Resisting Hollywood?
A Comparative Study of British Colonial Screen Policies in the Interwar Pacific:
Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Spring 2013

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Abstract

Set against a background of imperialism, this study uses a comparative approach to investigate government policies toward, and interventions in, the motion picture industry prior to 1942 in three former British territories — Hong Kong, Singapore (Straits Settlements) and New Zealand.

This study is broadly situated within new cinema history and is based on government and industry documents preserved in archives spanning several countries. Drawing upon political economy and media policy to inform the underlying narrative and analysis, the focus is explicitly on the development of the political and regulatory system governing the motion picture history in each polity. These developments defined the operational context and boundaries of the motion picture industry as a commercial and cultural institution, ultimately shaping the audience experience in each locality.

The underlying political narrative in each locality is different. In Hong Kong, there was the lost opportunity of utilising local-language production to meet Imperial quota goals. Singapore presents the story of censorship and early attempts at multi-culturalism through social control. New Zealand events reveal a government attempting to use the motion picture industry for social control and to maintain a thoroughly British identity. What links the three cases together is the local governments’ struggle to balance satisfying the requirements of the Imperial government in London, and meeting the demands of both local audiences and of theatre owners dependent on Hollywood product.

Each of these cases show the role which governments played in shaping the viewing experience for audiences, through explicit regulation such as censorship and cinema operating hours, and more hidden areas such as fire regulations, as well as the production and distribution of certain forms of motion picture. The study concludes that three broad policy imperatives explain the actions of governments in the motion picture industry: safety, both moral and physical; social control and development; and economic factors.

The focus on the social-cultural context of the audience experience of cinema inherent in new cinema history is seen to provide an important dimension missing from political economy and its focus on structure and agency.

Keywords: imperialism and colonial policy; motion pictures; new cinema history; comparative screen policy; political economy of film; New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, British Malaya and Straits Settlements.
Dedication

This is dedicated to my family.

First and foremost, my amazing wife and partner, Hien, for her love, patience and support as she has endured the challenges and long journey and challenges this project has taken.

My two sons, Andrew and Jonathan, who have spent most of their lives with their Dad slowly progressing on this.

And finally, my mother, who always thought New Zealand was too small a place for me, but passed away before this was completed, and my father who never lived to see me reach adulthood. I know both would be very proud of this achievement.
Acknowledgements

A work of this scope and magnitude is only possible with the assistance and support of many people and organisations over a number of years. I am very grateful for the significant support provided by so many during the course of the research and writing.

Institutional support has been critical. Funding towards the costs of the many trips to archives in other countries were provided by a number of units within Simon Fraser University: the School of Communication; Faculty of Applied Science; Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology; Graduate Student Society; Dean of Graduate Studies; the International Research Scholarship and the President’s Research Stipend. Computing Canada provided research support with backup storage of the huge number of files and electronic archives on their supercomputer network outside of the earthquake-prone West Coast. Thankfully I never had to figure out how to retrieve them in the event of an earthquake.

The staff in the many archives and libraries I visited were always efficient and helpful with my requests: Karl Magee in the Grierson Archives at the University of Stirling, Lisa Gray at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and the countless unnamed staff in Archives New Zealand, US National Archives in both College Park, Maryland and Washington, DC, the Library of Congress, Flinders University Library, Hocken Library at the University of Otago, Alexander Turnbull Library in the National Library of New Zealand, Public Records Office in Kew Gardens, London, the British Library, the New Zealand Film Archive, the Singapore National Archives, and the Public Records Office of Hong Kong. Not to forget Scott McKenzie and the team in the SFU Library Interloans, who found ways to borrow microfilms from libraries in other countries, as well as tracking down books and other materials from the period. Every request, no matter how obscure, was quickly filled, and I applaud their efforts on my behalf.

Free accommodation helped my travel grants stretch further, and so I am very grateful for David & Shelley (and the kids) for sharing their home with me in Wellington,
Gabriel and Aisha in London, Alastair and Peti in Hong Kong, Mary and Paul in Dunedin, as well as Julia for the house-sitting opportunity during my extended London stay.

A document of this size requires considerable formatting and attention to detail. My thanks to Joanie, the SFU Thesis Assistant, who took this from an earlier version of the thesis template and transformed it into its current state, fixing many problems in the process, and allowed me to continue using my preferred typeface. Your generosity of time is very much appreciated.

Considerable gratitude and thanks go to my supervisory committee for the insightful comments, support and patience throughout the process. Professor Catherine Murray led the effort as my senior supervisor provided a myriad of ideas. Professor Janet Wasko and Dr. Dal Yong Jin provided important and valuable comments in the latter stages. Thanks also to Dr. Zoë Druick who was part of the committee in the early stages.

Appreciation and thanks to Professor Richard Maltby of Flinders University and Professor Colin Browne from the School of Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University for consenting to be the examiners. Your careful reading, probing questions and insightful comments helped improve the final content and form of this work.

Intellectual support in the writing process came from colleagues in the PhD programme in the School of Communication, particularly from Scott, Ben, Daniel, Darryl and Heather in the writing support group, as well as George who generously shared his office with me after I got kicked out of the one with the magnificent view out to the sunsets over Vancouver Island that I inhabited for a number of years.

And last, but certainly not least, my family for the very substantial support, sacrifices, endurance and love of my family who were with me throughout on this journey: Jonathan, who has spent most of his life with his Dad working on this degree; Andrew, who got to see me on the occasional trips to D.C., and most importantly, Hien who put her own life and career on hold, endured food bank rations in the lean times, very little money and my prolonged absences while I pursued my obsession, took most of the parenting role with Jonathan, and finally proofreading this and asking incisive questions at the end. Your love and support through this long journey made it all possible.
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Glossary & Abbreviations

Aotearoa Māori name for New Zealand, literally meaning “land of the long white cloud.” The first sight of New Zealand, whether arriving by sea or air, will often be the clouds.

MPDA Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australasia. The Australian and New Zealand trade association for the US distributors. Sir Victor Wilson was the head of the organisation during the period.

MPPDA Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. Also known as the ‘Hays Office.’ The industry association controlled by the major studios.

Pākehā The Māori name for the ‘white-skinned’ settlers that arrived in New Zealand after the Māori.

Quota wall This refers to legislation requiring a certain % of films available for distribution or exhibited to be registered as having met local production requirements. Usually used in reference to Great Britain.

Runaway productions Productions filmed in locations outside of the home base of the production companies. This may be for economic reasons or for creative reasons relating to the setting of the film.

Abbreviations for archives

ATL: Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga O Aotearoa
HKPRO: Hong Kong Public Records Office
HL: Hocken Library and Archives, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, New Zealand
JGA: John Grierson Archives, University of Stirling, Scotland
NAS: National Archives of Singapore
NZFA: The New Zealand Film Archive, Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua
NZNA: Archives New Zealand, Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga
NZNL: New Zealand National Library, Te Puna Mātauranga O Aotearoa
TNA: PRO: The National Archives of Great Britain, Public Records Office
USNA: National Archives, College Park, Maryland, USA
USNADC: National Archives, Washington, DC, USA
Chapter 1: Introduction

The origins of this research dates back to circa 1984, when I came across a reference in a book on Australian film history to the 1929 Trade Information Bulletin on the Motion Picture Industry in Australia and New Zealand. That the US would be interested in 1929 in publishing a report on the motion picture industry in the two countries was intriguing. Around the same time, I began investigating government intervention into the motion picture industry in New Zealand. Having made my first film when I was twelve, I was subsequently told in a job interview for Television New Zealand that I should go and get a degree before seeking to become a director. So, I went to university and spent part of my undergraduate degree manipulating course requirements to conduct research into the history of the motion picture in New Zealand, an area in which there had been very little research at that time. The New Zealand Film Archive was at a fledgling stage, and I spent many hours combing through some of their resources for material for undergraduate research papers. In Australia, meanwhile, there had been recently published a slew of books on film history, including Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins 1981 book, Government and Film in Australia. These then provided the initial inspiration for what would later become my PhD dissertation research. As part of my master’s degree, I researched and wrote a thesis on government and the development of the feature film industry in New Zealand (1960-1987). I was fortunate to be supported by Jim Booth, Executive Director of the New Zealand Film Commission, who provided access to internal Film Commission documents (and confidential Treasury documents), as well as a financial grant. Booth subsequently left the Film Commission to become the producer and mentor for a young New Zealand director, Peter Jackson.

In 1987, I left New Zealand to study for another master’s degree in the US, and went digging for the report on the Australian and New Zealand motion picture industries. I found the report and learned that it was one of a series produced as part of the Trade Information Bulletins by the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce in the US Department of Commerce from 1927 to 1934. Around the same time, I also discovered Kristin Thompson’s book Exporting Entertainment, which drew heavily on this material as well as trade periodicals from the period. Manjunath Pendakur’s book, Canadian Dreams.
& American Control, came out shortly afterwards and introduced me to political economy of film as a field, and to Simon Fraser University.\textsuperscript{5} The seeds from New Zealand now had some soil to germinate. Like a wild cherry tree, this has taken some thirty years to develop, mature and bear fruit. This dissertation is the result of those earlier seeds.

Histories tend to be focused on the nation-state (film histories on national cinemas) as a unit of analysis or smaller (individual films, film studios, people), but motion picture industries also operate cross-borders in relation to each (particularly Hollywood). By undertaking comparative analysis of industries in different locations, or simply undertaking parallel analysis of those industries,\textsuperscript{6} patterns and connections may be revealed that would not otherwise be apparent when the research is focused on a single country. This has some similarities with the approach that Immanuel Wallenstein, Andre Gunder Frank and other world-system/s theorists take, arguing that the nation states are artificial units of measurement, and frequently they are part of a larger “world-system.”\textsuperscript{7}

This study investigates three smaller polities in the Pacific region who, although closely tied to Great Britain through their colonial relationships, developed their own policy responses to the challenges and potential of the motion picture industry. Aotearoa New Zealand, a Dominion during the period of this study, was a fiercely loyal member of the British Empire, who sought to be seen as the ‘Better Britain of the South.’\textsuperscript{8} During this period, although there was intermittent private film production, the government was the most significant producer. Later, New Zealand feature films and filmmakers would make an impact that was disproportionate to the size of the country in the global film industry.\textsuperscript{9}

Hong Kong was a busy colony built around a deep-sea anchorage, making it ideal as an entry point for trade into China, and as a result had a well-developed economy and substantial population of Westerners. A substantial Cantonese-language film production industry developed during this period has continued into to the present. Likewise, Singapore, an island in the Colony of the Straits Settlements, hosting the centre of the British colonial administration for British Malaya as well as the largest portion of the Straits Settlements population and a deep-sea port, had a well-developed economy and Western population. It also developed a film production industry, albeit much smaller and intermittent in its operation. Both Asian localities acted as film distribution hubs for regions surrounding them. Hong Kong and Singapore provide an interesting contrast to each other.
Although they were small city-states established as trading ports, they gained quite different reputations as a result of their styles of governance. New Zealand provides a contrast; although it had a more independent status as a self-governing Dominion, it was still very colonial in outlook in many ways and followed the British government line very closely in most areas.

These three cases represent two levels of political development and autonomy. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the colonies of Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements, controlled indirectly through local Governors to the Colonial Office in London. New Zealand represents the dominion level in the middle, as a state with autonomous self-government in all respects except for foreign policy. The third level, implicit in this study as the background, but not explicitly analysed, is the imperial level or Great Britain and the United States of America, who were battling for influence over much of the world (Americanisation), including the minds of those within the British Empire. The resistance by Great Britain against the dominance of the United States on the screens of the British Empire is viewed through the policies and negotiations at the level of the colonies and Dominions.

**Rationale**

The study of early screen media policy provides us with insight into the origins of contemporary screen policy and debates around the role that the government plays within the industry. Research has been undertaken into the development of screen policy in the major northern hemisphere countries, but little has been written on the smaller countries or polities within the British Empire. The Pacific Rim portion of the empire was relatively prosperous and well developed, and thus, provides a good focus for a comparative study of early screen policy.

During the 1920s and 30s, Hollywood dominated the global screen industry. However, their overwhelming dominance of the early to mid-twenties declined as talkies replaced the silent movies; language barriers became more apparent, local industries recovered, and local resistance against Hollywood dominance emerged. The resistance against Hollywood was often initiated or led by governments, though frequently with either or both the support and/or dissent of local companies within the industry.
The British Empire as a whole represented a significant trading bloc, enabling the British production industry (so the Imperial elite thought) to potentially be able to counter Hollywood. The population of the Empire was in the region of 450 million people, while the US had a population of approximately 120 million; however, for a number of reasons, Hollywood was much better equipped to penetrate and dominate the markets within the British Empire. William Seabury succinctly identified the problem in 1926 when he compared the difference between the British and the US markets. A producer in the US could spend US$300,000 and expect a healthy profit because of his domestic market. A British producer could spend the equivalent of a little over US$50,000 and never recoup his cost because he was effectively shut out of the US market. Even with the rest of the Empire as a potential market, without access to the US market the British producer was at a significant disadvantage. At the same time, the US distributors were actively “Americanizing” the British Empire using similar tactics to those that enabled them to totally dominate the US market. Audiences elsewhere in the British Empire were primarily seeing the much higher budget and production-value Hollywood movies, and as a result had formed a preference towards them. This meant that Hollywood gained substantial allies in each of the local markets to counter elite resistance against their product.

This study both uncovers narratives and relationships between governments and motion picture industries in three smaller polities in the British Empire, as well as applying an analytical framework for the comparison that could possibly be used in comparative studies of a similar nature going forward. A number of postulates underpin this study, including:

1. Governments contribute to the ecology of the screen industry, intentionally or unintentionally, through the use of a variety of regulatory and other policy tools;

2. Governments and the screen industry operate in a transnational media policy ecology, with the national policy ecology influenced by factors outside of the specific nation-state.

The word ‘ecology’, which might be seen as invoking media ecologists such as Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong and Neil Postman, is used in a slightly different sense here. Whereas, in the field of media ecology, media is the environment; here, ecology refers to
the environment within which the media (specifically the motion picture industry) exists and operates. The policy ecology or environment within which the industry works impacts its operation and business structure, as well as the viewing experience and options for audiences.

**Periodisation**

Many scholars have used the 1927 introduction of the ‘talkies in the motion picture industry as a marker of the transition between historical periods. Although this technological development was indeed a transformational moment, it was but one of a number of important developments in the industry. As this is a historical study of the development of policies and regulations creating the ecology within which the industry operated, it is appropriate that a different periodisation also be adopted.

Ian Jarvie and John Trumpbour both used 1920-1950 as the time period for their studies.\(^{16}\) These are rather general and arbitrary dates, and a slightly more precise timeframe is used in this study based on particular events significant in the narrative. The starting point is the establishment of the positions of cinematograph censor in New Zealand (1916) and Singapore (1917), and is closer to the timeframe used by Ruth Vasey in her work.\(^{17}\)

Although 1909 is the point when the English Parliament first introduced legislation regulating the cinematograph, the starting point for this study is the establishment of the position of cinematograph censor in New Zealand (1916), and Singapore (1917). These dates are the point where explicit censorship of moving pictures was established in each of these localities as a function separate from the more general censorship responsibilities of the police to ensure general public order. Hong Kong was slightly different, as censorship initially was the responsibility of the Registrar-General (renamed Secretary for Chinese Affairs in 1913), and only in 1919 did the responsibility shift to the Captain Superintendent of Police, who continued to nominally be the censor (he delegated the duties) until the Japanese invasion.\(^{18}\) This, then, is the point when motion pictures became clearly distinguished from other forms of entertainment in terms of social regulation.

The end date for this study is partway through World War II, when Hong Kong and Singapore fell to the Japanese (Hong Kong, December 1941; Singapore in February 1942)
and the New Zealand government established the National Film Unit (mid-1942). In both Hong Kong and Singapore, this point marked the end of a specific period of colonial governance, although both Hong Kong and Singapore would continue to be colonies for some time following the Second World War. For New Zealand, the establishment of the National Film Unit represented the beginning of explicit use of the film medium by the government for war purposes, and as such, it came under the direct control of the Prime Minister’s Office as an important tool for government propaganda.  

Following the war, Singapore became a Crown Colony in its own right and agitation for independence began. In Hong Kong, moves were made (with the encouragement of the Colonial Office) by the returning Governor (Sir Mark Young) to give greater autonomy to the local inhabitants. After a number of proposals were made to and discussed with the Colonial Office, the constitutional reform proposals were quashed. The move towards centralized censorship of movies in Hong Kong was realised shortly after the war, however, with the establishment of a censor’s office with dedicated staff.

Thus, this study focuses on a 25-year period during which the cinema developed from a variety or vaudeville show type programme of short films, frequently with a live musical accompaniment to a talkie, feature-based programme, either a double-feature or single-feature with accompanying short films and newsreels. Over this time period, the motion picture evolved from being purely a novelty or entertainment, to a medium that could also be used for education, propaganda or the development of nationalism. As a result, there were considerable debates around policies for the motion picture that would become the precursors of later cultural policy applied to a wider range of media.

**Choice of cases**

In selecting these three cases, it should be noted that other polities were excluded for a variety of reasons, not the least being the scope possible within a doctoral dissertation/thesis. Australia, the much larger British Dominion in the South Pacific, despite being a natural counterpoint to New Zealand as noted earlier, has been the subject of published research in the historical development of government screen policy. India and Canada, likewise, have been the subjects of published research. The various Pacific Islands, despite being numerous, did not have many cinemas, the economic base, nor the
extensive discussions surrounding film policy, as found in the larger colonies. British Malaya, of which the Straits Settlements was part, closely followed the policies established in Singapore, and the Official Censor of Cinematographs in the Straits Settlements was appointed to be simultaneously the censor for the remainder of British Malaya. Although the island of Singapore represented only one part of the Straits Settlements and British Malaya, much of the film policy for the loosely associated Malay territories originated in Singapore, as well as the administration of that policy and censorship for all of the films entering British Malaya. Thus, Singapore acts as a proxy for British Malaya, which was a collection of semi-independent protectorates along with the Colony of the Straits Settlement.

Research questions

The overall questions underlying this research are: “why do governments become involved in the screen industry?” and “What is it that motivates their actions?” Focusing more specifically on the Pacific portion of the British Empire, the following questions are raised:

1. What were the forms of government policy and intervention used in the screen industry in Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand between 1916 and 1942?
2. Why did these governments form the policy or make the interventions that they did? What were the similarities and differences between the localities?
3. Is there a common organising framework that can be applied to government policy and intervention in the screen industry?

Government intervention into screen industries takes place for a number of reasons, due in part to the role that the government sees for the industry/ies within their jurisdiction and the role that it plays in fostering the local business and political environment. Although intervention can happen for a number of reasons at different levels of government (local, regional, national and supranational), the focus here is on national level policies in two small colonies in Asia, along with a smaller Dominion. We will acknowledge, but put to one side, that Singapore was not a colony or nation-state in its own right until after World War II, but can best be described as a polity in this instance.
Significance of this research

This research is original and significant on a number of levels. As a work on comparative media policy, this research furthers our understanding of the relationships between governments and screen policy within the British Empire, as well as illustrating how local exigencies were able to overrule requests from the imperial centre. Screen policies were not developed in isolation, and it is possible to see in these three cases the interrelationship between local policies and those being developed in other parts of the Empire, as well as the imperial centre. Although there has been significant work published previously on government screen policies during or including the interwar period in Britain, Europe, Canada, Australia and India,26 there has been little research published for New Zealand, Hong Kong or Singapore.27 This research also adds to the growing body of scholarly work on British imperial cinema.28

On a historical level, although Hong Kong and Singapore were both significant trading ports for the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they had an almost non-existent role in British national consciousness, and neither has received much attention since then from British imperial historians.29 Also surprisingly absent, given the similarities in origin and their role in Asia, is comparative work considering the two localities together. Thus, this study is a contribution to an area that is significantly under-researched. This work will add to the historical narratives and understanding of both Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as an understanding of their parallel historical development. It doesn’t help that many of the local records from this period for Hong Kong and Singapore were destroyed as a result of the Japanese invasions of both colonies in 1941/1942, and so the narrative has been created primarily from documents existing in British and US archives.

Continuing on the historical track, the research here has drawn on a diverse range of archival sources from a number of countries, bringing new information to light and allowing new narratives to be written. The breadth of archival research undertaken and connections made between different locations is rare in a doctoral dissertation, and will provide the basis or beginning point for a number of future studies.

This dissertation adds to existing work in “new cinema history” to explicitly include the policy and regulatory ecology within which the motion picture industry operated.
Although implicit in other works, government actions or inactions provide the basis and constraints for the audience viewing experience and conditions for the production of the films themselves. Thus, this work fits within the rubric of “new cinema history.”

**Methodological approach**

A comparative approach is taken using three cases in this dissertation using primarily government papers remaining in a number of archives. The value of relying heavily on primary sources, is that the voices of the period are able to speak more clearly without the filters of promotional bias or interpretation clouding their message. The disadvantage is that the records are frequently incomplete and carry within them their own biases and filters. There is frequently a celebratory perspective taken in the telling of historical narratives that draw heavily on the press of the period. Some of that is avoided here by depending on the original records and correspondence from the period.

The comparative approach is used in a number of disciplines and fields to draw out similarities and differences between cases. Analysing multiple cases together can shed light on key ideas that can enhance the conceptualisation of explanations and theories. A discussion regarding using a comparative methodology and the archival sources used for this study is included as Appendix 1.1.

**Structure**

This study is divided into four parts. Part 1 provides the context for the research. Chapter 2 sets out the historical, theoretical and comparative framework for this study, demonstrating how actions of governments are an important component of new cinema history, as they affect the ecology of the industry and audience viewing experience. Imperialism and political economy are introduced as the theoretical frameworks to explain the historical events. Some of the historiographical problems encountered in the process are included. A model of policy imperatives is sketched out as a framework for comparison of the policies and interventions across the three cases. At the core of this framework is a taxonomy of motivations or imperatives for government policy towards the screen industry, although these could well be applied to other areas.
Chapter 3 summarises some of the history to provide the imperial context for the development of colonial screen policy in the three cases that follow. During the 1920s and 30s, there was considerable concern, particularly within British Government circles, regarding the impact that Hollywood films were having on audiences throughout the British Empire, and of the consequent ‘Americanisation’ that was perceived to be taking place. Numerous committees were set up by the British government, studies were undertaken into specific aspects of the industry, and Committees of Inquiry and Royal Commissions were established by the Dominion governments; all sought ways to minimise the perceived negative impact of Hollywood films while maximising the potential for the British film industry. The US motion picture industry, on the other hand, sought open access internationally to enable it to continue its market dominance, using the power and resources of the US Departments of Commerce and State to facilitate this. The cinema film was recognised as an important engine for US export trade (hence the frequent use of the phrase, “trade follows the film”). The British government, through the 1926 and 1930 Imperial Conferences and the Colonial Office, sought to build a network of protectionist barriers throughout the Empire to ensure a market for the, often less popular, British film product. To provide a wider context, the film policy debates and measures of two other major Dominions, Canada and Australia, along with those of the Indian Empire, are briefly outlined.

Part II of this study moves into the historical narrative of government policy and intervention with the comparison of two colonial-level cases, Hong Kong and Singapore. Singapore is used as a proxy for the wider Colony of the Straits Settlements (in fact, British Malaya), but is focused on as it was the main population centre and seat of government for the Straits Settlements, as well as the British colonial administration for the Protectorates of the Federated Malay States. Hong Kong and Singapore provide an interesting comparison, as they took vastly different approaches towards the issue of film censorship although they were both city-states and entrèpot colonies with many similarities.

Part III investigates the Dominion-level case, Aotearoa New Zealand. Part of the mythology of New Zealanders was that they considered themselves as the ‘better Britain of the South’; and although Hollywood movies dominated the local market, British films probably had a greater level of acceptance and success here than in almost any other part
of the Empire (including possibly Britain) during the period under study. 33 Aotearoa New Zealand developed from a settler colony, and was a Dominion throughout the period under study, not yet fully independent from Great Britain and without any desire to become fully independent. While there was an emerging New Zealand national identity apparent in the local literature of the period, many of the Pakeha inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand still considered themselves ‘British’, and indeed, the legal concept of New Zealand citizenship did not exist until 1947. 34 This case demonstrates the extent to which film regulation at the Dominion level moved into the area of social control and attempted to provide space for British films while not inhibiting the dominance of Hollywood.

