Archives of Singapore)

After World War II, Shaw and Cathay realised that including subtitles in foreign-language films was a surefire way to attract local audiences to cinemas and ensure extended movie runs. Malay fans, enamoured of Bollywood films, soon formed snaking queues at Taj and Garrick cinemas in Geylang in the 1950s and 60s,³⁵ thanks to the Malay subtitles in Hindi films.³⁶ In fact, a decade before Hindustani megastar Dev Anand kept Malays gripped to their seats with his enigmatic fighting scenes, Chinese-educated masses in Singapore who did not understand English had already been drawn to American and British films because the screenings had included Chinese subtitles.³⁷

Due to increasing demand, a pool of specialists and operators was employed to translate the foreign plots and lines.³⁸ In 1948, it was reported that there was only a handful of such specialists in Singapore and their job was described as "one of the hardest and most exciting tasks in the cinema business".³⁹ For the 1948 blockbuster *Hamlet*, Cathay employed a Hong Kong graduate, Lau Shing-yuen, to translate and prepare slides for its Chinese film subtitles⁴⁰ that were projected onto a small screen beneath the main screen. Getting the Chinese characters printed on the glass slides was a two-step process; first, painting the Chinese words in ink over the little glass slides followed by scratching the Chinese characters onto the glass surface with a metal stylus.

In 1953, a new form of subtitling was introduced. The previous method outlining the plot was not an accurate way of capturing

the dialogue of the film.⁴¹ To improve this, subtitles were superimposed onto the film itself, enabling nearly 1,000 subtitles to be dubbed for each film. The new method premiered first in Hong Kong before becoming a hit in Singapore.⁴²

Malay films of the 1950s and 60s, particularly P. Ramlee films, appealed to Malaya's cosmopolitan society because the universal themes they portrayed cut across language and cultural barriers.⁴³ In order to cater to non-Malay-speaking audiences, English subtitles were provided in Malay movies.⁴⁴ The then sole translator, writer Zulkifli Haji Muhammad joined Shaw Brothers' Jalan Ampas studio in 1960, eventually becoming assistant director, directing Malay films for Shaw.⁴⁵

TERJEMAHAN BERKESAN: SARIKATA DALAM FILEM MELAYU

Selepas perang, Shaw dan Cathay melihat kesan positif dari penggunaan sarikata (sub-titles) yang telah merancakkan lagi sambutan terhadap tayangan filem-filem bahasa asing mereka. Peminat filem dari masyarakat Melayu yang berduyun-duyun ke Taj dan Garrick di Geylang dalam 50an dan 60an terkena demam Bollywood kerana dapat memahami filem hindi menerusi sarikata yang disediakan dalam Bahasa Melayu. Bahkan sedekad sebelum Dev Anand memukau penonton Melayu dengan aksi pertarungannya yang hebat, penonton-penonton Cina di Singapura yang tidak fasih dalam bahasa Inggeris telah tertarik untuk menonton filem-filem dari Amerika dan Britain kerana tersedianya sarikata dalam bahasa Cina. Sekumpulan pakar dan operator penterjemah telah digajikan untuk menyiapkan sarikata filem. Pada 1948, dilaporkan hanya segelintir sahaja menjadi tenaga pakar ini dan mereka dikatakan memikul tugas yang paling sukar dan teruja dalam industri perfilman. Untuk filem blockbuster *Hamlet* yang ditayangkan dalam 1948, Cathay telah melantik seorang siswazah dari Hong Kong, Lau Shing-yuen, untuk menterjemah dan menyiapkan slides dalam bahasa Cina, yang kemudian dipancarkan ke skrin kecil di



A Chinese flyer promoting *Anak Pontianak* (1958). Directed by Roman Estella, produced by Malay Film Productions Ltd. Singapore/Hong Kong, 1958.

bawah tayangan gambar. Menyalin huruf Cina ke slides tersebut harus melalui dua tahap: melukis huruf degan Chinese ink dan memahat huruf Cina itu di atas slide kaca dengan stylus logam. Dalam 1953, cara ini telah diperbaharui kerana ianya hanya memuatkan plot filem secara ringkas dan kurang memaparkan jalan cerita dan dialog filem dengan sempurna. Untuk meningkatkan mutu terjemahan, sarikata sekarang dicetak langsung ke dalam filem dan ia dapat menghasilkan hampir 1000 sarikata bagi setiap filem. Cara baru ini dilancarkan di Hong Kong sebelum diperkenalkan di Singapura.

Filem-filem Melayu Shaw dan Cathay terutama karya P Ramlee disambut baik oleh masyarakat majmuk di Malaya kerana tema universalnya yang tidak kenal bahasa atau budaya. Filem klasik Melayu dapat dinikmati oleh peminat filem dari bangsa lain kerana disediakan sarikata dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Salah satu penterjemahnya ialah penulis Zulkifli Haji Muhammad yang mula menjalankan kerja-kerja sarikata di studio Jalan Ampas pada 1960 sebelum dilantik sebagai Penolong Pengarah. Mrs Wee, seorang lagi mantan pekerja Jalan Ampas dan teman kepada bintang legenda P Ramlee, banyak memeras tenaga untuk menyediakan sarikata untuk filem Melayu Shaw. Empat puluh tahun setelah studio Shaw ditutup pada 1967, beliau mengunjungi Jalan Ampas dan bangunan-bangunan renta di kawasan itu mengingatkan beliau kembali kepada hari-hari yang banyak beliau habiskan di salah satu Studio Shaw untuk menyunting dan mencetak sarikata ke dalam filem.

Notes

- Muhammad, A. (2010). *120 Malay Movies* (pp. 120-121). Petaling Jaya: Matahari Books
- Ibid.* and ii) Harding, J. & Sarji, A. (2002). *P. Ramlee: The Bright Star* (pp. 98-99). Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications.
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