Part IV ponders some of the conclusions that can be drawn from this study, and provides further discussions on findings that emerge from the cases. It is clear that policy within the British Empire was fragmentary and based on a compromise between the needs of the imperial centre and local exigencies. As the policies evolved in London, negotiations took place between the British government and governments throughout the Empire, frequently, without the results sought by the imperial centre. This was due to the different agendas held by local elites allowing commercial exigencies to frequently trump more nationalistic concerns. Differences are also apparent between the colonial-level states (Hong Kong and Singapore), and the Dominion of New Zealand. These differences can be attributed to the higher level of development of government and society in New Zealand, as a semi-autonomous state, compared to the two colonies.
Endnotes


6. The difference implied here is that comparative analysis takes place within an explicit framework where specific elements are compared, while within parallel analysis the framework is implicit and there may not be the direct comparison between specific elements.


8. James Belich, *Paradise Reforged* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001). This theme of ‘Better Britain’ permeates throughout his monograph to the extent that he uses the motif in a number of section headings.

9. David Newman, “Australia and New Zealand: expats in Hollywood and Hollywood South,” in Paul MacDonald and Janet Wasko (eds), *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (Oxford, UK & Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), comments on a number of the directors, including Peter Jackson, who have come from New Zealand. In addition, New Zealand has become a base for the offshore production of such Hollywood films as *Avatar* (2009), which subsequently led its Canadian-born director and producer, James Cameron, to relocate to New Zealand. New Zealand now ranks as one of the top post-production centres for film in the world.


11. Although local production companies were often strong supporters and advocates of resistance to, and limits on, Hollywood in their respective jurisdictions, exhibitors who depended on the Hollywood product to draw large audiences frequently lobbied against restrictions on US-sourced films.

12. Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London, 1932); Julean Arnold, *China Through the American Window* (Shanghai: American Chamber of Commerce, 1932), 17. Of course, there were significant changes of population during the period, so these numbers should be treated as no more than a very general indication.


14. ibid., 198.


18 In reality, the Captain Superintendent (or Inspector General) of Police was a figurehead comparable to the Censor for the British Board of Film Censorship. The actual censorship work was delegated (in the case of Hong Kong) to other government officials. The Secretary for Chinese Affairs continued to be responsible for cinematograph displays in Chinese theatres, though again the actual work delegated to subordinates.

19 Arguably, Stanhope Andrew’s production of *Country Boys* (1941) for the Government Film Studios actually marks this point, however, that was produced on personal initiative rather than mandated by the government.

20 Hassan Abdul Muthalib notes the demonstrations and strike that erupted in 1946 in British Malaya (including Singapore). These were an early manifestation of the desire for independence. See Hassan Abdul Muthalib, “The End of Empire: The Films of the Malayan Film Unit in 1950s British Malaya.” In Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe (eds.), *Film and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute, 2011): 177-196.

21 Sir Mark Young was the Governor of Hong Kong at the time of the Japanese invasion. He announced the intention for constitutional reform on his return to the position in May 1946 (after a period of British military administration following the surrender of the Japanese). Discussions continued under his successor, Sir Alexander Grantham, but due to the political changes in China and lack of interest within Hong Kong, moves towards a representative government in Hong Kong were abandoned by Great Britain in 1952. See: Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports: Hong Kong to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965): 105-12; Gavin Ure, *Governors, Politics and the Colonial Office: Public Policy in Hong Kong, 1918-58* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012): 111-134.


24 There has been one book published looking at the Australian Pacific territories: Jane Landman, *The tread of a white man’s foot: Australian Pacific colonialism and the cinema, 1925-62* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006).

25 The Colony of the Straits Settlements encompassed the island of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, Dinding, Malacca, Labuan and Christmas Island. Singapore was also the seat of the colonial administration advising the Protectorate of the Federated Malay States, and the Unfederated Malay States (the Governor of the Straits Settlements was also High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States and Unfederated Malay States).

26 Although histories of New Zealand film during the period make reference to the government and their policies, the references are background or contextual in nature. For instances, see Diane Pivac (ed.) with Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald, *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011). Nothing was found in English on the area for Hong Kong and Singapore in a search of the literature.

27 Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe (ed’s.), *Empire and Film* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute, 2011); Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe (ed’s.), *Film and the End of Empire* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute, 2011.

28 John Carroll comments on this in his 2005 book. It is also apparent when searching for references on Hong Kong and Singapore in the major work by Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins on British imperialism, that there is minimal reference to either locality. China, on the otherhand, which was never a British colony, receives considerable attention in their volume. See: John Carroll, *Chinese elites and British colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, 2nd ed. (Essex, England: Pearson Education, 2002).

29 Among the committees and reports were: Moyne Committee (Great Britain, 1936), Indian Cinematograph Committee (India, 1927-28), 1927 Royal Commission into the Moving Picture Industry (Australia, 1927-28), Colonial Films Committee (Great Britain, 1929-30), New South Wales Film Inquiry (Australia, 1934-35), 1928 Select Committee Hearings (New Zealand, 1928), 1934 Commission of Inquiry (New Zealand, 1934), *Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Motion Picture Industry in Canada* (also known as the White Report, Canada, 1931), British Film Institute – Dominion, India & Colonies Panel (Great Britain, 1934-).

30 Collectively, the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Unfederated Malay States were referred to as British Malaya.


32 To sustain this argument, further research needs to be undertaken into likely actual audience sizes rather than the figures commonly used based on the number of films passing through censorship. This latter measure is problematic as it assumes all films had an equal audience, which was not the case. The work of John Sedgwick begins to shed some light on this in relation to Great Britain, but no comparable work has been undertaken for New Zealand.

33 New Zealand did not adopt the British Statute of Westminster (1931) until 1947, although it wasn’t until January 1, 1949 that anyone could have the designation of New Zealand citizen and obtain a New Zealand passport. See: [http://archives.govt.nz/researchguides/citizenship](http://archives.govt.nz/researchguides/citizenship).
Part I: Context
Chapter 2: Theoretical & Analytical Frameworks

To do film history today, one has to become an economic historian, a legal expert, a sociologist, an architectural historian, know about censorship and fiscal policy, read trade papers and fan magazines, even study Lloyds List of ships sunk during World War One to calculate how much of the film footage exported to Europe actually reached its destination.
- Thomas Elsaesser, 1986

Whoever controls the motion picture industry, controls the most powerful medium of influence over the people.
- Thomas Edison, 1924

This chapter proceeds to outline the theoretical base underlying the research for this study, issues of historiography, and a framework for the comparative analysis labelled the Policy Imperatives Model (PIM). Political economy and new cinema history are placed in a dialectical relationship with each other. Along with the following chapter with the historical and political background to the period, this part provides the context for the cases that follow.

Political economy of the film industry

This research is grounded in political economy, as it is dealing with both the politics of the motion picture industry in the Pacific Asia region during the 1920s and 30s, and aspects of the business at that time. Then, as now, the businesses of the Hollywood majors were global, as they operated in most countries of the world, supported by the resources of the US State Department and the US Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. The film industry and Hollywood was and is a significant economic force globally, though not as significant as the fourth or fifth ranking in importance in the US that Will Hays used to claim.\(^1\) The industry first and foremost was and is a business, with a responsibility to its shareholders to be as profitable as possible;\(^4\) therefore, Hollywood looked to overseas markets to earn higher profits. As the economic force of Hollywood battled internationally for audiences and world domination, the US government supported
the industry through commercial intelligence and diplomatic services, as it recognised the value that films had in creating demand for US goods and services, thus enhancing the ‘American brand.’ In the process, Hollywood was facilitating the growth of US exports and values, thus undertaking a process of ‘soft imperialisation.’

Tom O’Regan, in his survey of the political economy of film, suggested that there were two versions of political economy, a weak version and a strong version, with the strong version critical in its approach. Political economy, states Vincent Mosco, is the “study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the product, distribution, and consumption of resources.” He draws on the work of Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, who suggest that political economy “engage[s] with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good.” Mosco, Murdock and Golding are all critical economists (O’Regan’s strong version) who go beyond focusing on market forces and exchanges in the market to critically engage with inequities in relationships and access to resources. All three agree that an important component of critical political economy draws on the historical context. Although the analysis here does not foreground the other components of the critical approach, it is underlying the narrative and analysis. Other scholars writing on the film industry similarly have employed many of the tools of critical political economy to analyse and critique the operations of Hollywood.

One of the ideological systems often used as a theoretical framework by critical political economists is imperialism, an ideological and political system marked by the systematic exploitation of the economic and political inequities in the relationships within the system. This is the central theory underlying both the historical circumstance of the three cases, as well as the analysis here.

**Imperialism**

Imperialism is a natural theoretical framework for this work. It has existed as an ideology and a political system in various forms for millennia, although it was scholars such as Marx, and later Hilferding, Hobson and Luxemburg, who began to theorise the concept. Imperialism provides both an explanatory framework, as well as the historical context within which each of the cases sits. As Ray Kiely notes, imperialism can be defined in a number of ways, though the root of the word goes back to the Latin term *imperium,*
which referred to “the capacity to make laws within a territory.” The word *imperialism* only began to be used in the English language in the late nineteenth century.

It was Ilyich Lenin, drawing on the writings of Hobson and Hilferding, who popularised it as a theoretical construct. Lenin’s definition of imperialism included five characteristics:

1. The concentration of production and capital developed to such a stage that it creates monopolies, which play a decisive role in economic life.
2. The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of ‘finance capital’, of a financial oligarchy.
3. The export of capital, which has become extremely important, as distinguished from the export of commodities.
4. The formation of international capitalist monopolies, which share the world among themselves.
5. The territorial division of the whole world among the greatest capitalist powers is completed.

Although Lenin was discussing imperialism and monopoly capitalism at a higher level of abstraction than specific industries, it is possible to apply the five parts to Hollywood.

1. *Concentration of production and capital to such a stage that it creates monopolies that play a decisive role in economic life.* By the mid-1920s, there were eight Hollywood majors that, although not a monopoly, were an oligarchy that dominated the industry in North America as well as in many other regions of the world. The Marxist definition of monopolies was not the single entity that is commonly understood in contemporary society, but the reduction of competition to a few major corporations who have effective control of the market. Hollywood fulfilled that with the eight majors that had almost total control of most of the film markets internationally, but weren’t really competing because each studio had specific genres and types of films they generally produced, and were able to act jointly or as a cartel in the international markets.

2. *The merging of bank capital with industrial capital.* Klingender and Legg and Janet Wasko demonstrated the degree to which finance capital became interwoven with industrial capital in the US and British film industries. This resulted in US film companies becoming structured as large industrial concerns with their production operations in
Southern California (in the case of Hollywood), but their head offices in New York close to the head offices of the major banks. A similar process was evident in Great Britain in the 1930s with the close relationship between the large British film production companies and the financial institutions based in London.

3. Export of capital, as distinguished from the export of commodities. Although the export of films continued to be extremely important, capital was also exported for the production of films in other locations. One example would be the production of films in Great Britain to enable greater dominance of the British industry by producing what were ostensibly British films behind the quota wall.

4. The formation of international capitalist monopolies, which share the world among themselves. The export of capital was also seen in the strategic investment in cinema chains in other countries, or in key first-run cinemas in major metropolitan centres, such as the Paramount ownership of Famous Players in Canada, or the Twentieth-Century Fox holding in Amalgamated Theatres in New Zealand. In some cases, these can be viewed as expansion of vertical integration of the majors to overseas territories, or formation of “international capitalist monopolies” as outlined by Lenin. In other instances, the investment ensured priority for the major’s films. Hollywood, with the assistance of the US government, was seeking to monopolise the film industry internationally. The US State Department from 1916, and later the US Department of Commerce, maintained an extensive commerce intelligence operation globally, which supported Hollywood through the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) with detailed and confidential information on the operation of all aspects of the film industry internationally.

5. Territorial division of the world. Under the Webb-Pomerene Export Trust Act of 1918, US companies weren’t subject to the same anti-trust laws as their domestic operations and could legally collude and form cartels in foreign markets as long as it was within a formally chartered export trade association. The Act had been introduced to enable US companies to form cartels to remain competitive in foreign markets as a result of industrial cartels formed by foreign companies. Ultimately, Hollywood was the major beneficiary of the legislation, able to legally operate joint agencies or cartels outside of the United States, and through the MPPDA, maintain a common front when it came to trade
disputes. As already noted, the MPPDA had the strong support of both the US Department of State and the US Department of Commerce, with a constant flow of commercial intelligence coming from the later, some of it based on reports provided by the former. It was this imperialistic force that film industries, and governments internationally battled against in trade wars during the interwar period and later. Of course, the battles did not end with World War II, but were extended and escalated with the Marshall Plan and introduction of television in the post-war era, and have continued in one form or another into the twenty-first century.

Ray Kiely in his work has described various forms and eras of imperialism. In his framework, the interwar period under study here comes at the end of the period of ‘classical imperialism.’ This period of imperialism was characterised by the global colonial annexation of territories by many of the major powers during the period 1882-1945, and resulted in the integration of these countries into a global economy and the development of governance structures that lead to later de-colonisation. The forms and theories of imperialism continued in the post-1945 period with the move towards post-colonialism, but continuing economic subordination under the guise of trade liberalisation, neo-liberalism and globalisation. The interwar period can also be seen as a period of overlap between forms of imperialism, as the state-led imperium of Great Britain was in decline, while the corporate-led, soft-power imperium of the United States (or economic imperialism) was on the ascendance. It is against the backdrop of this transitional period in imperial forms and dominance, that the motion picture industry provides an interesting case study that sheds light on the issues and changes taking place that would later be conceptualised as a form of globalisation.

Given this variety of conceptualisations of imperialism enumerated in use currently, for the purposes of this study I’m going to draw on a definition given by Robert Young:

> Imperialism is characterized by the exercise of power either through direct conquest or (latterly) through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination: both involve the practice of power through facilitating institutions and ideologies.

What is missing in this is the inclusion of cultural influence, which was clearly a vehicle that the US used and continues to use. Thus, a revised definition for this work would read:
imperialism is the exercise of power, either through direct conquest or through political, economic and cultural influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination. This definition encompasses both the formal and legal domination of a state by an imperial power (such as was the case within the British Empire), as well as the more informal dominance and influence over states, as has been the case with the United States of America.

During the period of this study, the British Empire was in decline, or in transition to a more egalitarian international structure, while the US and a more indirect form of imperialism was on the rise. At the beginning of the period, Great Britain was still very much a global imperial power, but the combination of domestic political forces and international discontent signalled that the days of the British Empire were numbered. Hong Kong and Singapore would continue to be colonies until well after the Second World War, but the Dominions, such as New Zealand, transitioned from their self-governing-but-still-subordinate status into fully independent countries within the British Commonwealth, equal in status with their former imperial parent. Although New Zealand had maintained its dominion status until 1947, in many respects it was still very colonial through this period.29

Colonialism

Whereas imperialism refers to political, economic or cultural domination over a territory, either formally or informally, colonialism refers more specifically to the physical occupation, exploitation and governance of a territory. Jürgen Osterhammel defines colonialism as: “. . . a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and minority of foreign invaders.”30 Young argues that colonialism is simply the development of geographic areas for settlement or commercial intentions, while imperialism is a state policy, operating from a central location and developed for ideological as well as financial reasons.31 Put another way, Young suggests that imperialism can be analysed as a concept, while colonialism needs to be analysed as a practice.32

Although recorded history suggests that the indigenous populations in both Hong Kong and Singapore were very small in number when the British arrived, New Zealand
also started as a colony and although had progressed to being a self-governing dominion in 1907, still maintained many of the vestiges of colonialism. The result of this was that in each locality there was a core population from Great Britain who believed that British films should be given prominence on the local screens, while local cinema owners and to a large extent, audiences, preferred the more popular Hollywood movies. So, although Britain had political control or dominion over these territories, the United States had cultural dominance through the screen media, an important component of colonial entertainment and cultural life. This leads us into the concept of cultural imperialism.

**Cultural imperialism**

Cultural imperialism as a theoretical framework rose to prominence in the late 1960s, though it can be traced back to the fourth characteristic outlined by Lenin. Lenin discussed how big corporations, cartels and trusts, after dividing up the home market naturally gravitate to the foreign market, and this has been interpreted by scholars to include various forms of media and culture, particularly large Western corporations such as Hollywood distributors.

Herb Schiller, Armand Mattelart, and Dallas Smythe among others, applied the cultural imperialism framework to developing countries and the Third World, as a critique of the liberal developmentalist theory. Although the definitions for cultural imperialism vary, the essence of it is that Western, primarily US, media companies were dumping news and television programs into developing countries at low cost, resulting in a one-way flow of information and images, undercutting local material, and introducing consumerism to audiences in countries who still had basic development needs. Schiller stated it more precisely as:

. . . the concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system.

Although in broad terms the theory had some attractiveness and applicability when it was first introduced, it fell out of favour due to its simplicity and failure to recognise the agency of local populations. Schiller recognised this in his later references to a revised
form of the theory.\textsuperscript{39} One scholar who has argued its continuing usefulness as a conceptual framework is Dal Yong Jin in his work on contemporary media in South Korea.\textsuperscript{40} In a 2007 article he suggests that Korea, as also in the case of Mexico, Brazil and India, was constructing a regional hegemony in the global cultural market,\textsuperscript{41} while at the same time the US has increased its dominance within the Korean market itself.\textsuperscript{42} Dual processes of cultural imperialism are evident. Thus we can see that cultural imperialism, and theories of the same have evolved and become more sophisticated, rather than dying out. This process was also alluded to by Herb Schiller, one of the original proponents of the cultural imperialism thesis, in 1992.\textsuperscript{43}

On the face of it, the label ‘cultural imperialism’ suggests that a wide range of practices, including language, education systems, social structures, and management styles could all be included within this framework. Raymond Williams makes the point that ‘culture’ is one of the most complicated words in the English language.\textsuperscript{44} He identifies three main categories of usage: “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development,” “a particular way of life, whether of a people, period, a group or humanity in general,” and “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.”\textsuperscript{45} This suggests that when the term ‘cultural imperialism’ is used, it encompasses a wide range of activities, even if it is using only one category of usage. The cultural imperialism espoused by Schiller, Mattelart, et. al., was more focused on the media, and unequal relationships where smaller, less-developed countries received a one-way flow of media and content from a dominant source (normally a Western country).

Although cultural imperialism had been applied to the emergence of post-colonial states as an explanatory framework for the continuing dominance of Western media,\textsuperscript{46} it hasn’t been applied in the same way to earlier colonial states during classical imperialism. The implication is that under cultural imperialism, although states were no longer bound politically within an imperial system or an empire, they continued to be dominated from a cultural centre; more specifically, that the United States continues to be the global centre for much of popular culture. That New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore, as members of the British Empire, were operating under the system and ideology of imperialism is self-evident. However, it is interesting to consider whether cultural imperialism could also be applied here, as Hollywood was culturally an imperialising force coming from outside of...
the British Empire. Related to this, McAnany and Wilkinson raise the question as to whether cultural dominance should be labelled imperialism, hegemony or something else.47

**Hegemony and Americanisation**

As the theoretical constructs of cultural imperialism and the more narrowly defined media imperialism were increasingly rejected as being too simplistic, the concept of hegemony became increasingly prominent. Although Antonio Gramsci is credited with bringing the concept into wider usage, the concept has earlier roots, with Gramsci having become acquainted with the term during his time with Bolsheviks in Russia.48 The term, however, was much older than this having been used by the ancient Greeks in the context of military leadership.49 For Gramsci, hegemony is a form of ideological control exercised by a dominant class over and granted to them by a subaltern class.50 Some scholars have suggested that hegemony is a new form of imperialism.51

Hegemony as a concept has been applied to Hollywood, although not always labelled as such. The Hollywood hegemon thesis can be dated back to the industry mythology created by Will Hays of the MPPDA during the 1920s. In early public announcements, and even later in his memoirs, Hays would proclaim how the motion picture industry ranked around fourth or fifth in the United States.52 He never explained what was actually being ranked, but it became a widely held belief that the motion picture industry in the United States was indeed of such size and importance that it was a leading economic sector deserving of instrumental status in US foreign policy. Mae Huettig exposed the inaccuracy of this notion drawing on government statistics in her 1944 study of the motion picture industry. In this, she demonstrated that in 1937, based on the gross income of the industry, the motion picture industry ranked number forty-fifth behind such mundane industries as ‘Canned Products,’ ‘Bituminous Coal,’ and ‘Loan Companies.’53

The Hollywood hegemon thesis suggests that from the silent days of Hollywood when US films heavily dominated the screens of much of the world, the assumption as to why this was the case was due to the superiority of the Hollywood product and audience preferences.54 Indeed audiences frequently did prefer the fare from Hollywood, but this was also what most of the options were and the Hollywood films were frequently made
with budgets ten times or more that of local films. But the degree of this hegemony was frequently overstated, and it is only by closer analysis of audience trends and viewing habits at a more micro level, that this becomes more apparent. The hegemony has also been explained by a number of scholars as being the result of international control of distribution. However, with the arrival of the talkies, language provided a natural barrier in those countries where English wasn’t the dominant lingua franca.

Each of the three cases investigated here challenges the Hollywood hegemon thesis to some degree and raises questions regarding the actual level of dominance. Although these challenges are effectively at the margins, as Hollywood films did continue to be dominant, the question raised is whether the viewing situation was in fact more complex and requires a more nuanced understanding that previously thought.

A much earlier concept, narrower in its usage, is Americanisation (or Americanization for the US-centric). Long before cultural imperialism or globalisation were explicit concepts, Americanisation was frequently referred to in the press and elite circles. Within the United States, Americanization was the term used in relation to the acculturation of new immigrants into US society. Howard Hill, in a 1919 article, quoted from the 1910 US census figures of the number of immigrants in the US unable to speak English, and how manufacturers, such as Ford, set up schools within their factories, staffed by volunteers, who would teach English, along with the interpretation of American ideals, traditions and values. The Cleveland Americanization Committee viewed this as going beyond assimilating new immigrants into US society and rather a worldwide movement uniting all peoples. Elsewhere in the world, specifically in this study in the context of the British Empire, Americanisation referred to the importation of US cultural artefacts and values, particularly through popular culture, and subsequent shift in social values. There was considerable concern over this among elites due to the loss of British values and the British way of life, and threat to the social structure as a result. Hollywood films were one very visible medium for the Americanisation feared to be underway, although other forms of popular culture, such as music (jazz, for instance) and radio programmes were certainly important. Americanization was an important component of the Marshall Plan in post-World War II Europe where a broader range of influences was introduced, such as business and managerial techniques. Resistance to Hollywood films among the elite in the British
Empire (as well as in other parts of the world) was a resistance to the values and ideas portrayed in those films rather than films themselves. Hollywood films were highly popular with local audiences, and Hollywood money (after the introduction of quotas in Britain in 1927) became increasingly an important source of funding for British film production.63 However, there was concern among the British and European elites that the mass public were becoming ‘temporary American citizens.’64

The term ‘elites’ is used here to refer to the rather amorphous group of people who generally were seen as part of the government or upper strata’s of British society, those who had some power or influence. Many would have been landowners or business owners or worked for government or quasi-governmental organisations. But, not all would have been wealthy. In some cases education would have provided the means of entry to the elite. James Foreman-Peck and Julia Smith describe the elite in British society up to 1914 as consisting of: owners of businesses, whether founders or inheritors, managers of those businesses, landed gentry, civil servants and professionals such as lawyers.65 What best characterised them was a set of generally shared values and beliefs. The values and beliefs were frequently voiced in the press, particularly in the elite newspapers such as The Times. These elites would also been present elsewhere in the British Empire, and frequently would have expressed or supported similar values to those of the elite in Britain.

Being British and the defence of Britishness

In opposition to the term ‘Americanisation’ is the concept and idea of ‘Britishness.’ In the same way that Americanisation could be understood as a code word for the adoption of US-based modernity, cultural values and consumerist lifestyle, the use of the label ‘British’ could also be seen as a code word. Often linked with the word ‘Empire’ during the period, for at least some of the British population it carried certain connotations. It signified a specific set of values associated with the British elite: maintenance of a class-based social system; a refined culture; and an obligation to civilise lesser-developed peoples (the ‘white man’s burden’). Defence of these values would emerge on occasion in the three cases investigated here, such as the calls by vocal minorities in the press for more British films (in Hong Kong and Singapore), or more specifically by censors holding British films to a different or higher set of standards that Hollywood films.
James Belich discusses the idea of New Zealand as a ‘Better Britain.’ This sentiment of developing New Zealand as a superior form of British society was common in New Zealand during the late 19th and early 20th century. Again, it incorporated a set of values and ideals based on the British, but with some distinctive differences, such as a redrawing of the class-based social system. Belich notes there were complications as well, as ‘British’ was not an ethnicity or race. In Great Britain, there were Scottish, Irish, English and Welsh, each with their own distinctive culture, language and accent. Elsewhere in the British Empire, British subjects could have any one of a number of ethnicities, but still be considered British. So, as a term it was very open and imprecise. Its use in the cases here, however, spoke to certain values that were seen to mark Britain as being superior to other countries, more specifically, the US.

**Film history**

Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery published the seminal work on film historiography in 1985, in which they noted the emphasis on the study of the films themselves as texts, with lesser research undertaken on the context of the films. That is not to say that research hadn’t been undertaken on the industry and contextual side of the industry, as indeed research had been done from the early years of the industry. However, much of this work took place outside of film studies. Allen and Gomery in their work set out to fill a gap then existing in the literature and provide an introduction for students to the process, context and problems of film history research, along with an introduction to the different types of historical research of film and the film industry. They drew upon British philosopher Roy Bhasker and critical realism as an approach to historical research, where “why” questions are answered following answers to “how” and “what” questions. Put into the film industry context, they suggested a four-step method for the historical study of the film industry that would provide answers to the “why” questions: a re-description of the event to be explained so as to uncover the possible generative mechanisms, analysis of the mechanisms, consideration of the interrelationships between the generative mechanisms, and assessment of the relative force of the mechanisms. They also suggested the use of empirical materials outside of the film text for the writing of film history, and to provide insight into the “why”, “what” and “how” questions. The use of empirical data, along with research methodologies and tools from
Film histories that looked at the broader industrial development of the motion picture industry have been written since the early days of cinema. However, those focused outside of the aesthetics of the film texts or personalities in the industry tended to be the exception. Some of these exceptions do stand out. In 1937, F.D. Klingder and Stuart Legg published a study on the British film industry, in which they mapped out the financial bubble conditions in the British film industry during the mid-1930s, which led to the collapse of many of the production companies. Mae Huettig published an important study on the US industry in 1944, which provided empirical data showing that the US motion picture industry was neither as large nor as important economically within the US economy as that claimed by Will Hays and other industry boosters. In the post-WWII period, Thomas Guback looked at the distribution of US films in post-1945 Europe in his PhD dissertation and subsequent book. In this research, he uncovered the link between the Marshall Plan aid and the requirement that European governments allow the importation of Hollywood films to access US foreign aid monies following the war; the films were to supposedly inoculate European minds against the ‘evils of communism’ or other left-leaning tendencies, and to provide a desire for American goods and popular culture.

Janet Wasko contributed to our understanding of the structure of the motion picture industry through her study of film financing and the relationship between banks and the film industry from the early days. This work points to the clear role that finance capitalism played (and still plays) in the production and dissemination of dominant and hegemonic ideologies. Shortly after Wasko, Kristin Thompson published Exporting Entertainment: America in the world film market, 1907-1934, where she outlined the rise to dominance of the US film industry in the global markets drawing on US government and trade publications.

Ian Jarvie comprehensively researched the cross-Atlantic movie trade and subsequent battle for audiences in his 1992 volume, Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920-1950. This study looked at the parallel developments and interrelationships between the United States, Britain and Canada in the other disciplines, would later become more prominent in the development of “new cinema history.”
motion picture industry, and in contradiction to earlier Marxian approaches, argues that it was the structure of the distribution supply chain as well as the supply of superior films that enabled Hollywood to dominate the world markets. John Trumpbour also provided an in-depth and comprehensive narrative into the US and Britain along with Belgium and France in the volume based on his doctoral dissertation, but gave the Roman Catholic Church much more prominence in the developments during the period than Jarvie’s account. Complementing the work of Jarvie and Trumpbour is the research that Ruth Vasey undertook into the Production Code Administration and the influence that foreign governments had through the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) on representations and content in Hollywood films. Her study of the control that the MPPDA had over scripts and content in movies of the period explains the homogenised world-view that audiences globally received from Hollywood.

**New cinema history**

The rise of “new cinema history” as a distinct approach became more visible in the early years of the twenty-first century, frequently with the use of digital analytical tools, overlapping with the rise of the ‘digital humanities.’ Richard Maltby and Robert Allen, along with other scholars such as John Sedgwick, Daniel Biltereyst, Philippe Meers, Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, Kate Bowles and Jeffrey Klenotic, are among the more visible proponents of this approach, which goes beyond the traditional film text and objects of study in mainstream film history to place the audience and their experience as a more central focus.

Allen’s work has focused on the social experience of cinema in the state of North Carolina between 1896 and 1930 in a research project titled *Going to the Show.* Core to the project are 750 fire insurance maps of forty-five North Carolina towns enabling (with the use of Geographic Information System or GIS technology) to stitch together and provide layered and dynamic representations of the changing audiences (including ethnicity) over the period of the study. In addition to the maps, the project draws upon cinema architectural plans, newspaper advertisements and articles, city directories, and photographs, and incorporates them all into a searchable database. Although this is
possibly the most ambitious project to date in new cinema history using GIS technology, it has by no means been the only one.

Klenotic, likewise, has used GIS technology to map the history of movie-going and exhibition in the North-eastern US. In Belgium, Daniel Biltereyst, Philippe Meers and Lies Van de Vijver have also investigated the spatiality of film exhibition in their study of how social organisation affected structures of exhibition and the audience experience in post-war Ghent. The use of these techniques provides a greater understanding of the changing socio-cultural role of cinema in local communities, and may aid in the understanding of shifting audience preferences and tastes over time.

Other studies of local exhibition practices have emerged from the investigation of archival resources and old newspapers. Fuller-Seeley edited a volume of case studies on local exhibition in different parts of the US, primarily in the east coast and mid-west. Bowles has undertaken work into regional exhibition circuits in New South Wales in Australia, and the role that cinema played in the life of rural communities. In a chapter published in 2011, Bowles suggests that the weekly programming of Hollywood films in one small community in New South Wales, has less to do with the films and more to do with the maintenance of community.

Taking a different approach, Sedgwick has drawn on econometric tools to study audiences and box office results in a number of countries. Whereas many of the studies in “new cinema history” focuses on local or micro-level histories, Sedgwick uses large databases of box-office revenue or attendance figures to gauge film popularity and statistical differences across multiple markets. Through the use of these tools, Sedgwick has been able to identify distinct patterns of film tastes in different geographic locations and different types of exhibition space. This work has shown, for instance, that in 1934 Sydney, there was significant difference in the form of programming between urban first-run cinemas and suburban cinemas, and that there was a greater acceptance of British films in the British market during the 1930s than previously assumed. As Maltby points out, this shifts the focus of film history from that of the filmic-text and issues specific to that medium to a much broader consideration of the role of cinema as a commercial institution in a wider socio-cultural context.
Toby Miller and his colleagues also addressed the issue from a different direction in *Global Hollywood 2*, where they excoriated film/cinema/screen studies as a discipline for their lack of connection with, and relevance to, the issues prevalent within the entertainment and screen industry sectors themselves. A number of examples were given where no input was forthcoming from academe, specifically screen studies. The one discipline Miller identified as having made a contribution, albeit flawed, was communication studies and its investigation of audiences. The presence of the audience is fundamental to the existence of the motion picture industry. Without it, there would be little reason for the industry to exist (aside from artistic self-expression). And it is the audience and the conditions around the audience experience that has also been a focus for new cinema historians.

**Historiography and problems of historical analysis**

As previously noted, Kristin Thompson’s 1985 book is a seminal work in this area; however, her research largely depended on the reports published in official Government publications, such as the *Commerce Report* or *Motion Pictures Abroad*, and from trade periodicals, most of which were publishing materials provided by the US Department of Commerce. This dissertation, although occasionally drawing on these same sources when necessary, focused more on the original sources, the reports coming out of the consulates themselves. There are a number of reasons for doing this. Although there is a presumption that the original sources were reasonably accurate (which was not always the case), there tended to be more detail in the original reports. The information was at an earlier part of the process, later it was often filtered and edited. By going back to the original reports and correspondence, it was possible to also access the confidential notes and supporting documentation, which frequently wasn’t evident in the published versions of the material. The reports from the State Department representatives in the US Consulates also tended to be richer and fuller than those from the Trade Commissioners attached to the Consulates.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past* outlines four moments in the process of historical production when ‘silences’ enter the process, all of which were evident in this study. The first moment is at the point of fact creation or the making of sources. At this point there is the issue of what is actually recorded, whether it is accurate and what is
omitted. Censorship records are good examples as in some jurisdictions detailed records still exist as to specific decisions and the reasons for them. Unfortunately, that was not the case for any of the locations studied here, although there were detailed records for Ontario, Canada and Australia existing in the New Zealand archives (which suggests there is a possibility of New Zealand records existing in Australian or Canadian archives). For other locations, there is the question of what was actually recorded, and what went unsaid. For New Zealand a registration book of films viewed by the censor still exist in the archives, but little information is provided beyond the titles of the films, footage and very minimal notes on cuts.

The second moment for Trouillot, is the point of assembly or making of the archives. This is the point at which a decision is made to keep records for posterity. An example is the one remaining copy of a censorship report from Hong Kong, which continues to exist as a result of a copy sent by a senior censor, Eric Hamilton, to a friend in the US Consulate on an unofficial basis, and subsequently preserved in their records. The report is detailed, and its existence suggests that there were many other reports that were destroyed. Other instances can be seen in comparing the documents available in the British archives with those in the US archives. In the UK Public Records Office, there are indexes of Foreign Office correspondence, including material that had been destroyed, presumably because they were deemed of little historic value. If the records existed, they may have been of value in this study; however, a value judgment by an archivist sometime in the past has precluded that possibility. It is at this point, then that many potential historical interpretations are eliminated as the evidence is destroyed, and resulting silences emerge.

There is another potential, perceived silence in the second moment that is apparent with archival materials, and that is the indexes and catalogues. They cannot be assumed to be complete and accurate, and not all the material available may be included within them. An example of this was found while researching the Congressional Hearing transcripts for the US House of Representatives and the US Senate. Dr. Julius Klein was normally indexed when testifying in his capacity as Director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. However, that was not the case for the Hearings before a Senate subcommittee on the House of Representatives Bill 11753 in 1926. In this case, it was
relevant for this study, as Dr. Klein commented on the need for a Trade Commissioner for the motion picture industry during this hearing. And yet, there is no indication in the index that he speaks.

Silences also occur due to the destruction of potential archival records, as was the case with the destruction of many of the Hong Kong and Straits Settlements records resulting from events outside the control of governments or archivists. There are clearly large amounts of government records that were destroyed ahead of, or as a result of, the Japanese invasion of the two colonies. One would assume, for instance, that there was some records kept of the censorship decisions made in Hong Kong (aggregate statistics appear in the Annual Reports of the Hong Kong Police); however, none came to light during the research for this dissertation.

The third and fourth moments for Trouillot are those of fact retrieval, of developing narratives from what material is left existing in the archives and in publications from the period, and the creation of history, finding the points of significance in the narratives. This is the point at which this dissertation comes in, as there are certainly silences because of the decisions made as to what include, what to leave out, and the interpretations created as a result. Although Trouillot points out that these moments are simply conceptual tools, they do raise the awareness that the narratives and history that result are shaped by both the evidence remaining (and is used), as well as by evidence that is lost or was never recorded, thus unable to be used. The narrative and interpretations in this study can only be considered to be one partial response to the evidence as a result.

This research, in its original conception, took a targeted and intensive approach, focusing, in large part, on known sources of government documentation on early screen policy. As noted earlier, there was a preference in going back to as close to the source as possible to decrease the problems of censorship and misinterpretation of information, and to obtain the widest possible coverage of the subject. Ian Jarvie notes that the information gathered by the State and Commerce Departments were censored before release, and it was that censored information that appeared in most of the trade papers of the day. Some of the earlier histories in this area, such as that written by Kristen Thompson and Kerry Segrave, have depended on the published sources, both in trade papers and published government reports. Whereas Thompson primarily used published government reports and
publications, Segrave focused more specifically on the trade papers. Although many of the sources for the stories would have been press releases and reports generated by the government departments, some of the material would have been gathered independently by journalists. This dissertation, by going back to the original consulate records, was able to access confidential comments and notes that were not released to any of the industry sources.

Marc Bloch in *The Historian’s Craft* advocates the use of a wide range of material and contextual evidence in the writing of history.\textsuperscript{108} The most comprehensive historical research projects are extensive and undergo a lateral search process drawing on a range of contextual material in the process of seeking the best interpretation of the evidence and events. Although this project did not go to the lengths suggested by Bloch, there was some lateral research undertaken to uncover addition evidence. An example of that here was the search of the US Consular Post Correspondence (USNA RG 84) for both Shanghai and Sydney, looking for material on Hong Kong (in the Shanghai correspondence) and New Zealand (in the Sydney correspondence).\textsuperscript{109} Both efforts paid off, particularly in the Shanghai files, which proved to be particularly rich in documentation on the screen industry in the greater China region. Although Peiping (now known as Beijing), and later Nanking, was the location of the US Legation, as that was where the Chinese national level government was based during the period, the US Consulate in Shanghai (the commercial centre for China) coordinated the commercial intelligence gathering efforts of the consulates in the Greater China region. Reports from Hong Kong to the US State Department in Washington, DC, would also be sent to Shanghai. Where there were gaps in one set of archival records (a very common occurrence), copies of reports or letters may be found in the files for another office. It is worth noting that the US State Department considered Hong Kong to be part of China although it was a British colony during this period and technically the sovereign territory of another nation.

There was also frequent correspondence between Shanghai and Hong Kong that would shed light on the conditions and operations in Hong Kong. For instance, some of the details on the operation of film censorship in Hong Kong only came to light in the investigation of the Shanghai files. The Cannan Commission in the Shanghai International Settlement in 1932 investigated film censorship in the Settlement.\textsuperscript{110} As part of the
evidence gathering process, questions were asked of the Hong Kong Government regarding film censorship in the colony. The detail of their response went beyond the detail found in either the US Hong Kong Consulate records, or the Hong Kong Governmental records. And as a further demonstration of the serendipity of archival research, valuable background on one of the Chief Censors in Hong Kong and main author of the submission to the Cannan Commission (1931) in Shanghai was found in Wellington in Archives New Zealand.111

Bloch brings up the issue of deception, specifically forgery and misrepresentation of the facts, when working with historic records.112 Bloch worked extensively with medieval documents where forgeries are commonplace. That was not an issue in this research; however, accuracy of the records was. The misrepresentations that were portrayed in the documents in many cases were unintended, though not true in all cases.113 A letter from Fox Films in 1934 in relation to a report they received on “The Motion Picture Industry in China” highlighted that there were many errors within the report.114 How do we account for this? Firstly, the motion picture industry in China (and everywhere else) was very fluid and constantly changing. The divergence in information between the Shanghai Consulate and Fox Films may simply because of changes in the market. There may have been omissions, which could be corrected in a later edition. But, in most cases I have assumed the information was generally correct, unless clearly out-of-line of expectations or other sources from the period. These reports were commercial intelligence intended to give US companies a clear picture of the situation in that locality. It is reasonable to assume that the writer would have provided accurate information as far as possible, based on their best knowledge and judgment. Errors are unlikely to have been deliberate. Industry sources were frequently used, and some of the comments from these sources appear to be inaccurate or off base. The consulates were in part dependent on local sources, which would have had less reason or motivation to be accurate. With experience, consular officers may well have picked up on where they were being provided inaccurate information. The accuracy was dependent on the source. Government sources could be considered to have a higher degree of validity, particularly where they were gathering statistics on such things as film censorship. In a centralized system, such as that in Singapore, a higher degree of trust can be assigned to the statistics. In Hong Kong, with the
decentralized operation of censorship and collection of statistics, there was probably more room for error.

As government statistics are often the only source of information in less developed economies and in earlier periods, they are generally assumed (rightly or wrongly) to be accurate. However, the example of import and export figures for films into and out of Hong Kong in 1931 and 1933 addressed in Chapter 4 suggest the potential fallacy in this.\textsuperscript{115} Although there is insufficient data to confirm there are errors in the Hong Kong trade data, what is available raises serious questions about validity. In this study, government statistics should be accepted with caution, in the absence of other independent sources of data.\textsuperscript{116}

Assumed facts may have become general knowledge based on their frequent use and lack of rebutting evidence. The US proclaimed throughout the period of the large audiences they commanded in most countries around the world. Comments were made frequently of having 75\% to 90\% of the market. These numbers were repeated frequently and became accepted as fact. However, the data suggests that this may not have always been the case and that the commonly used statistics for market share may be inaccurate and even misleading. The statistics are often based on the number of films (or total footage) submitted for censorship. Although the proportion of US films submitted for censorship may have been 75\% of the whole, this did not necessarily translate into 75\% of the audiences. ‘Bums on seats’ were different from reels of film passing through the hands of the censor. The US Consular reports document numerous examples of local cinemas primarily serving native audiences who showed very few US films. Although the ticket prices were also lower in these theatres, the seating capacity of the theatres suggest that the total audiences for local films may have been higher than previously suggested, and the total market share for US films of local audiences probably lower than commonly reported.

For instance, a telegram to the UK Colonial Film Committee showed that in Hong Kong in 1931, the average weekly attendance at Chinese cinemas was 61,247 against 46,713 for the cinemas with mixed audiences (and the ones more likely to have shown predominantly US films, also see figure 2.1 below).\textsuperscript{117} The assumption made in this study is that the Chinese cinemas showed a much larger proportion of Chinese films than the cinemas with a mixed audience. The telegram this data is taken from also reveals that all of
the Chinese cinemas still only screened silent movies at this time. These may have been a mixture of old silent movies from Hollywood with Chinese films produced in Hong Kong and Shanghai. What we don’t know is what the distribution patterns were for Chinese films. Did they run for a similar period of time, or were the runs longer? Further research is needed (utilizing cinema advertisements in newspapers from the period) to shed further light on this situation.

Figure 2.1: Hong Kong cinema seating capacity and average attendance in 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>US Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seating capacity</td>
<td>% of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed cinemas</td>
<td>7,252</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese cinemas</td>
<td>9,583</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Telegram from Governor of Hong Kong to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 Oct. 1931. TNA: PRO CO 323/1122/3 Colonial Film Committee (HK govt. figures); Donald Edgar, “Motion Pictures,” January 15, 1932. USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong Correspondence, Vol. 457, 840.6 (US figures).

The problem is also demonstrated in other ways. For instance, if we compare a report compiled by the US Consulate less than three months after a telegram from the Hong Kong government to London with the October 1931 figures, we can see that the US report included four cinemas not on the HK government list, but missed two that were. Although the total seating capacity in the US report was higher, the relative proportions were similar (see figure 2.1).

Comments in a 1932 Shanghai report regarding the import of films into Shanghai in 1931 provide another example of the problem. Richard Butrick states: “Of the other foreign films entering through the port of Shanghai during 1931, the British were second in value, followed by German and French films.” This totally ignores film from Japan, which is listed third by value on the list after Hong Kong (and most of the films from Hong Kong at that stage would have been from the US) from the Chinese Maritime Customs, and greater than imports from Great Britain, Germany and France combined. As Japanese made up by far the largest proportion of foreign citizens in the Shanghai International Settlement, and one of the seven first-run houses in Shanghai was dedicated exclusively to Japanese films, this was a major oversight on the part of Butrick.
This dissertation adds another dimension to that discussion, though not by investigating either the audiences or the movie texts themselves. Rather, the investigation is focused on the policy ecology within which the industry operated and the audience experience was constructed. Governments, for better or worse, became increasingly involved in the activities of the screen industry from the early years of the twentieth century, and have continued that involvement in some form to the present. That is in the nature of governments. In some cases the intervention has been overt and deliberate, possibly in response to a current moral panic, thus, the early introduction of censorship. At other times the intervention has been implicit, possibly incidental to other actions by governments. But, in the process these interventions have shaped both the viewing experience for audiences as well as the business and production environment for the companies creating or manufacturing the audience experience. Though often implicit in other studies, the political and regulatory environment are another facet of “new cinema history” (and media history in general), as this is what establishes the ecology within which the audience experience is ultimately shaped, as well as the composition of audiences themselves.

Although this dissertation is a study of comparative screen media policy, due to the paucity of research published on the three cases used in this study, considerable time is spent on establishing a historical narrative. Although the range of sources used to do this is primarily the government records themselves, sufficient detail is available from these to provide a reasonable indication of the events of the period. Let us now look at the framework for comparing policy in the three cases.

Towards a Policy Imperatives Model

To undertake a comparative analysis across a number of cases, there needs to be some commonalities or common areas that are investigated. Some form of categorisation or taxonomy is needed to assist in the systematic identification of similarities and differences between the cases. In this instance, the comparisons are happening across two dimensions. There is the comparison between the three cases, two of which are similar in form (colonies), and a comparison between political forms (dominion and colonies). To facilitate this consideration was given to the motivations and reasons behind government
policy and intervention into the screen industry, which led to the development of the policy imperatives model or typology.

A question underlying this dissertation was, why do governments intervene in the screen industry? Behind the various forms of intervention are reasons or motivations that drive the government focus or actions in the area. These decisions may be made on ideological grounds, or on pragmatic grounds to protect or to meet the needs of a particular portion of the population. An imperative here is defined as a reason or motivation for a need to be addressed that results in the formulation or implementation of policy. These imperatives may include such things as safety standards for cinemas to avoid loss of life in the event of a fire, taxing admission tickets as a form of government revenue, or setting exhibition quotas to ensure a particular nationality of film (British in this instance) are screened.

For this study, a policy imperatives framework is used as the basis of comparison, which categorises government policies into three main imperatives: safety (physical and moral), social control and development, and economic. These categories are not mutually exclusive as some policy actions, particularly in the case of censorship, were the result of a mixture of imperatives. Governments in meeting these imperatives used policy tools, and as we will see in the cases, the tools themselves may have served more than one of those imperatives. The policy tools and interventions were developed and implemented in relationship to the requirements of both the imperial centre and the local, primarily corporate, stakeholders.

**Conceptualising the model graphically**

The Policy Imperatives Model can be conceptualised graphically as three overlapping domains of policy imperatives, within which policy tools may be applied. Because the tools may support more than one imperative, the domains are not mutually exclusive, and as in the case of censorship, and could potentially be used to support all three imperatives. Censorship is not the only policy tool where such convergence applies, but is probably the one that is most prominent, but rarely used to support the economic imperative.
Propaganda and quotas are shown as having dual roles — used for both economic and social control and development reasons. In the case of propaganda, it is both an important tool for nation-building and influencing the beliefs and values of the population, as well as playing the more economic role of selling particular ideas, products and lifestyles. In the case of quotas, they can be used to both support industries (as was the case in Great Britain) as well as maintain space on the screen for local productions for identity and nation building (evident in New Zealand as well as Great Britain). Although not evident in any of the cases here, Hollywood was able to circumvent some of the latter restrictions by producing films behind the quota wall, without them necessarily being reflective or even associated with local culture. The production activities of Hollywood in Canada and Great Britain are the prime examples of this.

Figure 2.2: Policy Imperatives Model

Safety imperative

At the first level of the Policy Imperatives model is Safety. Safety can take two forms: physical (as in the physical safety of audiences within the theatre buildings) and moral. At this level the government is simply trying to keep the population or specific segments of the population from safe certain perceived threats. Initially the physical safety requirements of cinemas were covered under the same requirements as theatres for live
performances, but it didn’t take long for the recognition that cinemas had differing requirements. Explicit regulation of safety in cinema theatres began with the British Parliament passing the Imperial Cinematograph Act of 1909, which was subsequently replicated fairly quickly in many of the Colonies and Dominions throughout the Empire. Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements had actually passed legislation to license and regulate theatres in 1908, and thus, in some respects, were ahead of the imperial centre.

Theatre fires were a significant danger; therefore, by the time the cinematograph was first presented, there were well-established regulations in place governing places of public entertainment. Prior to the introduction of electricity, the danger of fire in a theatre was substantial as an open flame provided much of the lighting. As a result, building regulations evolved to facilitate the exit of the audience in event of a fire. With the coming of electricity, the risk of fire from an open flame was much diminished. There was a new menace, although not immediately apparent, with the introduction of moving pictures into public entertainment spaces. Early film used a nitrate stock, which proved to be chemically unstable and extremely inflammable. Once the nitrate stock catches fire, nothing can be done to extinguish it, as the combustion process generates its own oxygen. The film has to be left to burn itself out. With this knowledge, regulations were imposed early on governing the projection, storage and transportation of nitrate film. Bertrand cites a memo from 1908 in South Australia noting that the “London County Council insists on the cinema apparatus being enclosed in a metal box to prevent panic and fire” as the films once alight could produce flames as high as eighteen feet. Projection booths were often encased in metal or constructed as fireproof boxes that could be shut-off from the rest of the theatre building. Anthony Slide details a number of early nitrate film-related fires following the Paris Charity Bazaar in 1897 where 180 people were killed. In the British Empire, it wasn’t until 1927 that there was any significant loss of life due to cinema fires with seventy-six children dying in the Laurier Palace Cinema fire in Montreal. Nearly three years later, sixty-nine children and two adults were killed in the Glen Cinema fire in Paisley in Scotland. In both cases, the large death toll was primarily due to panic and blocked or locked fire exits, and led to a subsequent tightening of regulations.

Fires in the projection booth could be controlled, and frequently were, without the audience necessarily noticing much beyond an interruption in the projection of the film.
The booth was fireproof, and there were fireproof shutters that would automatically drop in event of a fire. Panic, however, could result in uncontrolled chaos where members of the audience (particularly children) could be trampled in the rush for the exits. Connected with the risk of panic, was the importance of easy egress from the theatre in the event of a fire, and outside of the projection booth regulations, this was the focus of the building code requirements. The importance of having fire exit doors that opened outwards into large enough areas for audiences to escape quickly was incorporated into building codes early. Hong Kong went as far as following Seattle building standards by requiring that there be at least ten feet clear distance from other buildings.\textsuperscript{127}

Moral safety was a concern from the early days and one of the first areas to be specifically regulated. Although fire safety was ostensibly the reason for the first licensing of cinematograph theatres in Great Britain with the introduction of the Cinematograph Act of 1909, which provided local authorities in Great Britain with the legal basis to license those theatres. James Robertson, in his 1985 study on the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), suggests with some evidence that the real purpose underlying the legislation may have been censorship.\textsuperscript{128} By December 1910, the prerogative of local authorities to exercise their authority in such a way to control and regulate content was established through legal judgement. The growth of local authority censorship of film content increasingly alarmed the film trade leading to concerns that the central government may moved to impose censorship.\textsuperscript{129} Although local authorities were responsible for the licensing of the cinemas, the local police were often delegated the duty of ensuring that content met local standards. The end result of this was that after discussions with the Home Office in 1912, the film industry established a censorship board (the BBFC), which began operations on 1 January 1913.

Initially, the examiners for the board had only two specific guidelines laid down for them by G.A. Redford, the first President of the BBFC: no nudity and no portrayal of the living figure of Jesus Christ. However, from early on they used much broader principles in deciding what should or should not be allowed.\textsuperscript{130} Although the restrictions appeared to be wide ranging, very few films were totally banned.\textsuperscript{131} As censorship developed, the BBFC continued to work without strictly following a set of written rules, as they felt they needed sufficient flexibility to judge each film in its entirety on their individual merits, with the
scenes considered in their context. However, they were guided by “the broad principle that nothing will be passed which is calculated to demoralize the public, extenuate crime or vice, or shock the just susceptibilities of any section of the public.” These guidelines were described in broad terms in a 1926 brochure published by the BBFC, portions of which are reproduced in Appendix 2.1. Although not portrayed as a strict set of rules, it is likely that these guidelines were well known to censors throughout the British Empire. An example of this is a letter that the Secretary of State for the Colonies received from the Straits Settlements Government in 1930 noting that the Censor and Committee of Appeal in the Colony based their decisions on the schedule printed in England by the BBFC in 1926.

In the British colonies, censorship was largely the responsibility of the police, at least initially, while, in the Dominions, governments took control by establishing an office separate from the police to undertake the function. In New Zealand, although there had been calls for censorship of films as early as 1911 and initially it was viewed as a police matter, it was a police report regarding a film screening in Timaru purporting to include real war footage that spurred the government into action (later it was ascertained that the footage was fake). The fear was that images of wounded and dying soldiers may lead to opposition to the war, and thus censorship was necessary to forestall such an eventuality. Although the First World War and the necessity of protecting the morale of the population provided the backdrop for the establishment of dedicated censors in some locations, such as New Zealand and Australia, in other places the concern was more about protecting the reputation of the colonial powers among the indigenous or “less-developed” peoples. In particular, restrictions were introduced regarding the portrayal of situations that would decrease the respect for the ‘white’ woman or man (the ruling elite), any symbols of authority (such as the military), or in the case of colonies such as Hong Kong, East Indians were an important part of the colonial police forces.

Richard Maltby notes that outside of wartime exigencies, film censorship by the state “ha[s] not been prominent features of twentieth-century liberal democracies,” and instead self-regulation or market censorship was more often practiced to ensure films produced met the moral norms of society. In countries such as Great Britain and the United States, where the state did become directly involved, it was frequently at the local
rather than the national level. This wasn’t the case, however, elsewhere in the British Empire as is illustrated by the three cases here. The function of censorship, then, from early on had both social control as well as moral safety aspects, and it was these social control attributes that made it a particularly important policy.

In terms of the model, it is apparent that safety was handled, at least in part, at the local government level, or as part of self-regulation in the industry, although the full-range of possible practices is not evident from the cases studied here. That doesn’t diminish its role within the model, but does mean that the considerations of imperatives needs to be wider than just the national government level, and that the model should possibly incorporate non-governmental practices. For the purposes of this study, only the policies at the level of the polity or national government are considered.

**Social Control and Development**

Social control and development is a more amorphous category than Safety, as it encompasses a range of policy tools whose function was more to influence, educate or guide the audiences rather than provide prescriptive limits. Control and development are two sides of the same thing. While *control* has the sense of limiting or directing the audience in a particular direction, *development* has a more positive connotation in that some improvement is implied.

Regulations were only one, rather blunt tool used in this category. Censorship has already been mentioned, as its social control functions were particularly important in the colonies where there was a need to maintain the prestige of the colonial elite and not introduce subversive or dangerous ideas to the local people. Native audiences were thought to lack the sophistication of Western audiences, and so would misunderstand some of the images presented to them; an example of an early fear of the “hypodermic needle’ theory of media effects. There was a fear that the behaviour and images shown in many of the US films would lower the prestige of the colonial elite and respect for the ‘white’ people, and this would lead to a disintegration of the colonial social-structure. The social control functions of censorship made it one of the most important policy tools used by colonial governments in their oversight of the screen industry.
Other tools used by colonial governments included licensing requirements for control over the placement of cinemas or studios, and the use of film for educational and propaganda purposes. In the latter case, colonial governments made little use of the medium themselves until late in the period; however, the British government placed some attention on the use of film as a tool in the ‘development’ of ‘native’ or ‘primitive’ peoples throughout the Empire, application of an early version of the liberal modernisation theory.138 This development encompassed both knowledge and skills to improve the health and social well-being of the people (such as Plague Operations in Lagos (1926) and other films by William Sellers in Nigeria and later for the Colonial Film Unit, or the Rockefeller Foundation films on the dangers of hook-worm and how to protect against it), as well as the moral development of the population.139 Most of the focus was on the use of film in the African colonies, although there is the suggestion in the archival record of cinema trucks used in British Malaya. It is unclear as to whether this use of cinema trucks in rural areas in British Malaya (not including Singapore) was extended to the screening of educational films.140 Zoë Druick has touched on the use of mobile cinemas within the British Empire,141 but this is still an under researched area. By the end of the period, the educational use of films was becoming reasonably widespread in the colonies with a Colonial Film Unit established by the Ministry of Information in 1939 for that purpose.142

**Economic imperative**

The third imperative, though among the colonies it appears to have been relatively unimportant, was the economic imperative. The area covers all forms of policy or intervention provided to generate revenue for the government (such as taxes and duties), as well as to stimulate business. Thus, this also covered quotas and the development of business or trade support bodies, such as film banks and film commissions (neither of which are applicable to the current cases during this period). At the colonial level, the primary form of economic intervention was through taxes, although there was discussion at the 1927 Colonial Office Conference regarding the request from the Colonial Office that some form of British quota be introduced (almost none of the colonies acceded to this request, with Trinidad being the exception).141 The lack of interest by governments in creating and stimulating local film production sectors is interesting, and will be returned to in the conclusion. New Zealand did provide a concessionary rate with its film hire tax for
locally-produced films, but that had little impact on the development of a production sector. And in Hong Kong, where a significant production industry developed from the mid-1930s, there was little official recognition of its existence from the colonial government, and no economic support or assistance. The only economic interest governments in Hong Kong and Singapore had was from a taxation point-of-view, and even there, admission taxes formed a very small portion of total government revenues.

The economic imperative can be most clearly seen in this period in the actions of the British government in supporting their film production industry (starting with the quota legislation). As countries developed and the establishment of local production sectors became more important, governments frequently established support programmes through such tools as institutions, subsidies and tax incentives. The economic imperative was also evident in the actions of the US government in their support of Hollywood through the extensive commercial intelligence gathering operations of the State Department and Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, along with diplomatic support in lobbying foreign governments.

These three imperatives broadly encompass all of the policy tools used by governments of the three cases studied here. They provide a framework within which similarities and differences between the three localities can better be identified and analysed. As has already been hinted at, and can be seen in the following cases, not only does the model show similarities between the cases, but also suggests there are differences in imperatives between different forms of polity, colonial, dominion or imperial.

The next chapter will provide a background at the imperial level of the events and negotiations around screen policy during the interwar period. With the motion picture providing a range of values and ideologies to the mass audience, and attracting a significant portion of leisure expenditure, it was an area that captured the attention of many governments. The policies and events at the imperial level, both within the British Empire, as well as in the ascending US, provided the backdrop and context for government policy and intervention in the cases here.
Endnotes


3 Will Hays, the first President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America used to boast that the film industry was the 4th largest industry in the US. Mae Heuttig in her study of the US film industry in 1944 suggested that the ranking in 1937 was 45. Maybe Hays missed a digit and meant 44th. See Mae Heuttig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 57.


8 Murdock and Golding, 66; Mosco, 33-34.

9 Murdock and Golding, 61; Mosco, 26-27.

10 Murdock and Golding, 61, notes that critical political economy is holistic, historical, concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention, engages in the questions of justice, equity and public good; Mosco, 26, reconceptualises these as: social change and history, the social totality, moral philosophy and praxis.


17 Lenin 1917, 237.
18 The ‘majors’ were: Paramount, Warner Brothers, Loews/MGM, Fox (became Twentieth Century-Fox in 1935), and RKO (formed in 1928) (collectively known as the ‘Big Five,’ along with the ‘Little Three,’ Columbia, Universal, and United Artists. Although the ‘Little Three’ had production and distribution operations approaching the size of the ‘Big Five,’ they did not own theatres. See Richard Maltby, Hollywood Cinema 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 118-121. Some scholars refer to only the Big Five as majors, and the Little Three as minors. See Douglas Gomery, The Hollywood Studio System (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 157.
20 Manjunath Pendakur, Canadian Dreams & American Control (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990);
21 Although the operation wasn’t purely conducting intelligence into the film industry; film was in fact one small aspect of the total operation, the intelligence gathered was substantial and played a significant role in enabling Hollywood distributors (and film industry manufacturers) to compete internationally. There were only a few areas of the globe not covered by the intelligence operation. Most notable of these was the Soviet Union.
24 Copies of the constant flow of correspondence to the MPPDA from the US Department of Commerce residing in the US National Archives provided one of the sources of source information for this study. Unfortunately the microfilms of the General Correspondence files from the MPPDA do not include most of the correspondence received by the Foreign Department.
25 Kiely, 54.
26 ibid.
27 ibid., 5.
29 Angus Ross, “Reluctant Dominion or Dutiful Daughter? New Zealand and the Commonwealth in the Inter-war years,” Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, 10(1) (1972): 28-44.
32 ibid., 17.
New Zealand also engaged in imperialism as it attempted to build a South Pacific empire. In 1901 it annexed the Cook Islands and then occupied German Samoa at the beginning of the First World War. It was later granted the mandate to administer Samoa by the League of Nations in 1920.


ibid.


ibid., 753.

ibid., 767.


Raymond Williams, Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87.

ibid., 90.


ibid., 208.


Mae Huettig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 56-57. One of course could be very generous and suggest that maybe this is what Hays meant all along, but got the numbers mixed up. This is doubtful.


Hill, 633-634.

ibid., 630.

ibid.


ibid., 126-156.

ibid., 217.


72 Allen and Gomery, iv.

73 ibid., 14-15.

74 ibid., 18-20.


78 ibid., 23.


Kate Bowles, “ ‘All the evidence is that Cobbargo is slipping’: an ecological approach to rural cinemagoing,” Film Studies, 10, 87-89; Kate Bowles, “The Last Bemboka Picture Show: 16mm Cinemas as Rural Community Fundraiser in the 1950s,” in Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (ed’s.), The New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Bowles, 218-320.


Miller, et. al., 31.


NZNA, IA 83 2/7/7 Canadian return on excisions and rejections 1938-42; IA 83 2/7/5 Reports Australia – Returns of Excisions and Rejections 1935-42.

NZNA, IA 60 6 14 Registers of Films viewed by the Censor, 1 April to 17 July, 1930.


E. W. Hamilton to Roger Tredwell, 8th Nov., 1927, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 388, 840.6. The text of the censorship report is included in this dissertation as Appendix 5.3.

*Index to the Correspondence of The Foreign Office, 1920 to 1940* (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1969). TNA: PRO, CO 349/22 Index to the Correspondence of the Foreign Office for the Years 1920 to 1940.

Dr. Julius Klein (1886-1961) taught Latin American and Spanish history at Harvard (1915-23) and was considered to also be Herbert Hoover’s right-hand man in the US Department of Commerce. He joined the Department of Commerce in 1917, was Director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce from 1922-29, when he became Assistant Secretary of Commerce until 1933. His testimony before Congress was frequently cited by Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister and others in the debates in the British Parliament. See Ian Jarvie, *Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 303-305, 332.


Trouillot, 26.


USNA, RG 84 Consular Records, Shanghai Consulate; USNA, RG 84 Consular Records, Sydney Consulate. In hindsight, more material on New Zealand may have been found in the correspondence for the Melbourne post as that seemed to be the more active consular in terms of the motion picture industry.

USNA, RG 84 Consular Records, Shanghai Consulate, 840.6, Vol. 2288


Bloch, 90-91.

Dr. Stacilee Ford, a scholar at the University of Hong Kong, mentioned in a discussion with the author at a Fulbright Symposium in Hong Kong in 2004, that she believed reports from the US Consulate often overstated the role or importance of the US and the consulates. A possible reflection of this can be seen in the figures used regarding the percentage of the local market that US films held, which in some cases (as is evident for Manchuria), are likely to have been inflated or overly optimistic estimates.


116 It is possible that further research in Chinese archives (such as the Chinese Maritime Customs archives) may provide a more complete and more accurate set of data.

117 Telegram from the Governor of Hong Kong to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20th October, 1931. UK National Archives, Public Records Office (hereafter TNA: PRO), CO 323/1122/3 Colonial Film Committee.

118 Richard Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” Oct. 4, 1932, 44. USNA, RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 7221, 893/4061/69

119 ibid., 43

120 The use of this category can be shown by a couple of examples. The first was cinema licensing legislation introduced in Great Britain in 1909, which provided sufficient scope for local authorities to go beyond the safety aspects of cinema buildings and to also concern themselves with moral safety through censorship. Elsewhere in the Empire, Southern Rhodesia provides an example where the Entertainments Control and Censorship Act of 1932 dealt with both safety in theatres and cinemas, along with the censorship of films and film advertising (as well as film quotas). See: Appendix IX, 6. TNA: PRO, BT 55/3 Committee on Cinematograph Films (Lord Moyne’s Committee), 1936. Documents circulated to Committee (with Index).

121 The labelling of it as an Imperial Act meant that it was applicable throughout the British Empire in the absence of similar legislation within a particular locality. In practice, many of the Dominions and colonies would subsequently pass legislation similar to that passed in England.

122 The Theatres Regulation Ordinance, No. 18 of 1908 (Hong Kong); The Theatres Ordinance, No. XVII of 1908 (Straits Settlements).

123 Ina Bertrand, Film Censorship in Australia (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 5.


129 ibid., 4.

130 Cinema Commission of Inquiry (1917), p. 104. Pages 254-255 list a code of forty-three rules of situations that were disallowed by the examiners.
111 Early records for the BBFC are fragmentary, but there are indications from evidence presented by the BBFC Secretary, Brooke Wilkinson, to the Cinema Commission of Inquiry (1917), that for the years 1913 to 1916, less that 0.4 per cent of films were rejected outright, although approximately 10 per cent in 1916 required some excisions (p. 214). Annual Reports of the BBFC from the 1920s suggest that the very low level of outright rejections continued, although the proportion of films requiring cuts increased. 1921, 433 of 1,960 films required cuts; 1923, 237 of 1,923 films; 1925, 361 of 1,885 films; 1928, 345 of 1,947 films. See *Annual Reports of the British Board of Film Censors*, 1921, 1923, 1925 and 1928.

112 TNA: PRO, CO 323/1045/1 Film Censorship – Colonies. Letter dated 4th October 1929 from Secretary for Native Affairs, Gold Coast to the Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, p. 3.

113 TNA: PRO, CO 323/1118/9 Film Censorship. Letter from ‘Officer Administering the Government’ to Right Honourable Lord Passfield Corner, Colonial Office dated 5 December 1930, p. 2.


115 Roger Culver Treadwell, “Report on motion picture industry in Hong Kong,” April 24, 1926. USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong Correspondence, Vol. 374, 840.6. Although the *Hong Kong Blue Book* records show that East Indians made up a significant portion of the Hong Kong Police (approximately one-third), it was not the “almost entirely of Indians” suggested by Treadwell.


117 This fear was probably most prominently expressed by Sir Hesketh Bell, a former Colonial Governor, who wrote an article for *The Times* in 1926, and later a minority opinion in the 1930 report following a colonial conference dedicated to the influence of film in the colonies. See James Burns, “American Philanthropy and Colonial Film-making: The Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation and the Birth of Colonial Cinema,” in Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe (ed’s.), *Empire and Film* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute, 2011), 55-69; *Report of the Colonial Films Committee* (London: HMSO, 1930); Rex Stevenson, “Cinemas and Censorship in Colonial Malaya,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Sept. 1974, 209-224.


120 TNA: PRO, CO 323/1253/3 Educational film in the colonies, 1932; William Brass to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23rd July 1941. TNA: PRO, CO 859/46/10 BFI application for grant from the Colonial Office to investigate the effect of films on native races. This file has an application from the BFI for funds for an experimental cinema truck for Malaya (as well as West Africa and the West Indies). The application was declined on that occasion. However, mention is made in an earlier memorandum. See: “Draft Memorandum on the Non-Theatrical Distribution of Films Within the British Empire,” December 1938. TNA: PRO, ED 121/285 Dominions, India + Colonies Panel of the Advisory Council.


Chapter 3: The Imperial Context

In Great Britain and throughout the Empire, nearly every film shown represents American ideas, set out in an American atmosphere (and in American language). The accessories are American houses, American motor cars, American manufactures, and so forth. I have no wish to attack or to malign the American industry, but cinematograph audiences everywhere are made up of the most impressionable sections of the community, and it seems to me of the utmost importance that they should see at least some proportion of British films – of importance for our prestige, for our trade, and – I am assured – for our morals. I am therefore convinced that a British film industry would be a national asset.1

– Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, 1926

“Trade follows the film, rather than the flag”2
– Prince of Wales, date unknown3

In order to understand how and what policy was formed and implemented in the cases, it is important to understand the historical, political and economic background in which decisions were made. The three cases that follow were part of the British Empire, and thus did not operate independently of the wider empire. This chapter then provides the background and context for the three cases through a review of the literature and shows the origins of many of the local debates and measures in the three cases, as well as the broader imperial context within which the debates were taking place. Implicit in these debates were questions and issues around imperialism, and who had dominance and control over the subordinate territories. The chapter begins by looking at the support provided by the US government towards the industry and the formation of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), before going on to map out the key events in Great Britain and developments elsewhere in the British Empire.

The epigram at the beginning of this chapter by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII for a brief period) in a speech in 1923 that “trade follows film” succinctly summed up a major reason that the US government supported (and continues to support) the US film industry in its drive to totally dominate the global film market. By dominating the global movie screens with images of US goods and way of life, they hoped to also
capture a large portion of international trade from the British, and to a lesser degree, from European manufacturers. The battle for the cultural influence of international markets was a battle for export markets, and in the case of the US, an outlet for the goods produced by their excess production capacity. The phrase from the Prince of Wales would be picked up by US officials, along with the suggestion that “every foot of film exported equals a dollar of trade”, was the proclamation by Will Hays, the President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) that they were setting out to “Americanize the world.” This latter phrase was eventually dropped in international forums when it became clear that the rest of the world didn’t want to be ‘Americanized.’

**United States of America**

Trade was clearly an important justification for the US government support of the industry, as new markets were needed to maintain the overproducing factories within the United States. US workers needed to be kept employed if what was to become known as the ‘American dream’ was continuing to be a reality. These new markets needed to be introduced to the ideology of consumerism, and for this, cinema was admirably suited. In testimony to the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations in 1926, Julius Klein told the story of being shipwrecked off the coast of Peru in 1919, and seeing the demand for American goods in the local market as a result of what the local audiences saw on their screens. American films were creating a desire for American goods.

According to Jarvie, US government intelligence gathering on the motion picture industry began in 1911, shortly after the establishment of the Department of Commerce. He notes that Thompson dates the major move into intelligence gathering on the motion picture industry globally to 1916, which is supported by a memorandum from the State Department to US Consuls dated 15 December 1916, when they were requested to place attention on reporting fully “upon the market for American films and accessories in your district.” Reports on the industry had been filed by overseas posts prior to this date, and their usefulness had lead to the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (NAMPI, predecessor to the MPPDA) to request their continued collection. Many of these reports were published in a very brief and encapsulated form in the Department of Commerce publication, *Commerce Reports*, as well as in *Daily Consular and Trade*
Reports. Later, more substantial reports were published as part of the Trade Information Bulletin series, as well as brief reports as Motion Pictures Abroad. Thompson drew on all of these publications in her 1985 work.

Establishment of an intelligence section in the Department of Commerce

The US Congress also showed interest in foreign markets for motion pictures from early on, with a request in 1919 for the Secretary of Commerce, Redfield, to appear before the House of Representatives to report “upon the value of moving pictures as a means of commercial promotion at home and abroad.” A subsequent plan to request funding from Congress that year to support intelligence gathering for the industry was withdrawn due to an environment of cost-cutting. Another request for a report on the development of overseas markets came in August 1921, this time from the US Senate. Herbert Hoover, the Secretary of Commerce from 1919-1928, and subsequently President, was a strong supporter of using motion pictures to promote commerce, and advocated at the 1926 budget hearings for funding for the establishment of an intelligence section dedicated to the motion picture industry within the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (BF&DC). He was successful, and the intelligence collecting functions formerly under the ‘Other Specialties Division’ were reconstituted as the ‘Motion Picture Section’ (later upgraded for a time as a Division) under Clarence J. North as from 1 July 1926. Although the depression and budget cuts in the government would later see the Motion Picture Division down-graded and absorbed into other divisions for a time, the intelligence functions continued according to Jarvie for some twenty years. In terms of the narrative here, the BF&DC was very much in the background, and more important as a source of information than a participant in the action.

Creel Committee

An important US government body that Jarvie fails to mention in his monograph, and to which Trumpbour only makes a passing reference, but had an important role in the distribution of US films internationally at the end of the First World War, was the Committee on Public Information (CPI) or the Creel Committee. This committee, led by George Creel enlisted the expertise of a wide range of advertising and public relations
experts, such as Edward Bernays, to initially shift public opinion within the US to support entry into the war being fought in Europe. This they successfully did through the development of what was probably the first large-scale public relations campaign. As US involvement in the war progressed, their responsibilities grew to include the approval of films for export to other countries, and they imposed a requirement that 20% of all film footage exported would include informational films (or commercial propaganda) about US products. As US films were dominating most international markets by this stage (as a result of the collapse of the European film production in the wake of the war), this was the beginning of a significant and systematic promotion of US goods and industries internationally. Although the CPI ceased to function with the end of the war, and the 20% requirement was dropped, this initial push provided an impetus that would continue.

It was against this state-supported promotional drive that the elite in the British Empire sounded the alarm, as they were concerned about the apparent impact that Hollywood films were having on British subjects around the world. Rachael Low, in her 1971 work, charts the decline in the exhibition of British films to a level of forty-five films in 1925 and thirty-seven in 1926 from 145 in 1920. The rapid penetration of foreign markets by Hollywood films is detailed by Kristen Thompson who maps out the international trade flows of films from 1907. Whereas, in the pre-First World War period, the major film producing and distributing countries had been France and Italy (with several others, such as Denmark also significant producers), the war in Europe had created a severe dislocation in European film production, providing the opportunity for US producers to move in to fill the demand. Along with their films, the renters of US films brought with them new business practices, shifting the business from the sale of film as a commodity on a per foot basis, to renting the films to exhibitors, while retaining ownership of the films themselves. Along with the shift to rental of films came the practices of blind and block booking; the practice of booking films based on a title and very brief synopsis, and the practice of booking a continuous supply of films, often for twelve months or more. This provided a much more efficient form of conducting business as producers were able to gain guaranteed sales for the films before many of them had been produced, while exhibitors were able to gain a secure source of supply. For local producers, however, it blocked their access to local screens, as exhibitors had their programmes fully booked.
months in advance. It was because of this that the Federation of British Industries (FBI) approached the government for assistance.

Cinema was not the only vehicle of imperialism or Americanisation during the period, but it was the one that was most visible and governments paid the most attention to. The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was a period of considerable global trade and travel; a larger portion of total trade by some measures then was the case in the latter part of the twentieth century. The telegraph and growth of news wire services enabled the rapid dissemination of news of major events. The gramophone enabled recordings of music and singers to be exported all over the world, bringing a common experience to listeners internationally. This was later followed by the radio, which, although primarily focused on domestic audiences, was used by some governments to broadcast propaganda or to link diasporic groups in other parts of the world. The BBC, through its World Service, was probably the most significant network in the pre-World War II era, although both Germany and Japan also had significant international broadcasting operations. The British also built up a network of British Council offices through the world, supporting and disseminating British culture. Initially operating out of consulates, from 1938 the British Council began establishing separate offices. The difference with cinema was the dominance that US producers had in the major international markets until governments stepped in to set limits on the number of Hollywood films that were allowed to be screened in local markets (though the language barriers that the introduction of sound provided also had an impact).

**Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America**

The establishment of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1922 has been well covered elsewhere, but in brief, according to both Jarvie and Trumpbour, the development of the MPPDA can best be understood in the context of the ideology of corporatism. This involved self-regulation from within the industry itself, along with building national corporations and state-corporate cooperation. The corporations would conduct themselves with a high level of moral actions, and would be good citizens within the communities they operated within.
The motion picture industry in the US was beset by a number of problems in the early 1920s, and the NAPMI was ineffective and without the strength to deal with them. Jarvie’s explanation for the formation of the MPPDA suggests that by withdrawing support from the NAPMI, the major corporate players initiated its collapse and enabled them to form a new organisation with a different (and stronger) structure.\(^{27}\) The main problems he saw was:

1. Overseas restrictions on American films;
2. Organization by foreign firms and governments to promote locally made films at home and abroad; and
3. Disarray and lack of cooperation both among U.S. firms and between the U.S. motion picture industry and the federal government.\(^{28}\)

Although the growing threat of censorship, both at the state and federal level, particularly in wake of the ‘Fatty’ Arbuckle controversy, was also an issue and became an important focus in the early days of the MPPDA, it was the problems listed above that led to the formation of the MPPDA.\(^{29}\) The appointment of Will Hays, at that time the Postmaster-General following his role in the election of President Harding as part of the Republican National Committee preceding the establishment of the MPPDA, provided the organisation with a leader and figurehead with superb public relations and organisational skills, as well as being very well connected politically.\(^{30}\) It was the MPPDA that would drive Hollywood’s overseas initiatives and policy, with support from the US State Department and Department of Commerce. The MPPDA maintained a close relationship with these government departments, along with sister (or arguably, daughter) organisations in Great Britain (the Kinematograph Renters Association), Canada (Motion Picture Distributors Association) and Australia (Motion Picture Distributors of Australia).

Although most of the focus of the MPPDA was on European relations, on occasion they focused their eye on problems in the Asia Pacific region. China and Japan occasionally gained attention when registering their indignation or displeasure at the portrayal of their nationals as villains in Hollywood movies. In the case of China, this resulted in the MPPDA and studios consulting directly with a Chinese motion picture liaison officer stationed in the Los Angeles consulate.\(^{31}\) And then, there was the problem of piracy (illegal copying or exhibition) of Hollywood films. Although the Hollywood distributors had an extensive network of agents monitoring cinemas and screenings
(including estimating audience sizes to ensure that reported box office takings were in line with actuality), on occasion cinemas would obtain either pirated copies of movies, or movies from unauthorised sources, and US diplomatic personnel would be asked to intervene.

In late 1927, the BFDC sought funding from Congress for an additional Trade Commissioner for the Asia Pacific region, paralleling the earlier appointment of George Canty in Europe. Appearing before the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations was a Mr. Burt New, who on behalf of the MPPDA outlined the case for a Motion-Picture Trade Commissioner for the Far East. He reminded the Committee of the problems that arose in Europe in early 1926 that resulted in the appointment of a motion-picture trade commissioner to that part of the world, and then went on to outline the agitation against US films in Australia, New Zealand, India and the Straits Settlements. The agitation to which he was referring was the proposals to introduce quota legislation along the lines of the British legislation. He also noted the piracy of US films in China and the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), along with the strength of the Japanese production industry, making it difficult for the distribution of US films in that territory. In 1926, the volume of US exports of film to the Asia Pacific region was similar to Europe, with Australia receiving the largest volume of US films in the world. The hope was that a commissioner based in Asia (or the Orient as he termed it) would enable the US industry to address these situations and other issues with the local governments in a similar way to what was happening in Europe. That absence of the subsequent appointment of a trade commissioner for the motion picture industry indicates this request was denied, though no archival records documenting the reasoning behind this decision were found in the research for this study.

**Economic background**

The period of the 1920s and 30s were one of considerable economic and social turmoil. Following the armistice, there was a period of economic recession followed by a boom culminating in the New York stock market crash of 1929. This led into the Great Depression, although Kindleberger, in his account, suggests that the cause of the depression was a lot more complex, and not related to any one single cause. The
depression was more a result of a systematic breakdown of economic relationships between countries, of which there were a number of contributory factors, rather than singular issues that are sometimes suggested such as: the drying up of liquidity following the New York Stock Market Crash, war loans and reparations, and inappropriate repegging of countries re-entering the gold standard following WWI. It is true that by the mid-1920s, the US stock markets were booming and there was a speculative frenzy as those with the capital to invest in the markets were able to make substantial profits. This was also a time of rapid expansion of the film industry.

Janet Wasko, in her 1982 monograph, outlines the evolution of the financialisation of the motion picture industry from the early days. With the capital-intensive nature of the industry, particularly with the development of cinemas from storefront nickelodeons into extravagant entertainment palaces and the coming of sound, the involvement of banks and financiers in the industry became crucial for its development and growth. With the increasing flow of capital into the industry, bankers also increased their influence and control, looking to maximise their return while minimising their risk. The onset of the depression also affected the motion picture industry, though possibly to a lesser degree than other industries as people flocked to the cinemas for a low-cost escape from the hardship of living in an economically depressed environment for a couple of hours.

By the early 1930s, the global environment had changed. The Great Depression was having a global impact, the Nazi Party was rising to power in Germany, and there were signs of increasing militarism from both Germany and Japan. Britain was beginning to prepare for a new war. China was embroiled in a low-level civil war, halted by the invasion by Japan in 1937, which also signals the beginning of WWII. It is against this backdrop that we consider the development of government policy towards the screen industry in Great Britain and the British Empire.

**Great Britain**

The perception that British subjects throughout the British Empire were being Americanised as a result of Hollywood films was an issue of considerable concern to the imperial government in the United Kingdom and elites throughout the British Empire. Hollywood films dominated British screens in the post-World War I period, as well as the
cinema screens throughout the British Empire (and most of the world). British films had difficulties competing for a number of reasons, not the least being that Hollywood distributors booked up all of the major cinemas for their films many months in advance, a combination of two practices known as block booking and blind booking. These will be touched on shortly as these practices in Great Britain led to legislative action.

1926 Imperial Conference

The problem of the film industry and US domination of the cinema screens throughout the British Empire was placed on the agenda of the 1926 Imperial Conference. The Conference drawing together representatives of the British and Dominion governments had been meeting on an irregular basis since 1911 to discuss issues on an Imperial level.36 Film had previously been discussed at the 1923 conference, on that occasion focusing on the use of film within education.37 However, by 1926, there were much greater concerns surrounding the dominant market share of US films throughout the British Empire.

Preceding the conference, there had been considerable discussions around the different stakeholders within the industry jointly agreeing on a course of action to propose to the government. Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, in their 1985 volume, claim that a draft quota bill was secretly shown to the conference, but Ian Jarvie rejects this suggesting that there is a lack of any supporting evidence, and “the impropriety of showing draft legislation to strangers before showing it to Parliament.”38 A close reading of Dickinson and Street suggests this is probably incorrect as draft bills and proposals had been circulating (some quite openly) for some twelve to eighteen months prior to the Imperial Conference, and they were a rather open secret, given that some of the proposals had been published in the Kinematograph Weekly. The lack of citations or references on the part of Dickinson and Street do not preclude the existence of a draft bill or their subsequent discussion at the Imperial Conference, though this probably contributed to Jarvies’ assertion. It is possible that Dickinson and Street based their contention on comments in the trade press, such as Kinematograph Weekly, or that Jarvie was looking in the wrong place for archival evidence. If a draft bill was indeed shown to the Imperial Conference, it is likely that what was shown was a draft that had originated from within the industry -- Federation of British Industries specifically, rather than from the Board of Trade -
- the government department ultimately responsible for putting forward the bill. With the relationship that the Federation of British Industries (FBI) had with the Board of Trade, this would have been quite possible. Dickinson and Street do provide a somewhat detailed narrative of the negotiations within the industry leading up to the Films Bill. The Kinematograph Renters Society (KRS, representing the American distributors) wanted minimum restrictions (no surprise), the Cinema Exhibitors Association (CEA) had a draft bill focusing on access to cinemas and the film release system, while the Federation of British Industries (FBI) focused on a quota scheme. According to Dickinson and Street, it was the latter bill along with “a ‘manifesto’ on marketing British films in the Dominions, proposing the formation of a central distribution company, coupled with a quota scheme” that was presented to the Imperial Conference.

The Economic Sub-Committee considered the issue and reported back to the main Conference that it was of the greatest importance that the British production industry be revived, and that remedial measures be taken throughout the Empire to facilitate the screening of British films. Dominion governments made commitments to investigate measures on their return following the conference. The ground was set for subsequent discussions throughout the Empire around quotas, but ultimately not with the success that was initially hoped for at the conference.

Jarvie suggests: “…it was only at the Imperial Conference… that a coherent cultural argument was finally formulated,” however, the cultural arguments had been aired previously. The Board of Trade was focused on the commercial aspects of the industry, but any form of trade protectionism still received considerable opposition in free-trade Britain. For any form of protectionism to gain sufficient support, it was necessary to justify it for cultural reasons. By appealing to the need to maintain the British cultural identity, the Board of Trade was able to justify and move forward the quota measures in the Cinematograph Films Bill.

1927 Cinematograph Films Act

In March, following both the Imperial Conference and the failure of the industry bodies to agree upon a voluntary set of guidelines, the government presented its Cinematograph Films Bill for its first reading in the House of Commons. As well as
introducing quotas for both exhibitors and renters (distributors), it moved to abolish blind and block booking practices, and defined what qualified as a ‘British’ film. The practices of blind booking (requiring cinemas to book films without viewing them, sometimes before they were produced) and block booking (booking a quantity of films up to 18 months in advance), were business practices introduced by the US distributors to enable them to have a stranglehold over all of the significant exhibitors. As a result, British producers were denied access to British cinema screens in a timely manner. In the Committee stage, the Bill went through 250 amendments before returning to the House for the Third Reading. The Cinematograph Films Act received Royal Assent on the 1st of January 1928, nearly ten months after its first reading in the House. The Bill, and the Act that followed, would form the basis of New Zealand legislation, as well as bills introduced in a number of other polities in the British Empire.

By the time the Cinematograph Films Act had passed, the British film industry had revived in anticipation of the quotas being phased in. Rachael Low points out that by the time the quota legislation has passed its third reading in the Commons in November 1927, 160 films were ready or nearly ready for quota purposes. The introduction of the Bill had resulted in a boom in British-produced films, and subsequently the proportion of locally-produced films in British cinemas rose significantly.

![Figure 3.1: Comparative share of British cinema market (based on number of feature films)](chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UK films % of market</th>
<th>US films % of market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>81.0</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>71.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>74.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dickinson and Street, 42.

**Empire Marketing Board**

At this point we should mention another event that took place prior to the 1926 Imperial Conference, the establishment of the Empire Marketing Board. The establishment of the board arose out of an election promise made by the Conservative Party in the 1924
election that they wouldn’t add any additional Imperial preferences to imported items.\(^{47}\) This, however, conflicted with an earlier agreement made by the government at the 1923 Imperial Economic Conference. As a result, a compromise was crafted whereby one million pounds would be set aside each year (approximately the revenue raised from the duties on goods imported from the Empire), to promote and assist the marketing of Empire goods within Britain. This led to the establishment of the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) under Stephen Tallents whose mandate included the encouragement of scientific research to improve the quality of Empire produce, as well as market research and publicity.\(^{48}\) In early 1927, John Grierson, recently returned from study in the US on a Rockefeller Fellowship, met with Tallents. The outcome of their first meeting was that Grierson was commissioned to write a report for the Films Committee of the EMB,\(^{49}\) and Tallents would continue to act as Grierson’s mentor for a number of years. In 1928, Tallents sought to have Grierson direct a film for the EMB, but had to overcome the resistance of the Treasury, who in a budget-cutting environment weren’t amenable to the EMB producing films. Tallents skilfully overcame the resistance by suggesting to the Financial Secretary that Grierson’s first film should be on the herring industry, and that the personal expertise of the Secretary may be invaluable for the film (the Financial Secretary having written a book on the topic).\(^{50}\) Thus, Tallents secured the funding for *Drifters* (1928), the only film that Grierson directed and the film that led to the British documentary film movement.

Grierson is often viewed by historians as a film maker/producer from his role with the Empire Marketing Board and later with the General Post Office Film Unit. However, this view downplays that in many respects he was a distributor, and for a portion of his career was focused on building non-theatrical distribution networks across the British Empire/Commonwealth. Grierson only ever directed one film, though he influenced the production of countless others, in part through his role as producer. He admired Hollywood films and how they could engage audiences, and wanted to engage audiences with films for a different purpose. Grierson saw the educational and transformative potential of films, and the potential for films to change lives. In developing alternative distribution networks, he needed films that would also engage audiences in the way that Hollywood films would. Hence, his focus and writings on developing documentary film style would later have an influence on government film-making in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and many other countries.
Due to the Great Depression, the Empire Marketing Board was dissolved in 1933. Sir Stephen Tallents (he was knighted in 1932) transferred to the General Post Office (GPO) as Public Relations Officer, and was able to facilitate the move to the GPO of the EMB Film Unit, where they continued to make non-fiction films.⁵¹

**1927 Colonial Office Conference**

The Dominions and Colonies of the British Empire were administered or overseen by different arms of the British government (India also had a separate administrative apparatus), and so discussions at one level would typically take place at a different time and in a different forum from similar discussions with another level of the Empire. Whereas the 1926 Imperial Conference consisted of the Dominions meeting with the British Government, the Colonial territories met the following year with the Colonial Office and their own agenda.⁵² The Colonial Office Conference lasted from the 10ᵗʰ to the 31ˢᵗ of May, meeting four days a week (Mondays were reserved for Colonial Office administrators to catch-up on paperwork), with the issue of films scheduled for the afternoon of Friday, 27ᵗʰ May.⁵³

Prior to the conference, memoranda discussing the issue of censorship and the use of films for educational purposes were circulated to the delegates.⁵⁴ Part of the background to the film industry being included on the agenda for the conference was a letter that Sir Hesketh Bell had sent to the *The Times* in September 1926, regarding the image of the Europeans that was being projected to colonial peoples, particularly by Hollywood, and how it contributed to communist doctrines.⁵⁵ This resulted in considerable discussion among the elites, and had resulted in His Majesty, King George V, voicing his concern to the Secretary of State for the Colonies via his personal secretary.⁵⁶ Rosaleen Smyth describes how the Colonial Office approached the issue of film from two different viewpoints, with both economic and cultural concerns:

(a) how the cinema affected the economic and political interests of the imperial power; and (b) how the imperial power might use the cinema to promote what it determined to be the economic, social and moral welfare of colonial peoples; this last might be called the trusteeship approach.⁵⁷
Colonial governments needed to be sensitive to the needs and susceptibilities of the local native people’s, and to avoid the screening of anything “which is calculated to rouse undesirable racial feeling.”

Film within the colonial portion of the British Empire was one of the last issues discussed at the Colonial Office Conference, and Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the President of the Board of Trade, was invited to open the late Friday afternoon meeting with an explanation of the Cinematograph Films Bill then under discussion in the British Parliament. Cunliffe-Lister noted that there were two issues that the Bill was addressing: culture and ideology, and trade.

If this was merely an ordinary industry, I do not suppose the Government would have started handling so thorny a subject, but it was borne in on us that the film was, even more than the Press, the greatest possible medium through which ideas could consciously or unconsciously be passed on to the public. That I think must be apparent, and it was obviously an unsatisfactory position that through that universal medium almost exclusively foreign ideas, foreign atmosphere, and foreign scenes should be presented to the public of our Empire.

On the trade side it was hardly less important. We have had evidence from many quarters that the seeing of American films in American settings constantly was of the greatest possible help to American trade. Mr Hoover has borne testimony to that, and has asked for an increased grant for the Ministry of Commerce in America entirely on the ground that assisting the American film industry was the best possible way in which the Ministry of Commerce in America could assist the American export trade.

He went on to outline the impediments to British films within Great Britain and the measures that were being introduced in the Bill to ban blind booking, to require films to be ‘trade shown,’ and to reduce the length of the booking contract to a maximum of six months. The provisions for a quota was introduced as a positive means of ensuring that British films would be screened in cinemas, and it was this last provision that Cunliffe-Lister hoped would be replicated elsewhere in the empire to ensure a market for British films.

The discussion that followed covered a number of areas including concern regarding an adequate supply of British films and the organisation of distribution of British films into the colonies. The Colonial Secretary for the Straits Settlements, Mr. H. Marriott,
who was one of the more vocal contributors to the discussion, noted that the government in Singapore had already proposed, including a provision in a new cinema license, that a proportion of the films shown should be British.\(^{61}\)

Although there was considerable support for supporting British films via quotas, the area of greater concern to many of the delegates was the impact of films on native peoples, and the need for stricter censorship. Here, there was no agreement as to the best way to proceed. Sir Hesketh Bell, despite of not being present at the meeting, had communicated with the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Amery) and suggested that differential tariffs or additional duties could be introduced to make the showing of some films uneconomic except in the “more expensive picture houses.”\(^{62}\) Cunliffe-Lister questioned as to whether it would be “possible for any Colony to put a tax on a film with a direct ratio to morality.”\(^{63}\) The discussion ended without any general consensus, except for the expectation that individual colonies would introduce appropriate legislation to strengthen British film in their respective colonies. Few colonies subsequently introduced quota legislation, but the Straits Settlements was one of the exceptions. Even there, the bill was dropped after the second reading (see Chapter 6).

The most significant action to come out of the 1926 Imperial Conference was the Balfour Declaration, which set the basis for the dissolution of the British Empire and the beginnings of the British Commonwealth, subsequently formalised with the Statute of Westminster in 1931.\(^{64}\) The British Empire wouldn’t formally end until June 30, 1997, when the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong changed its colonial masters and became the Special Administrative Region of the Peoples Republic of China, although, at the time of writing, there continue to be a number of British Overseas Territories that haven’t yet gained independence.

**Report of the Colonial Office Films Committee (1930)**

The following Colonial Office Conference was scheduled for 1930; and leading up to it, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Right Honourable L.S. Amery, appointed a Colonial Office Films Committee to further consider the educational use of cinema, censorship and the distribution of British films in the colonies.\(^{65}\) Sir William Brass, the Member of Parliament for Clitheroe (and later Chairman of the British Film Institute), was
initially appointed as chair of the committee, but he resigned in July 1929 as he felt the scope was too narrow and needed to be broadened. In his view, he felt the supply of films to the colonies needed to be considered in conjunction with India and the Dominions. He doubted that the film industry would be interested in the colonies on their own due to the comparative smallness of the market. Without changes, he felt the inquiry was likely to “prove abortive.” 66 The terms of reference for the inquiry were subsequently changed, but not to the extent that Brass had been seeking. Mr. Henry (Harry) Snell, Member of Parliament for Woolwich East, was appointed in his place.

The new terms of reference for the committee focused more specifically on the educational use of film in the colonies, in addition to the question of censorship. 67 A number of the committee were individuals actively involved in film policy over the period. Sir Hesketh Bell was a member, although he only attended a few of the thirteen meetings, and subsequently provided a minority report, going beyond the recommendations of the report to suggest that films for Africa should be all be censored in London. Hanns Vischer, Secretary to the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, had previously written the report on the use of film for educating native peoples for the 1927 Colonial Office Conference. Other members included Edward Foxen Cooper, the Government Film Advisor, and Simon Rowson, a cinema owner and statistician, who wrote a number of scholarly papers on British cinema audiences.

The report considered the film industry in three areas: its use in education within the colonies of the Empire, the supply and exhibition of British films, and censorship of films. Although Mr. R.O. Winstedt, the Director of Education for the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, had attended some of the meetings of the committee, the focus was on film in Africa (particularly in terms of censorship) with little mention of the Asia-Pacific colonies.

The delegates for the 1930 Colonial Office Conference received the report ahead of the meetings; however, unlike the previous conference, there wasn’t any extended discussion of film within the Empire. The discussions or comments on film were made in passing. A sub-committee to consider film issues had been set up under the chair of Sir Ransford Slater, Governor of the Gold Coast (now Ghana), but little evidence remains of
their discussions beyond one motion brought before the Conference recommending the acceptance of the Report of the Colonial Films Committee:

The Conference is convinced that the cinematograph has very great possibilities for educational purposes in the widest sense not only for children but also for adults, especially with illiterate peoples. The Conference also considers it is desirable to foster in every way the market for good British films. It regards the question of censorship as of the first importance, as the display of unsuitable films is a very real danger, and, in case of primitive communities in Africa at any rate, there is still time to mitigate this danger. In so far as the report of the Colonial Films Committee suggests certain practical measures for dealing with these problems the Conference recommends its acceptance, and it hopes every avenue will be explored to further the use of the cinematograph as an instrument of education and foster the supply of British films and ensure efficient censorship.68

Little, if anything, substantive came out of the conference in terms of film policy; however, the ongoing discussions later led to experiments in the use of film in Africa, such as the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit.69 Although much of the initial discourse among the elite around cinema and native audiences had been a result of observations made by an ex-Governor travelling in British Malaya, the focus for subsequent colonial film policy was Africa.

**Moyne Committee Report (1936)**

In the years following the implementation of the Cinematograph Films Act, it became apparent that the intention of the quota was being circumvented by the production of low-cost films, either directly by British production units of the US distributors or by films produced by local production companies commissioned by or sold to the US distributors to fulfil their local quota. At the same time, exhibitors had been pressuring the government to lower their quota.70 Following a number of attempts in discussions between the Board of Trade and different segments of the industry, it became clear that they would not be able to come to any consensus as to the best direction to take. The Board of Trade came to the conclusion that an independent inquiry was required to provide clarity as to which the direction legislative changes should be taken.71 Thus, in 1936, the government set up a committee under Lord Moyne, a former Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries among other positions, to:
consider the position of British films, having in mind the approaching expiry of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927, and to advise whether any, and if so what, measures are still required in the public interest to promote the production, renting and exhibition of such films.72

The Committee reported back in November 1936 with a number of recommendations, most of which dealt with amending or adjusting the quota conditions. Significantly, recommendation (ix) was for a quality test on all British films, both long and short, where they were intended to qualify for the renters’ quota. This was in response to the prevalence of ‘quota quickies’ and would result in expenditure requirements in the 1937 Cinematograph Films Act for films to meet quota requirements. Films made in the Dominions would likewise have to meet the quality test, with the Moyne Committee also suggesting that there should be reciprocity in local quotas so that British films in the Dominions should receive the same treatment as Dominion films received in Great Britain.73 Although there was considerable dissent among the main three industry bodies (Federation of British Industries, Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association and Kinematograph Renters’ Society), the report set the ground for the debates that would follow, leading up to the 1938 Cinematograph Films Act.

1938 Cinematograph Films Act

Dickson and Street, as well as Jarvie, outline many of the debates leading up to the renewal of the Cinematograph Films Act. Joseph Kennedy, the US Ambassador to Great Britain, and a former film studio executive, met with the President of the Board of Trade during the process, to press Hollywood’s case and to seek concessions for the American distributors. The focus from the American side was on ensuring that changes to the quota legislation best met their interests. They knew that quotas were not going to be abolished, but at least they could try to mitigate any changes. Great Britain and the US were also in negotiations over a larger trade agreement at the time, which would result in the liberalising of trade between the two countries. The hope of the Americans was that the revised Cinematograph Films Act could be delayed until the trade agreement was in place, at which time they would be able to demand that the British legislation for cinema be consistent with the new trade regime.74
The British, however, argued that films were a cultural rather than a commercial matter, thus outside of the trade talks and so the legislation could proceed without having any impact on the trade talks whatsoever. Jarvie notes that Kennedy agreed that the US industry could go along with that, without anticipating that the British would be able to successfully keep the film industry outside of the trade agreement altogether.  

Aside from continuance of the quota for another ten years, the main changes in the Act were the provision of double or triple credit for locally-produced films that American distributors paid more than £22,500 or £37,500 for respectively, as well as introducing a minimum cost level for films (£1 of British labour costs per foot). This was introduced to ensure that films produced in Great Britain that met quota requirements also met a minimum quality level (i.e., to ensure US distributors to met their requirements with films acceptable to the public). Significantly, the definition of ‘British films’ had been tightened to mean only films produced within Great Britain. Films produced elsewhere in the Empire would no longer count for the renters’ quota, although they could be used against the exhibitors’ quota. This was both in retaliation against Australian states, which had introduced local quotas that excluded British films, and to stop Hollywood companies from using locations in other parts of the British Empire, such as Canada, to circumvent the quota wall.

**Imperial Relations Trust**

The Imperial Relations Trust (IRT) was established in 1937 as a result of a £250,000 grant from an anonymous donor to Lord Baldwin (then Prime Minister of Great Britain) to be used to enhance ties between the United Kingdom and her Dominions. The *Evening Standard* later revealed the donor to be Sir Henry Strakosch, a financier who had profited from gold mining in South Africa. The Trust established an Advisory Committee on Film in February 1938, with a number of advisors including John Grierson and Sir Stephen Tallents. John Grierson was shortly after employed by the International Relations Trust with his first task a trip to Canada to survey “the distribution of British and other Dominion films in Canada, and to study the question of the production of Canadian films suitable for distribution to the United Kingdom and other Dominions.” Andrew Rodger suggests that Tallents was looking to secure the cooperation of the Dominions in the preparation for
war, and so the agenda of the Imperial Relations Trust (or Tallents) combined with the need expressed by Canada coincided very neatly. Interestingly, there was a similar combination of agendas with Grierson’s visit to New Zealand, raising the question of whether this was all coincidental, or engineered in some way by Tallents. It was in this context that Grierson visited Australia and New Zealand in 1940 to continue the investigations begun in Canada. The trip had originally been scheduled for late 1939, but was delayed due to the declaration of war by Britain on Germany. The New Zealand leg of that trip is covered in more detail in Chapter 9.

**British Empire**

The resolution of the Imperial Conference and subsequent debate over quota legislation, led to substantial studies and debates in other parts of the Empire. The 1927 and 1928 Cinematograph Films Bills in New Zealand will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, with the Select Committee hearings for the 1928 Bill providing a significant understanding of the operations of the motion picture industry in New Zealand at the time. In Australia, a Select Committee was appointed in 1927 by the Federal Parliament to investigate how Empire film production could be assisted, with support for Australian production a subsidiary aim. Following difficulties in obtaining financial information from witnesses, the Committee was upgraded to a Royal Commission, with the authority to demand the information and almost unlimited terms of reference. The final report of the Commission was presented to the Parliament in 1928 and received with enthusiasm by both parties. What was notable in the report after the Commission held extensive hearings all over Australia was how it maintained the status quo, and only made minor recommendations that meant the Parliament could easily agree to all of them. Among the recommendations was an Empire quota that only applied to feature films (an Australian quota was not considered feasible because of the low supply of locally produced films). Bertrand and Collins note that beyond protecting Australians from the excesses of the Hollywood industry, Senator Grant, who introduced the original motion for the commission prior to the 1926 Imperial Conference, also asked that Australian governments begin to use film as a means for developing national identity. Before the Federal Government could move on the quota issue, each of the States had to pass legislation surrendering their control of the motion picture industry to the Commonwealth
government. They showed considerable reluctance to do this, however, and the Federal quota proposals did not proceed.86

The issue of quotas had been the topic of some discussion at the state level prior to the Royal Commission into the Motion Picture Industry. Most of the pressure for quota legislation was in Victoria and New South Wales, where the majority of the production companies were based. Victoria was the first to move towards a quota, adding a weekly British (which included Australia) exhibition quota to the Censorship of Films Bill in 1924. Once passed in 1926, it had minimal effect, as the quota was for a minimum of 2,000-feet, a very small amount that only benefited the producers of short films.87 In 1934, a bill was introduced to include a quota for Australian feature films, similar to that proposed in New South Wales. The measure proved inadequate and in 1940 the legislation was allowed to expire.88

In New South Wales, there had been initiatives beginning in 1923 to introduce a quota, but these were rebuffed until it was clear that the Federal Government were unable to proceed in that direction. The New South Wales Government conducted its own investigation into the film industry 1934-35, and a key recommendation in the final report was for the introduction of an exclusively Australian quota for both the exhibitors and distributors. By 1934, British producers were doing well in Australia with 27.1% of imported films coming from Britain, compared to 5.4% in 1927 at the time of the Royal Commission hearings.89 Following the introduction of the quota bill into the Legislature, the British producers lobbied for an amendment to the legislation, which allowed for the quota to only apply based on the number of non-British foreign films imported into Australia (which effectively meant Hollywood).90 Exemptions could be provided if there were insufficient films for distributors or exhibitors. The quota legislation proved inadequate in stimulating Australian production, and exemptions were given every year. It was the introduction of the ‘Australian only’ quota in New South Wales and Victoria that led the British Government in its 1938 revision of the quota legislation to limit acceptable quota films to those produced within Great Britain.91

In Canada, the other major “white Dominion,”92 there was little change. Jarvie suggest that Colonel Cooper, the Canadian representative, had hoped that the definition of ‘British’ films in the legislation would result in the establishment of Hollywood branch
plant operations in Canada, but that was not to happen on any large scale. Although there were a few Hollywood productions shot in Victoria, Canada to obtain ‘British nationality,’ most of the production to meet quota requirements was undertaken in London.93 Peter Morris recounts how Ray Peck, Director of the Government Motion Picture Bureau, was both opposed to any quota and favoured a Hollywood branch plant operation.94 As the exhibition of films fell under provincial jurisdiction, any legislation imposing quotas had to be introduced at the provincial level. Three provinces, Ontario, Quebec and Alberta, all brought forward legislation to introduce quotas for British films, but none progressed to the point of becoming legislation.95

Another country that undertook an inquiry into the motion picture industry was India, who established a committee to study the conditions in the motion picture industry, to recommend changes, and recommend as to whether there should possibly be an Indian film industry.96 The report that followed was a substantial five-volume tome, which included transcripts of all of the hearings. The recommendations were unpalatable to the British colonial government, and so were in large part shelved. The discourse around the establishment of an Indian film industry had enthused many, and so the beginnings of the Indian film production industry can be traced back to this period.97 Priya Jaikumar, in her 2006 book, Cinema at the end of empire, provides a detailed discussion of British and Indian film policy during the 1930s and 40s, and how the policies of the two places were intertwined with one another. Her contention is that other scholarly accounts of the 1928 Quota Act have focused on the significance of it to the domestic industry and excluded the imperial dimension.98

The African colonies have attracted some attention from scholars. Rosaleen Smyth outlined the development of British colonial film policy from 1927 to 1939 in her 1979 article, and suggests that although the British government sought to use cinema as a tool for the advantage of the Empire, and to counter what were seen as the harmful effects of Hollywood, a lack of funding held back the efforts until the Carnegie Foundation financed the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE) in 1935. The BEKE was an experiment undertaken in conjunction with the Colonial Office in the production of films to assist the educational and cultural adjustment of Africans to modern (Western) society, and lasted until funds ran out in 1937. When the British government created the Colonial Film Unit in
1939, its purpose was to make war propaganda films for the colonies, although in the post-war period its main function shifted to making instructional movies. 99

The relatively low level of interest from film scholars in film policy throughout the British Empire is not reflective of the interest imperial elites in Great Britain took towards the film industry during the period. Zoë Druick notes that the British government established no less than twelve committees or sub-committees to consider film and film policy during the period. 100 This number is drawn from a British Film Institute report to the Dominions, India and Colonies Panel in 1939, and understates the number of committees and groups taking an interest. 101 Despite operating earlier, the ‘Colonial Films Committee’ and ‘Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa’ would be two additional examples not included on the list, not to mention the ‘Bantu Educational Kinematograph Experiment,’ which was also underway at the time. The membership of many of these groups or committees had significant overlap, resulting in a sharing of ideas and possibly values between the different organisations.

The introduction of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Bill in Great Britain provided a significant boost to British film production and enabled the industry to get back on its feet. There was a subsequent (legislated) increase in the proportion of British films screened by exhibitors; however, this was insufficient for the British industry to successfully counter the global dominance of Hollywood. Although the potential audience in the British Empire far exceeded the domestic audience in the US in numbers, the British industry failed to capture a significant portion of that potential audience. The archival records suggest there was discussion of quotas throughout the British Empire during this period, but in most cases, those discussions never resulted in subsequent legislation. With the absence of quota legislation in most parts of the Empire, there has also been an absence of scholarly investigation into the potential for that legislation.

If we look at two recent volumes published on British Empire film history as an example, there is no discussion of quotas in the British Empire outside of that provided by Lee Grieveson, and even there the focus is on the British legislation itself. 102 Quota legislation in Australia was considered in Bertrand and Collins 1981 volume, Government and Film in Australia, 103 but outside of that the most significant scholarly discussion of film
quotas and the relationship between Great Britain and other parts of the British Empire is that of Priyar Jaikumar.

This chapter has provided an overview of the events of the period forming the background for the cases that follow. It is evident in the support that the US government provided Hollywood, that the film industry was an important tool for the imperial ambitions of the US government. Thomas Guback provided us with further evidence of that following the Second World War when the provision of Marshall Plan aid money was linked to the open access for Hollywood films. In Great Britain, there was considerable concern regarding the collapse of the British film industry following the First World War as the market was flooded with films from the US. Over the course of the interwar period, numerous British government, official and semi-official committees met to investigate and discuss a range of issues around the film industry, many of them concerned with the dominance of US films, how the British industry could counter their influence, and how film could be used for Britain’s own imperial goals. These concerns were evident elsewhere in the British Empire with some notable studies undertaken in places such as India, Australia and Canada.

With the imperial rivalry between the US and Great Britain, along with the economic and political turmoil of the 1920s and 30s as a backdrop, we now turn to the three specific cases. In the case of New Zealand, the development of film policy in the pre-WWII era has not been covered in much detail. At the colonial level, there has been even less investigation of film policy beyond inclusion of the period in historical studies of film censorship, and so Hong Kong and Singapore will be our starting point.
Endnotes

1 “The British Film Industry,” Memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade to Cabinet, 6th February, 1926, TNA: PRO: CAB/24/178.


3 “Trade Follows the Film,” Commerce Reports, April 24, 1922, 141. Will Hays attributed the saying to the Prince of Wales, but it isn’t clear when the Prince first used the phrase.


6 Some eighty years later, China had taken on the role of ‘factory to the world,’ arguably overproducing, with the Chinese government actively encouraging local citizens to consume, to maintain their economic engine of growth.


8 Jarvie, 276, 302.

9 ibid., 276

10 quoted in Jarvie, 276.

11 ibid., 276.

12 quoted in Jarvie, 282.

13 Jarvie, 282; US Senate Resolution No. 121, August 5, 1921. USNA, RG 151 Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce General Records, 281 Motion Pictures, Box 1302.

14 Statement of Hon. Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce, January 31, 1925. Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, US Senate, Departments of State, Justice, Commerce and Labor Appropriation Bill, 1926 (68th Congress, 2nd session). USNA, RG 287 Publications of the Federal Government, Committees of Congress, Y4.Ap6 St2 926. The Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce was initially led by Dr. Julius Klein, an economic historian of Spain and Latin America who had previously taught at Harvard University. He was promoted to Assistant Secretary of Commerce in 1929. Klein’s testimony before a Congressional Subcommittee on Appropriations in January 1926 regarding being shipwrecked off Peru and noticing how US goods had displaced British goods as a result of US films, was widely quoted in Britain.

The mandate of the Bureau was to provide promotional support to US trade and industry by compiling and disseminating statistical and other information on foreign and domestic markets and manufacturing. See: Laurence F. Schmeckebier and Gustavus A. Weber, The Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce: Its History, Activities and Organization (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins Press, 1924).
15 Jarvie, 309, 311.
16 ibid., 311. Their research provided a substantial volume of the data for this dissertation.
17 Kristin Thompson does discuss the Creel Committee (pp. 93-99), but there appears to be a typographic error in her account. On page 93 she has the Creel Committee forming the Division of Films on 25 September 1916, however Stephen Vaughn in his work on the Creel Committee dates the establishment of the committee to an executive order by President Wilson on April 13, 1917, with the Division of Films established on 25 September 1917. See: Stephen Vaughan, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 19, 204.
18 Vaughan.
19 Thompson, 96.
20 ibid., 99.
21 At this stage, if you were born in the British Empire, you were a British subject. The concept of different nationalities within the Empire was not yet well-developed, though would develop during the next few years following the passing of the Statute of Westminster in 1931 giving the Dominions equality in a British Commonwealth of nations.
22 Rachel Low, *The History of the British Film, 1918-1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 156. What Low actually shows are the number of British feature films that received a trade showing. The films would have been produced earlier, and may not have appeared in cinemas until later.
24 ibid., 34-46, 49
26 Trumpbour, 26; Jarvie, 285.
27 Jarvie, 286-287.
28 ibid., 279.
29 ibid., 286
30 Successors to Hays continued to be politically well-connected: Eric Johnston, former US Chamber of Commerce President; Jack Valenti, former Special Assistant to President Johnson; Dan Glickman, former Congressman and US Agriculture Secretary; Chris Dodd, former Democratic Senator.
Using the declaration of war by Great Britain (and the British Empire) in September 1939 as is commonly used by historians, takes a euro-centric view of the conflict. The actions by Japan against China in 1937 was the beginning of their move through Asia to fulfil their plan to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and as such is probably a more accurate starting point. See A.J. Grajdanzev, “Japan’s Co-Prosperity Sphere,” Pacific Affairs, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1943, 311-328.

This does raise the question as to whether an even earlier date would also be appropriate given their invasion of Manchuria in 1931, though in this case the conflict didn’t continue into the wider warfare of WWII. This also wasn’t an act of war by the Japanese civilian government, as the invasion took place as a massive act of insubordination in violation of orders from Tokyo.


ibid., 47-48.

Jarvie, 114.


ibid., 27.

Jarvie, 110.

Dickinson and Street, 30.

ibid., 30.

ibid., 32.

ibid., 33.


Dickinson and Street, 27.

ibid., 28.

Stephen Tallents file note, 29th April 1927. TNA: PRO, BT 64/86 Film Industry, Forwarding copy of a paper circulated to the Film Committee of the Empire Marketing Board.

Dickinson and Street, 28.

ibid.

TNA: PRO, CO 885/29/7 Colonial Office Conference; CO 323/1001/8 Colonial Office Conference – Summary of action taken on recommendations.

Colonial Office Conference, 1927. Provisional Programme. TNA: PRO, CO 323/977/18 Colonial Office Conference. Programme of Meetings and Order of Business.

Appendix XVIII: Cinematograph Films, 242-261. TNA: PRO, CO 323/983/9 Colonial Office Conference, 1927. Appendices to the Summary, Cmd. 2884. The papers included a copy of the Report of the General Economic Sub-Committee of the 1926 Imperial Conference regarding film within the Empire, a copy of the Cinematograph Films Bill and accompanying notes provided by the Board of Trade, and a report on Native Education in Africa.

Sir Hesketh Bell, “The Cinema in the East: Factor in the Spread of Communism,” The Times, 18 September, 1926. Sir Hesketh Bell, GCMG, had previously been the Governor of Uganda, Northern Nigeria, the Leeward Islands and Mauritius, and had toured parts of Southeast Asia in 1926 during which time he had witnessed some of the films being shown locally and the reaction of the local people towards them. For more detail, see Rex Stevenson, “Cinemas and Censorship in Colonial Malaya,” Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, September 1974, 209-224.
Lord Stamfordham to Amery, 19th September, 1926. TNA: PRO, CO 273/533 Influence of Cinema Pictures in the Far East.


Amery Circular, 8 Jan, 1927. TNA: PRO, CO 323/990/2 Films.

Cunliffe-Lister, “Stenographic Notes of the Twenty-Third Meeting held at the Colonial Office on the 27th May, 1927 at 4 p.m.,” 2. TNA: PRO, CO 885/29/7 Colonial Office Conference 1927. Stenographic Notes of Meetings.

ibid.

Marriott, “Stenographic Notes of the Twenty-Third Meeting held at the Colonial Office on the 27th May, 1927 at 4 p.m.,” 9. TNA: PRO, CO 885/29/7 Colonial Office Conference 1927. Stenographic Notes of Meetings.

Amery, “Stenographic Notes of the Twenty-Third Meeting held at the Colonial Office on the 27th May, 1927 at 4 p.m.,” 11. TNA: PRO, CO 885/29/7 Colonial Office Conference 1927. Stenographic Notes of Meetings.

Cunliffe-Lister, “Stenographic Notes of the Twenty-Third Meeting held at the Colonial Office on the 27th May, 1927 at 4 p.m.,” 11. TNA: PRO, CO 885/29/7 Colonial Office Conference 1927. Stenographic Notes of Meetings.

The Balfour Declaration of 1926 made at the 1926 Imperial Conference recognised that the United Kingdom and British Dominions were equal in status, but freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. This was the first official reference to the British Commonwealth. The Statute of Westminster 1931 enacted the Balfour Declaration into law by establishing legislative equality with the United Kingdom for the self-governing dominions of the British Empire, effectively providing them with full independence (once the statute had been adopted locally).


Sir William Brass to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26th July, 1929. TNA: PRO, CO 323/1051/2 Films. Colonial Films Committee


Dickinson and Street, 53-54.

ibid., 55.

ibid., 39-40. This recommendation was in response to the Australian film quota introduced by the New South Wales and Victorian state governments in Australia.

Jarvie, 156-157

ibid., 157; Dickinson and Street, 1985, 99.

Dickinson and Street, 1985, 98-100.


Imperial Relations Trust, First Annual Report, 1938-1939, 3. TNA: PRO,DO 35/993/16 Imperial Relations Trust; Andrew Rodger, “Some Factors Contributing to the Formation of the National Film Board of Canada,” Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 9, no. 3 (1989): 264. The full Advisory Committee consisted of: The Right Hon. The Earl of Clarendon (Chairman), Sir Walter Citrine and the Dowager Machioness of Reading, with advisors, Oliver Bell (Imperial Institute), John Grierson (Films Officer, Dominions Office), Philip Guedalla, Sir Harry Lindsay (shortly afterwards to be High Commissioner to New Zealand), L.A.de L. Meredith and Sir Stephen Tallents (Deputy Director General of the BBC, and director-general designate of the Ministry of Information in the event of war).

Imperial Relations Trust, First Annual Report, 1938-1939, 10. TNA: PRO,DO 35/993/16 Imperial Relations Trust.


Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins, Government and Film in Australia (Sydney: Currency Press and Australian Film Institute, 1981), 30-35.
Although the term is archaic now, it was commonly used during the period to refer to the British dominions where the local populations were largely of European or British descent. Thus, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Newfoundland.

Jarvie, 63; see also Morris, 1978, p. 163; “Will Feature Scarlet Coats,” Daily Colonist, 11th February, 1938. Extract in TNA: PRO, BT 64/91 Dominion and Colonial Films. This newspaper extract notes that Central Films in Victoria, British Columbia, had produced twelve pictures for Columbia Pictures since September 1935, but the association had been terminated due to the new Cinematograph Act excluding the Dominion’s for the purposes of meeting the British quota. An example of the origins of British Columbia as a location for ‘runaway’ productions.


Zoë Druick, Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board of Canada (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 37. The twelve committees or groups were: The Vansittart Committee, The Joint Committee of the British Council, The Dominions and Colonies Panel of the British Film Institute, The Film Committee of the Imperial Relations Trust, The Travel Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, The Film Committee of the Royal Empire Society, The General Post Office Film Unit, The Films for Scotland Committee, The High Commissioners, Government Departments, The Colonial Empire Marketing Board and the Empire Film Library of the Imperial Institute. “Memorandum on the Various Agencies Concerned with the Promotion of Imperial Unity through the Film,” circa 1939. TNA: PRO, CO 859/6/11 BFI – Dominions and Colonies Panel. Technically neither the High Commissioners nor the Government Departments were formally constituted groups with a specific interest in film.

“Memorandum on the Various Agencies Concerned with the Promotion of Imperial Unity through the Film,” circa 1939: TNA: PRO, CO 859/6/11 BFI – Dominions & Colonies Panel.


Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins, Government and Film in Australia (Woolhara, NSW and Melbourne, Victoria: Currency Press and Australasian Film Institute, 1981).

Thomas Guback, The International Film Industry: Western Europe and America since 1945 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969)
Maria Barbieri in her M.Phil thesis on film censorship in Hong Kong states that the colonial government had a system of film censorship, but it was unregulated until the end of WWII (77). She notes that by 1953, an official system of film censorship had been implemented (78). The research in this dissertation, along with archival records in Hong Kong showing the re-establishment of film censorship in 1946, suggest there is a whole period of film censorship in Hong Kong that she overlooked. See: Maria Barbieri, “Film Censorship in Hong Kong” (M.Phil. thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1997), 77-78.
Part II:

Colonial Level:
Singapore and Hong Kong
Overview

This part investigates the two colonial level cases, Hong Kong and Singapore in the Straits Settlements. Before considering these two cases in some detail, a look is taken at the film flows in the region, particularly between Hong Kong and Shanghai. This information provides a useful context and some of the business background for the cases that follow. But first, some historical background and an overview of these Asian colonies.

Screen policies in the British colonies during the 1920s and 30s were primarily focused on censorship. With a few exceptions (Hong Kong being the primary one), few colonies had any local film production of note, with most production being of an occasional and sporadic nature. Even in Hong Kong, the production industry only began to re-develop in the early 1930s (having previously closed down as a result of the 1925-26 General Strike), and grew significantly in the late 1930s with the relocation of the Shanghainese industry to Hong Kong. Most of the films screened in the colonies were from Hollywood and Great Britain, and therefore represented a foreign influence for what were largely local or ‘less-developed’ peoples. This was a concern for the colonial elites, as they saw foreign ideas introduced to the local peoples; ideas that in many cases ran counter to the interests of the colonial power. Thus, censorship was a major area of focus in screen policy during the period, as the Europeans in the colonies sought to protect the reputation and perceptions that the non-Europeans had of them. A theme underlying the policies of some colonial governments during the period was the need to maintain the racial and social differences underpinning colonialism.

Two Asia-Pacific colonies are used as comparative cases in this section, Hong Kong and Singapore in the Straits Settlements. Singapore was not in fact a colony at this stage, as it only became a colony in its own right after liberation from the Japanese in 1945; however, the seat of the British colonial government for British Malaya based in the Colony of the Straits Settlements. This colony was a motley array of small settlements and colonial territories around British Malaya and off the Australian coast (Christmas Island). British Malaya, at the time, was considered a jewel in Britain’s colonial crown due to the rubber plantations, which provided considerable wealth for the British, while many of the other colonies were a financial drain on Britain. Both Hong Kong and Singapore operated
under a colonial form of government, so it is possible to see the Governor, an appointee of the British Colonial Office, as a benevolent autocrat, with an appointed Legislative Chamber and Executive Council to act as advisors. What makes these two colonies interesting was that they were both relatively modern and developed societies compared to many of Britain’s other colonies.

The origins of both Hong Kong and Singapore were as the primary deep sea trading ports for the British Empire in the Asia Pacific region from the mid nineteenth century and into the interwar period in the 1920s and 30s. Both were creations of Great Britain that transformed from what were effectively barren islands with a small number of local or indigenous inhabitants pre-colonisation into the bustling city-states during the twentieth century. The form they took reflected the role the British elites set out for them as colonial trading posts, and the massive immigration from China and elsewhere that resulted. In the process of development, colonial authorities recognised the power of the filmic image to entertain and to offend, to educate and to subvert the burgeoning populations, and thus, grappled with the need to control the medium. Control of the medium and representations projected were deemed necessary to both protect the colonised peoples from images and ideas that would corrupt them and damage their development as civilised peoples, and to protect the status and prestige of the colonisers and the female members of their families. As a result, censorship and the regulation of content were a significant component of screen policy during this period.

Hong Kong began as a British colony in the First Opium Wars, when the island of Hong Kong was captured from China. In following treaty negotiations, the Kowloon Peninsular was ceded to the British Crown and the New Territories leased from the Chinese for a period of ninety-nine years. Its reason for existence was commercial, in part to facilitate the smuggling and trade of opium into China; and as a result, Hong Kong governments have always taken a pro-business, *laissez-faire* approach to governing. Geographically, on the southern border of China, the Chinese population could move between Hong Kong and China at will without passports, with the Chinese inhabitants of Hong Kong continuing to maintain close links with their place of origin in China. For many Chinese businessmen and warlords, Hong Kong was a convenient haven outside the legal
jurisdiction of the Chinese government, in a similar manner to the French Concession or International Settlement in Shanghai.

In 1919, the population of Hong Kong was approximately 600,000, of which 13,600 were categorised as ‘foreigners,’ although this number excluded Asians of other ethnicities. Over the course of the interwar period, the population grew to over 1.6 million, with most of this increase happening from 1938 as refugees streamed into Hong Kong to escape the Japanese invasion of China. Although Hong Kong was legally British sovereign territory, the Chinese inhabitants considered themselves to still be a part of China. They were careful to respect Chinese government wishes due to the close intertwining of the Colony’s fortunes and business with China. When the Nanking Government imposed a restriction banning the production of Cantonese films in China in 1936, Hong Kong producers travelled to Nanking to lobby the Chinese government to delay its introduction, to which the government agreed, as few in Southern China understood films in the Mandarin dialect. If we consider this from a sovereignty basis, strictly speaking, Hong Kong film makers did not have to comply with this edict; however, because their business and family interests were tightly connected to China, they felt obliged to follow, or at least respect, Chinese laws and regulations.8

At the beginning of the period under review (1920), the motion picture industry consisted of eight cinemas, most of them on Hong Kong Island. Pathé had a local distribution office supplying films for Southern China (primarily Canton) and Macao, as well as Hong Kong. In addition, at least two other exchanges were in operation. Over the course of the next twenty years, the total number of cinemas grew to thirty-one as of October 194011, while a number of the major Hollywood distributors established offices to join those of Pathé Freres (or Pathé Orient as the local branch was known). Shanghai continued to be the most important distribution hub for China, with many films entering Shanghai first before being shipped on to Hong Kong, until most of Shanghai was captured by the Japanese in 1937.12 Hong Kong then acted as a regional distribution hub for Southern China, as well as for the transhipping of some film into Singapore and Southeast Asia.

The development of a production industry in Hong Kong came at the end of the 1920s with the introduction of sound. Language was not an issue for silent films; it is likely
that many of the cinemas followed the practice in Canton and other parts of Asia, such as Korea and Japan, and used interpreters to explain the subtitles.\textsuperscript{13} Language did become an issue when the ‘talkies’ were introduced, as most Chinese did not understand English (or any of the other Western languages). Although Shanghai initially was the main production centre for Chinese films from the early 1920s, the dominant dialect used in Southern China was, and still is, Cantonese rather than the Mandarin dialect dominant in the central and northern areas, including Shanghai. Although initial production of Cantonese films took place in Shanghai, the growing hostilities around that city precipitated the growth of a Cantonese-language production industry in Canton, now known as Guangzhou, and Hong Kong with the introduction of the talkies. By the time of the Japanese occupation at the end of 1941, over 500 Cantonese-language talkies had been produced in Hong Kong, most of them after 1936, making it the major production centre for this dialect.\textsuperscript{14} This compares with over 600 films produced in Shanghai between 1928 and 1934.\textsuperscript{15} Even after the fall of the Chinese portion of Shanghai to the Japanese in 1937, when many from the film industry had fled to Hong Kong or the interior of China, approximately 230 films were produced in the International Settlement of Shanghai during its ‘orphan island’ period (from 1938-41).\textsuperscript{16}

Singapore also had its origins as a trading port and another centre for the trade of opium from India. Like Hong Kong, its raison d’être was also commerce. The main city of the Colony of the Straits Settlements was Singapore with nearly half the population of the colony along with the administrative machinery of the British colonial government for British Malaya.\textsuperscript{17} For the purposes of this study, Singapore (the island) is treated as a polity, as the focus is on government policy, although it didn’t actually become a colony in its own right until 1945.

Stamford Raffles initially established a trading post on the island for the British in 1819,\textsuperscript{18} although its use as a port is believed to predate this period by several centuries.\textsuperscript{19} Its status as a British possession was cemented by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, which divided the Malay archipelago between the two colonial powers.\textsuperscript{20} From very early on, the Chinese were the largest ethnic group on the island followed by the Malays. According to the 1921 Straits Settlements census, the population of Singapore Island was nearly 418,000 of which 6,000 were British or Westerners. The remainder of the population was primarily
Chinese, Malay and East Indian. By the time of the Japanese invasion in February 1942, the population had grown to 770,000. The screen industry in Singapore was focused on the exhibition side, although there were a few independent Malay language films produced in the latter part of the 1930s, a precursor to what would become the Malay language film industry post-World War Two. Like Hong Kong’s relationship with Southern China, Singapore acted as the film distribution hub for the South East Asian area.

Both Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements passed legislation to license and regulate theatres in 1908. Hong Kong made amendments to its legislation in 1910, 1911 and 1912 to incorporate early monitoring of film content, while the Straits Settlements amended their legislation in 1912 to also provide explicitly for the monitoring of film content in a similar way. In both cases, this was not censorship in the way that would become known later as only written descriptions were required to obtain the necessary permits for exhibition. Viewing of the actual footage and requiring cuts to the footage would not be introduced until late in the decade. In Singapore, the Chief Police Officer was given the responsibility for issuing the permits, while in Hong Kong the role fell to the Registrar-General, a senior official overseeing Chinese affairs (the position was renamed, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, in 1913). Only later in 1919 would the responsibility shift to the Captain Superintendent of Police, although the Secretary for Chinese Affairs would continue to have responsibility for the cinematograph displays in Chinese theatres. This shift is interesting, as ‘Chinese theatres’ were not defined in the legislation, and Chinese attended all of the theatres (many of them understood English); however, from 1919, the Captain Superintendent of Police, not the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, was viewed as the Chief Censor. Placing the role of film censorship under the purview of the police was common in many of the colonies in the British Empire. With the advent of the first war footage, or purported war footage during the First World War, censorship regulations became formalised and institutionalised; the colonies and dominions frequently following the lead of the imperial centre. By the end of the war, the first cinematograph film censors were appointed in many of the colonies and dominions, including Singapore.

Before we proceed to the cases themselves, and the investigation of government screen policy in Hong Kong and Singapore, it is useful to consider the flows of motion picture film (exposed or developed) into and around Asia, both in terms of providing a
larger context and possible impacts on the censorship of films in each of the localities. Most of the films going into and exhibited within the region came from other parts of the world, with the US being the most important source. By tracing the flows of film around the region, and more specifically between the main distribution centres of Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai, we can gain a bigger picture and deeper understanding of the film business in the region during the period, as well as hints of possible influence that government regulation or policy had from one location to another.

Figure 4.1: Major Asian film distribution hubs

Endnotes

1 Hong Kong Film Archive, *Hong Kong Filmography, Vol. 1 (1913-1941)* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1997). The filmography lists seven films produced prior to 1927. No further film titles are listed until 1931. The numbers of fiction films listed in the filmography by year are as follows: 1931 – 3, 1932 – 2, 1933 – 5, 1934 – 15, 1935 – 32, 1936 – 49, 1937 – 85, 1938 – 87, 1939 – 125, 1940 – 89, 1941 – 80. The number of documentary films produced over the same period was small, with the peak in 1937 at 13 films.

Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: the extra dimensions* (London: British Film Institute, 1997) provides some detail regarding the growth of the Hong Kong film production industry during the early years.

2 Histories of both places have primarily been written from an Anglocentric (and coloniser) point-of-view that as a result may well have minimised the extent of settlement and social structure of the indigenous population present prior to occupation by the British.

3 The impetus for the First Opium War was the seizure and destruction of 20,000 chests of opium (approximately 1,250 tonnes, worth US$20 million at the time or a street value of over US$6 billion now) from British traders in Canton (now Guangzhou) by Chinese Imperial Commissioner, Lin Zexu, in March 1839. While British merchant ships and traders withdrew to the relative safety of the deep-water harbour in Hong Kong, London sent a naval expeditionary force in response and proceeded to blockade ports along the Chinese coast. On January 20, 1841, Captain Charles Elliott of the British Navy met with the Chinese Governor of Kwangtung, to sign an agreement, generally referred to as the Convention of Chuenpi, which ceded the island of Hong Kong to the British (they had already established a base on the island following their withdrawal from Canton). The British formally landed on the island and raised the British flag on 26 January 1841, however, the treaty was never ratified. Elliott was later recalled to Britain for having disobeyed orders from London by occupying Hong Kong rather than an island closer to Canton, nor for not been more forceful in his use of military force in obtaining terms from the Chinese. In time, however, London accepted that Hong Kong should be maintained as a colony, particularly as the Superintendency of Trade had been moved there from Macao, its status as a free-port had been declared and the colony was rapidly developing. See Ying-Fen Huang, “Spectacular Post-Colonial Cities: Markets, Ideology and Globalization in the Making of Shanghai and Hong Kong,” (Ph.D. diss., Simon Fraser University, 2008), 158-160; G.B. Endacott, *A History of Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1964), 10-25.


5 *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1919, p. 29. The figures were estimates. The 1921 census pegged the population at 625,166 of which 610,368 were Chinese (Endacott, *A History of Hong Kong*, 289), although there are also questions regarding the accuracy of these figures as well. The estimated population was based on birth/death records along with immigration/emigration records.

6 Endacott, *A History of Hong Kong*, 289 puts the 1941 population at 1,639,000, with the number of refugees entering the colony 1937-39 at 750,000. Also, G.B. Endacott, *Hong Kong Eclipse*, Alan Birch, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978).


8 Carroll, op. cit.
9 George E. Cuderson, “Motion Pictures in Hong Kong,” Jan. 19, 1920, 2-4, 11, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 284, 840.6. The three major cinemas (in the city of Victoria, now known as Central) were the Coronet, the Victoria and the Hongkong. The remaining five cinemas were smaller and in outlying areas.

10 “Moving Picture Shows in Canton,” Commerce Reports, April 17, 1919, 381. The agents were Victoria Cinematograph and R. Basa on Des Voeux Road.

11 John H. Bruins, “Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry for 1940,” Oct. 15, 1940, 4, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 82, 840.6.

12 The Shanghai International Settlements and French Concession were not captured by the Japanese until 1941 when the major Western Powers declared war against Japan.

13 J.C. Huston, “Motion Pictures in China,” July 10, 1931, 49, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2153, 840.6. Huston notes that the practice of using interpreters was common in all of the cinemas with cheaper admissions as most of the audiences at those cinemas were illiterate. Given the close relationship between Canton and Hong Kong, it is not improbable that the practice was also used in some of the cheaper Hong Kong cinemas.

14 Cynthia Liu (compiler), Hong Kong Filmography Vol. 1 (1913-1941) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, Urban Council, 1997); Han Yanli states that silent films totally disappeared from South China cinemas within two years of the release of the first Cantonese talkie, The Platinum Dragon (1933) (which was actually made in Shanghai). Han Yanli, “National Defence Cinema: A Window on Early Cantonese Cinema and Political Upheaval in Mainland China,” trans. Terri Chan, in Wong Ain-Ling (ed.), The Hong Kong-Guangdong Film Connection (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005), 70. Lee Pui-tak in the same volume provides a table stating the level of output of Cantonese films from 1932-1941 totalled 559 films. Although it is not clear what portion of those films were produced in Hong Kong, it is reasonable to assume that the majority were given that the output from 1938 onwards (after Canton/Guangzhou was under control of the Japanese) was 381 films, and the output from Canton prior to this was small (many of the production companies actually being registered in Hong Kong). Lee Pui-tak, “To Ban and Counter Ban: Cantonese Cinema Caught Between Shanghai and Hong Kong in the 1930s,” trans. Terri Chan, in ibid, 37.

15 Based on a compilation of figures from different sources: Jay Leyda, Dianying: An Account of Films and Film Audiences in China (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), 61-62; Richard Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” April 2, 1934, 4, USNA, RG 84, Shanghai, Vol. 2492, 840.6; Richard Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China, 1934,” Feb. 16, 1935, 5, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2575, 840.6; Jubin Hu, Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 20. The US consulate figures were consistently lower than those from Chinese sources, and are less likely to be accurate.


17 The Straits Settlements was the only British colony (or possession) in British Malaya. The Federated Malay States and Unfederated States were protectorates, which meant that under treaty, they were under the protection of Britain who was responsible for their defence and foreign relations, but they continued to be responsible for their domestic governance. There was, however, a British “advisor” or Resident General who would provide advice to the local government, which they were bound to follow.

18 C.M. Turnbull, A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 25-32. The reason was not just commerce, but to protect the sea lanes for British trade (East India Company) between India and China, specifically from the Dutch.


23 J. Uhde, & Y. Ng Uhde, *Latent Images: Film in Singapore, 2nd ed.*, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), lists the first Malay feature as *Laila Majnun* (1934, B.S. Raihans, dir.). In 1937, Shaw Brothers Pte Ltd. established production studios to produce a number of Malay-language films based on Chinese stories, to supplement the films they were also producing in Mandarin. The Malay-language films weren’t very successful with local audiences (22).

24 *The Theatres Regulation Ordinance, No. 18 of 1908* (Hong Kong); *The Theatres Ordinance, No. XVII of 1908* (Straits Settlements).

25 The explanation for the Bill amending The Theatres Ordinance in the Straits Settlements in 1917 explains that a written description of a cinematograph film was not a sure guide that a film was objectionable or not, thus viewing was necessary. A Bill to amend The Theatres Ordinance, 1908, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, August 24, 1917, 1399. The Theatres Regulation Ordinance Amendment, No. 17 of 1910 (Hong Kong) added the requirement that the Registrar General be furnished with a description of every scene to be presented, who may then, at his discretion, issue a permit for the display of the film (Section 4).

26 Section 4(1), *The Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance, No. 22 of 1919* (Hong Kong).

Chapter 4: Asian colonies and film flows

The origins of this chapter arose out of the question “what impact did Shanghai censorship have on Hong Kong and Singapore given that it was the central hub for Asian film imports?” The proposition behind this was that censorship in Shanghai or Nanking prior to films arriving in Hong Kong might provide an explanation as to the apparent differences in censorship between Hong Kong and Singapore. Although Shanghai (and the Shanghai International Settlement) was outside of the British Empire, it was possible that this would be an instance where external policies and intervention impacted government operations and censorship in Hong Kong. The conclusion after working through all the evidence was that it likely had very little, if any, impact on Hong Kong censorship. At times, Hong Kong censors had similar concerns to the censors in Shanghai and Nanking, but this wasn’t material in the differences between Hong Kong and Singapore. The material and analysis contained within this chapter does, however, provide some interesting insights into the film trade in the region and some useful contextual information for the Hong Kong and Singapore chapters that follow.

Detailed statistics of trade flows during the period and in the region, specifically of films, are patchy, incomplete and inconsistent. Although there are government statistics available for British Malaya, nothing official appears to exist for Hong Kong.¹ The only source of data found in the archives for film imports into the colony are in two US Consular reports providing data for 1931 and 1933.² Although the data in these reports are apparently sourced from official Hong Kong statistics, they raise a number of questions, as they don’t support what was generally believed (particularly in the US Consul reports) about the flow of film in the greater China region at the time. In short, the figures create a conundrum, which will be touched upon shortly. The data for British Malaya (including the Federated and Unfederated Malay States), however, is quite comprehensive, and provides some empirical evidence for the importance of Singapore as a distribution hub in the region. Unfortunately, it does not separate out the Straits Settlements from the other parts of British Malaya; however, this is a minor problem as all of the films for British Malaya were supposed to go through the censor in the Straits Settlements anyway.³ Films
coming into the region would typically be censored at their first point-of-entry, and in many cases, the cuts would remain in place as the films were shipped to other locations.

The interpretation of film trade statistics is an area that has to be approached with caution. The most consistent measure is the length or footage of films imported and exported; however, these do not appear to be available for Hong Kong, nor do footage figures differentiate between short and feature subjects. Although most of the statistics provide a monetary value for the film, this in itself is somewhat arbitrary, as it is primarily based on local currency values and pricing, and can be misleading. The value placed on a film for trade purposes is nominal and varies from importer to importer. In places where a customs duty was imposed on imports, there would have been incentive for importers to use a low number to value the incoming film; nonetheless, that wasn’t the case with either Singapore or Hong Kong, as they were both essentially free-ports (no customs duty was imposed on anything other than liquor). What is presented here, then, is very incomplete, serves to give an indication only of film flows in the region, and adds complexity and confusion when looking at the case of Hong Kong and film censorship.

The underlying question being addressed when looking at the flow of films in the region is: what impact might censorship in one location have had on another location? Shanghai is included in this, as it was supposed to be the major entry point into China for films, and the distribution point from where films were shipped to Hong Kong, and in some cases, other parts of Asia. All the major distributors maintained offices in Shanghai, where they controlled the trade of film throughout the region. The main US Consulate and trade post for the region was also based in Shanghai. Other ports in the region that may have received film include, Kobe (Japan), Tientsin (now Tianjin, Northern China), Canton (Guangzhou) and Manila (The Philippines).

The British Malayan data is the most comprehensive and very detailed in terms of the locations from where films were imported and the destination of exports. From 1931, the data also breaks out first-importation/exportation of films from films that were re-imported or re-exported, making clearer the role that Singapore played as a regional film distribution hub. Some caution needs to be exercised, though, as the import data for the first importation of films does not correspond well with the censorship data, nor is it clear whether Hong Kong films were categorized as Chinese or British in the censorship data.
(more likely to be considered Chinese as that was the language of the films). There was a negligible level of production of films within British Malaya, and so local films have no impact on the trade data.

The first four columns of the following table (figure 4.2) show films entering from the major producing locations. The three shaded columns on the right-hand side are locations where the re-import/export of films would have been predominant. Almost all of the films arriving from the US would have been US films. The films from China and Hong Kong would have been a mixture of locally-produced products with re-exports of US and possibly British films. As Shanghai was the major entry point for US films in Northern Asia, it is likely that a portion, at least, eventually were sent on to South-East Asia. The same would be true of films that had been used within China and ended up in Hong Kong. Many of the films from Shanghai, though, from around the early 1930s would have been Shanghai-produced films. Shanghai was the centre for production of Mandarin-dialect films, which was also the dominant dialect in Singapore. From 1935 onwards, Hong Kong-produced films likely dominated the Hong Kong figures, as export revenues were crucial for the economic viability of the locally-produced films. Hong Kong-produced films, along with those produced in nearby Canton-- now known as Guangzhou, were in the Cantonese dialect, and dominated in the southern region of China. The role that Singapore had as a distribution hub is most evident in the Other Malay States, Dutch East Indies and Siam columns. Most of the footage from these locations would have been re-imports of films originally exported from Singapore, while the films entering from the other locations (‘Other British Empire’ and ‘Rest of World’) would have been mainly US films with a few films of other nationalities. Re-imports may have made up a small portion of these numbers, although the numbers would have been small. While the US was clearly the dominant source throughout the period, the growth in films during the period from China and Hong Kong are marked, as is evident in the film censorship trends (see figure 4.2 below).
Figure 4.2: Sources of film imports into British Malaya, 1925-37 ('000s feet)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Other British Empire</th>
<th>Rest of World</th>
<th>Other Malay States*</th>
<th>Siam†</th>
<th>Dutch East Indies‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>2,046.6</td>
<td>634.8</td>
<td>165.0</td>
<td>1,408.0</td>
<td>272.0</td>
<td>3,314.6</td>
<td>4,884.0</td>
<td>1,754.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2,207.1</td>
<td>321.8</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>1,402.7</td>
<td>650.9</td>
<td>4,372.5</td>
<td>3,775.1</td>
<td>2,627.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>3,761.3</td>
<td>245.4</td>
<td>300.0</td>
<td>452.6</td>
<td>845.3</td>
<td>591.4</td>
<td>5,809.1</td>
<td>4,095.0</td>
<td>747.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>3,981.5</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>348.2</td>
<td>676.7</td>
<td>637.2</td>
<td>6,257.1</td>
<td>6,471.5</td>
<td>333.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>118.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>221.0</td>
<td>788.6</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>7,665.8</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>623.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>115.3</td>
<td>852.5</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4,070.4</td>
<td>349.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>279.0</td>
<td>386.8</td>
<td>100.8</td>
<td>6,234.0</td>
<td>3,640.1</td>
<td>413.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>3,097.5</td>
<td>144.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>583.6</td>
<td>488.0</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>8,034.4</td>
<td>2,423.4</td>
<td>516.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>2,727.4</td>
<td>363.5</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>581.3</td>
<td>535.5</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>6,293.6</td>
<td>2,956.5</td>
<td>209.8</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>3,456.5</td>
<td>627.7</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>491.4</td>
<td>1,104.5</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>9,861.6</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>3,737.4</td>
<td>417.1</td>
<td>138.3</td>
<td>577.8</td>
<td>997.4</td>
<td>154.2</td>
<td>9,797.8</td>
<td>2,710.3</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>3,258.3</td>
<td>446.2</td>
<td>206.5</td>
<td>429.3</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>3,866.5</td>
<td>320.9</td>
<td>838.8</td>
<td>448.5</td>
<td>1,696.3</td>
<td>259.7</td>
<td>12,851.3</td>
<td>3,104.9</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: *British Malaya Import and Export Trade*, National Library of Singapore microfilms.

* Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo, British Protectorates on the island of Borneo outside of the Federated and Unfederated Malay States. † Now known as Thailand. ‡ The Dutch East Indies data is comprised of Java, Borneo and Sumatra. These areas now make up a portion of Indonesia.

An alternative approach to looking at sources of film is to look at the censorship data. These numbers are based on the countries of original production rather than the ports of origin, as the import figures are. In addition, they are based on the number of films rather than the footage used in the previous table. Hong Kong is not listed as a separate entity in this instance, and is likely included within the China figures. Placing this data alongside the numbers of films suggests that some caution needs to be exercised, as the first importation data does not correspond well with the censorship data (the importation figures don’t suggest the degree of decrease in the US portion that is evident in the censorship figures). One possible explanation for this may be that British films into Asia were in part shipped through the United States. The amounts in figure 4.3 differ from 4.2, as this data is based on where the films were produced. It is evident that US, China (including Hong Kong) and Britain dominated the local screens. Although the level of Chinese films initially peak in 1929, they drop off after that, presumably as a result of the transition to sound films. The trend bottoms in 1932, and then picks up again with the conversion of the Shanghai industry to sound production, and then the inclusion of (and
later shift to production from Hong Kong. The British-sourced productions make a
significant leap in 1932, suggesting that there was a lag before the increase in British
production reached Singapore.

Figure 4.3: Countries of origin of films censored in Singapore, 1926-38
(percentage based on no. of films)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. TNA: PRO, CO 275 Straits Settlements Sessional Papers.
It is unclear how Hong Kong-produced films were categorised in this, though it is quite likely they
are included under China, although technically they were of British nationality.

Looking at these figures, we can see that in all probability the source of film
(exported from, not place of production) had little impact on censorship in Singapore. Prior
to 1927, films coming in from China were likely to have been uncensored unless they had
previously come from Japan or another country with strong censorship. From 1927-1930,
as the censorship structure became established in China, it is possible that some of the
films from China may have first been shown and censored in China prior to their export to
British Malaya. Films shipped through the Shanghai International Settlement would also
have been censored, but censorship there appears to have been lighter than either
Singapore or Hong Kong. From 1931 with the establishment of the National Film
Censorship Committee in Nanking, all of the Chinese-produced films would have been
censored prior to export. Although the Chinese censorship shared similar moral
restrictions to the Shanghai censors, the major focus for the Chinese censors was removing
anything detrimental to Chinese prestige or interests. The number of films entering
Singapore from Japan was very small, and it is unclear whether they were Japanese-produced productions, US productions trans-shipped through Japan, or a mixture of both. Many of the films coming in from China were likely Chinese language films and from 1931 onwards, would have had to pass through the National Film Censorship Committee, or the Central Film Censorship Committee from 1934 onwards, prior to export. Chinese films were still cut or considered unsuitable for the Malayan market however. For instance, the Straits Settlements Government Gazette listed thirty-five Chinese films banned between 1935 and the end of 1939. Looking at an earlier period, Colonial Office records showed that 17% of Chinese films were banned in 1927, and 15% in the first five months of 1928. This was before the introduction of any consistent censorship of Chinese films in China. Many of the films in the latter part of the period were banned from exhibition in British Malaya, because they were considered to contain propaganda (see figure 6.3), although compared to the earlier period, it appears that a smaller proportion of Chinese films overall were being banned by the censor in Singapore. By the late 1930s, the overall percentage of films being banned had dropped to around three percent compared to 8.8% in 1927 and 6.7% in 1928. If we take into account that the reason that many of the films from China banned in the late 1930s were for propaganda reasons, it does suggest that the Chinese-government censorship may have had an impact on films needing censorship in British Malaya.

In comparison, the data for Hong Kong is very sparse, with no actual trade data available until the early 1930s, and only then in two US consular reports. A 1920 report from Hong Kong US Consul, George Cuderson, provides some background on distribution in the period leading up to 1920. Prior to the First World War, Europe had been the source for most of the films in Hong Kong. This in part can be explained by the early presence of the French firm, Pathé Frères, throughout the region. During the war, Cuderson suggests the source of films for Hong Kong shifted to Manila and Shanghai. By 1920, although some films continued to be exported to Hong Kong from Manila, the reports suggest they tended to be old, worn-out prints, primarily sent to avoid the payment of duty in the Philippines. While in Hong Kong, some of those prints were exhibited in the smaller Chinese cinemas, likely in contravention of their territorial agreements. Cuderson states that the highest-grade films (known as “Metropolitan” films) came from Singapore, while “Select” films came from an agency in Shanghai. Other films were imported either directly
from the US or were US films sub-leased to Hong Kong theatres from agencies in Tientsin and Shanghai, or arrived via Australia. Interestingly, the report suggested that even British films were often imported via the US.\textsuperscript{22} No trade data is available for 1920 to corroborate this. By 1924, when the export figures start being available for British Malaya, the export of films to Hong Kong had diminished to negligible amounts, with 92,300 feet recorded for that year.\textsuperscript{23}

The only substantive data for imports into Hong Kong of film is from 1931 and 1933, and is embedded in US consular reports.\textsuperscript{24} On the surface, the data appears to be at odds with what was frequently stated in US consular reports regarding the source of films.\textsuperscript{25} Two issues arise: firstly, Shanghai is often stated in the US Consular reports as a major source of films for Hong Kong; and secondly, from 1931, all films exhibited in China needed to be approved by the National Film Censorship Committee in Nanking first. The data for imports of film into Hong Kong from 1931 and 1933 do not correspond with this. The US Consulate obtained the figures from the Hong Kong Government Superintendent of Trade, and there is no reason to believe they were materially inaccurate or deliberately misleading. However, they raise questions as to what actually happened, or whether the Hong Kong government data is even accurate. As a result, only partial, somewhat speculative, explanation is possible here.

The first problem is that North China is shown in the data as being the more important source of films, not Middle China, which is assumed to have included Shanghai and Nanking.\textsuperscript{26} Tientsin, the major port in North China, was recognized as a film distribution hub, despite of lesser importance than either Hong Kong or Shanghai.\textsuperscript{27} Nanking, the Chinese national capital from 1927 and centre for the censorship of films, was much closer to Shanghai (200 miles) than to Tientsin (600 miles). Why Tientsin shows as having a higher level of exports to Hong Kong than Shanghai is intriguing and suggests that rather than shipping most of the films direct from Shanghai to Hong Kong, films followed an exhibition circuit into the northern parts of China first before being shipped to Hong Kong. The wording used in a different report from 1932 implies that this may have been a possibility: “The routing of films varies with the different companies, but it is general practice to cover the larger cities first, beginning with either Shanghai or Hong Kong.”\textsuperscript{28} The implication in this is that a film would have begun in either of Shanghai or
Hong Kong, and followed a route though other cities before reaching the other major exhibition centre. As Shanghai provided approximately 40% of the revenue from China, and was close to the National Film Censorship Committee in Nanking, it made sense for the majority of films to begin their exhibition there (Hong Kong provided approximately 30% of China revenue). Other than the import/export figures from Hong Kong, the number of distribution offices located in Tientsin supports its importance as a film distribution centre. In 1932, eleven distributors had offices in Tientsin, five in Hong Kong and twenty-eight in Shanghai. Tientsin as a city of over one million was bigger than Hong Kong in 1932, but had a smaller foreign population — approximately twenty thousand in Hong Kong compared with possibly ten thousand or a bit higher in Tientsin. The number of regularly operating cinemas in Tientsin was also smaller with fifteen compared with twenty-six for Hong Kong. The total transportation time from Tientsin also took longer at three weeks total against two weeks from Shanghai. Figure 4.4 also shows the large number of films imported from Southern China (Canton was a similar size to Hong Kong), and so another possibility may have been that films were transported by rail from Shanghai to Hong Kong via Canton, possibly being exhibited in some cities en route. There is no evidence that this did in fact occur, as it would have been a longer and more indirect route to Hong Kong, and because there were no direct rail lines and the films would have had to travel into the interior of China and be transferred to different lines before arriving in the south. The more likely explanation for the high number from Southern China is that these numbers represent the flow of films to and from different exhibition centres in the southern parts of China with Hong Kong as the main distribution hub (as mentioned in many of the US consular reports).
The role of Hong Kong as a regional distribution hub similar to Singapore is clear from these figures with the volume of trade attributable to Macao and Southern China. Given the Shanghai Incident in 1932 (or Shanghai War, a battle in Shanghai between Japanese troops and the Chinese 19th Route Army lasting a month resulting in the demilitarization of Shanghai), the question arises as to whether some of the import trade might have been redirected from Shanghai to Hong Kong. This seems unlikely, as trade would have recovered quickly after the ‘incident’ given the importance of Shanghai. This view is supported by a US consulate report out of Shanghai providing import figures for cinematograph films for 1931 and the first six months of 1932. The 1932 data show that imports during the same six-month period as the Battle of Shanghai was ahead of imports for the previous year. Another possibility is that Hong Kong could have been used as a trans-shipment point with films then sent to Shanghai/Nanking for censorship and distribution. Looking at the export figures for film from Hong Kong for 1933 (the only year these numbers are available, see figure 4.4), this is a possibility, although the question remains as to why Tientsin in North China appears to be the more important port than either Shanghai or Nanking for film being shipped from Hong Kong. One possible explanation is hinted at in a US consular report for Tientsin. In the report, it is revealed that the Hong Kong Amusement Company had an agreement with the North China Amusement Company for the outright purchase of film from the Puma Film Company in Shanghai, and distributing RKO Radio and First National films. Under the agreement, the Hong Kong
Amusement Group held the exhibition rights for Southern China and Hong Kong after their exhibition in Shanghai, while the North China Amusement Company held those rights for Northern China. As Hong Kong Amusement was the major distributor and exhibitor in Hong Kong, this would partially explain the shipping of films between Hong Kong and Tientsin.

The export data for Hong Kong in 1933 showing that Tientsin (North China) was a more important destination than Shanghai for film leaving Hong Kong supports the theory that Hong Kong was one end of a film circuit that looped through North China before finishing in Shanghai. It is puzzling, however, as it doesn’t account for the flow of films imported into Hong Kong from the United States (and other countries) that needed to be shipped to Nanking (Middle China) for censoring.

**Figure 4.5: Destinations of exports of film from Hong Kong, 1933**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>HK$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North China</td>
<td>215,608</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle China</td>
<td>141,296</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South China</td>
<td>730,027</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macao</td>
<td>260,814</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siam</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>24,869</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,386,614</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As was also the case for Singapore, Shanghai censorship is unlikely to have had much impact on censorship in Hong Kong. A 1932 Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) Commission into Film Censorship interviewed Eric Hamilton, one of the Hong Kong film censors in its evidence gathering, and in the final report suggested that censorship in Hong Kong in some areas was probably stricter than in Shanghai. What those other areas were was not stated in the report. A possible explanation for these differences was that Shanghai was a very cosmopolitan city. It had a reputation for considerable vice and moral laxity. The SMC censorship board were primarily Westerners well aware of the social milieu around them, and so there likely was greater leniency towards what was acceptable content in the motion pictures than was shown in smaller centres, such as Hong Kong, or by the Chinese government censorship board.
The introduction of national level film censorship in China in 1931, on the other hand, probably did have a material impact on films shown in Hong Kong. With the importance of Hong Kong as the distribution centre for Southern China, and the requirement that films pass through the National Film Censorship Committee prior to exhibition in China, it would have been prudent for Hong Kong distributors to meet Chinese requirements at the outset. One of the major distributors in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Amusements, was also an operator of cinemas in Southern China. As a result, they were conscious of meeting the Kuomintang (Chinese Republican government) requirements. Examples of the impact on Hong Kong are films such as *Shanghai Express* (1932, Paramount, Josef von Sternberg), and *Captured* (1933, Warner Bros., Roy Del Ruth), both of which proved problematic in Shanghai or with the Nanking censors, and subsequently were not released in Hong Kong.

Although the Chinese restrictions followed a different approach to those in many of the Western countries (they placed a lot of emphasis on eliminating or banning anything that was derogatory of, or portrayed the Chinese nation/people in a negative light), they also shared some similar concerns to the Western censors. As a result, it is possible that some of the more salacious pictures that may have originally been passed by the Shanghai censors would have been cut by the Nanking censors prior to their arrival in Hong Kong.

We can see from this chapter both Hong Kong and Singapore were important transhipment points and regional hubs for the distribution of film in the region. A question does remain regarding the route that films took between Hong Kong and Shanghai, with the theory provided that there was a northern route from Shanghai to Tientsin before films were then shipped to Hong Kong. This is speculative and requires further research of Chinese language sources to confirm or rebut this. It is also evident from this chapter the close links that Hong Kong had with Shanghai in the distribution of films in China. Although not covered here, this was true of the production industry as well. Many Shanghai producers also set up operations in Hong Kong, initially to provide another base for the production of Cantonese films, and later to provide an alternative base of operations outside of Japanese-controlled territory. Let us now turn to Hong Kong and the development of screen policy during the period.
Endnotes

1 It is possible there may be records existing in China from the Chinese Maritime Customs Department from the period, however, those were not available for this study.


3 The Federated Malay States were Selangor, Perak, Pahang and Negri Sembilan, while the Unfederated Malay States were Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu. As Singapore was the major port in the region and all of the film would have gone through the censor in Singapore before being exhibited elsewhere in British Malaya, the statistics provided can be considered to be reasonably reliable.

4 For example, film imported from Egypt into British Malaya in 1936 was valued at S$0.346 per foot, the previous year film was valued at S$0.286 per foot, while film from the US for the same years were valued at S$0.034 per foot in 1935 and S$0.031 per foot in 1936 (British Malaya Imports and Exports, 1936, 694). It is highly unlikely that the Egyptian films would have been approximately ten times as valuable as the films from the United States. The differences between years may in part be explained by shifts in currency exchange rates.


6 The regular reports from the Shanghai consulate lists all of the distributors along with the cinemas.

In a 1925 report, Universal is listed has having an agency in Shanghai, while United Artists (UA) worked through a sub-agent, lawyers Krisel and Krisel (J.E. Jacobs, “Shanghai as the Center of the Chinese Motion Picture Industry,” October 16, 1925, 5, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 1557, 840.6). By 1932, Universal and UA had been joined by Fox Film, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Richard P. Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” October 4, 1932, 156, USNA, RG 59 Shanghai, Box 7221, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/69). Kobe in Japan was also another major centre for US distribution operations in Asia (United Artists, for instance, had their Asian office based there), although there is little evidence of films being shipped from there to Hong Kong or Singapore.

7 Although the US Legation was based in Peking (or Peiping as it was referred to), the major consulate operations for China were based in Shanghai, the commercial capital. The consulates in Amoy, Canton, Chefoo, Foochow, Hankow, Nanking, Swatow, Tientsin, Tsinan, Tsingtao and Yunnan all reported to Shanghai. Dairen, Harbin and Mukden in Japanese-occupied territory from 1931 continued reporting to Shanghai as did Hong Kong, although not part of Chinese sovereign territory (something apparently ignored by the US as they always referred to Hong Kong being part of China in their diplomatic correspondence).


9 These refer to Sarawak, Brunei and North British Borneo. Each of these were British dependencies on the island of Borneo, outside of the Federated and Unfederated Malay states.
Although not explicitly stated by Thompson as her focus was on Hollywood films, this interpretation could be made from her comments regarding shipping. Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), 61-84.

Although there was localized censorship in China, prior to 1927, it was very sporadic and localized.

This is hinted at in Shanghai Municipal Council, Report of the Commission Appointed by the Shanghai Municipal Council to Examine the Question of Film Censorship in the International Settlement, 1932, 4-5, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2288, 840.6.


The Japanese films are included in the ‘Rest of World’ column.

There are no statistics available on the cuts made to films or their nationality, but the assumption here is that if films from China were being banned, then some of them would also require cutting.


All titles taken from Straits Settlements Government Gazette (SSGG). Further information regarding year of production, director and production company not included in the SSGG. Information regarding director and production company for *Midnight Vampire* (1936), obtained from: Cynthia Liu (compiler), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol. 1: 1913-1941*, Stephen Teo (trans.), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, Urban Council, 1997. It is possible that there are other Hong Kong films on this list that weren’t identified due to transliteration/translation differences.


From the Colonial Office records (CO 273/550/14), 1927, 17% of Chinese films; First 5 months of 1928, 15% of Chinese films. Drawing on data from the *Straits Settlements Administration Reports* and the *Straits Settlements Government Gazette* for 1938, Chinese films = 19.3% of 2,164 films (thus 418 films), 25 Chinese and Hong Kong films banned = 6% of Chinese films (compared to 2.5% of US films and 1% of British films).

George E. Cuderson, “Motion Pictures in Hong Kong,” January 19, 1920, 1, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 284, 840.6. Cuderson states that prior to the war, most of the film came from France and Italy, who had frequent, fast steamship connections, and from northern Europe via the Trans-Siberian railway. European films were cheaper and Pathé Freres was seen as better organised than the American competition. Manila, the capital of the Philippines, was a US-territory during this period. Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: American in the World Film Market, 1907-34* (London: BFI Publishing, 1985), lists Calcutta, Bombay, Hong Kong, Tientsin and Shanghai as all having Pathé branches prior to the war (44).

George E. Cuderson, “Motion Pictures in Hong Kong,” January 19, 1920, 1, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 284, 840.6.
21 ibid., 4-5. Under the customs regulations of the Philippines, film could only be kept in the islands for six months without payment of customs duty. Fox Films was singled out as having gained a particularly poor reputation for passing old prints of their films off as ‘first class films.’

22 ibid.

23 British Malaya Imports and Exports, 1924. The figure dropped to 9,600 feet the following year (1925). To put this in perspective, in 1924, exports of film to Java (in the Netherlands East Indies) totalled 2,688,329 feet, and to Siam (Thailand) totalled 4,682,012.


25 One example is Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 12, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6. In this he states “With few exceptions, the motion pictures exhibited in Hong Kong have previously been exhibited in Shanghai. This is not only because of the importance of the Shanghai market but because motion pictures must be censored in Nanking before being shown in China.” Although this is a later report once Chinese censorship has been well-established for several years, it echoes comments made in earlier reports.

26 An assumption is implicit in here that Shanghai and Nanking were in fact part of Middle China and not Northern China. None of the literature of the period appears to delineate what was considered North or Middle China, and discussions with Professor John Carroll from the History Department at Hong Kong University support this assumption. An alternative explanation would be the Shanghai was considered North China, but that raises the question as to which port, or what constituted Middle China. Further research is needed in both Chinese archives, and possibly using advertisements from Chinese newspapers of the period, to support or reject these possible scenarios.

27 Julean Arnold, China Through the American Window, (Shanghai: American Chamber of Commerce, 1932), 65, supports this with Tientsin listed as the port of distribution for North China and Shanghai as the port for Central China. And a letter from the US Shanghai Consulate to The Phonovision Company states the following about film distribution centres in China: “The distributing centers for this country named in order of their importance are Shanghai, Hongkong and Tientsin, which supply films for Central, South, and North China and Manchuria respectively.”


30 Richard Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” October 4, 1932, 156-158, USNA, RG 59 Shanghai, Box 7221, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/69. See Appendix 4.1, Film distributors and office locations in China, 1932.
The Hong Kong Blue Book gives a total population of 900,796 for Hong Kong in 1932 with a non-Chinese population of 19,984. There are some questions regarding the reliability of the officially reported population numbers as after each decanal population census, there was a significant downgrade in the official population size. As a result of the 1930 census, the official size of the Hong Kong population size was decreased by approximately 350,000, a decrease of 30%. It is not clear whether this was due to the population estimates (based on immigration/emigration and birth/death records) were inaccurate, undercounting in the census or a combination of both. I tend to believe that most of the difference was due to undercounting in the census. Thus, the 1932 population may have been around one million.

The Tientsin population figures are questionable. Richard Butrick in his 1932 report puts the population at one million (“The Motion Picture Industry in China,” October 4, 1932, 111, USNA, RG 59 Shanghai, Box 7221, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/69). Julean Arnold in his 1932 monograph (Julean Arnold, China Through the American Window, Shanghai: American Chamber of Commerce) suggests the number is 1,300,000. A 1929 report lists the Chinese population at 1,500,000 Chinese and 10,000 Europeans (George R. Paschal, Jr., “Motion Picture Theaters in the Tientsin Consular District and the Marketing of American Films Therein”, October 26, 1929, 5, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 1927, 840.6).

Richard Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” October 4, 1932, 143-151, USNA, RG 59 Shanghai, Box 7221, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/69. However, there is a caveat in another report suggesting that in addition to the sixteen cinemas identified in Tientsin, there were “probably ten or twelve small motion picture houses at Tientsin which exhibit pictures rented from the larger theatres. Some of these operate but sporadically, and it is not believed that the financial standing of any of these small houses warrant including the names of their principals in trade lists.” Enclosure No. 1 in John Hubner, II, “Importation and Distribution of Motion Picture Films and Projection Equipment during 1932 in the Tientsin Consular District,” August 1, 1933, 4, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2396, 840.6.

The Shanghai Incident of 1932 was a battle between a Japanese expeditionary force and the Chinese Nationalist Army in and around Shanghai in the early part of 1932. Without the armour, naval and air force support that the Japanese commanded, the Chinese were forced to retreat. The subsequent peace treaty resulted in the Chinese Army having to remain at least 30 kilometres outside the city, while the Japanese were allowed to garrison a few units within the city. See Marie-Claire Bergère, Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity, trans. Janet Lloyd, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, 208.

The term ‘incident’ was used by the Japanese for hostilities in both Shanghai as well as Manchuria; as if they had declared war they would have no longer been able to import strategic supplies from the United States and other countries.


Although the Chinese Nationalist government introduced censorship legislation in 1927, execution of the censorship initially was at the local level. The National Film Censorship Committee (NFCC) in Nanking did not begin operation until 1931. Even at that stage, exhibitors in the Shanghai International Settlement did not feel compelled to submit their films for censorship, and a number were exhibited without passing through Nanking. Xiao, 1994, discusses this in more detail on pages 199-211 of his PhD dissertation. See Zhiwei Xiao, “Film censorship in China, 1927-1937.” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1994).

Hong Kong Amusements was frequently a major source of information for the US Consulate. In addition to ten cinemas in Hong Kong in 1932, the company also operated at least five cinemas in Macao and Canton, and possible others through Southern China. Henry Day in his 1934 report on Hong Kong mentions that the company controlled over fifty cinemas in China (Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 5, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6).


A brief mention is made by Ruth Vasey of the banning of Shanghai Express, but there is no comment from her on Captured. See Ruth Vasey, The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 155.

The Nanking censors had a relatively short list of guidelines of what was not acceptable. Article 2 of the Motion Picture Censorship Law promulgated on November 3, 1930, but not actually put into effect until June 1931 stated: “Motion picture films will not be approved if they are:
1. Injurious to the dignity of the Chinese people.
2. Contrary to the Three Principles of the People.
3. Detrimental to good morality or public order.
4. Promoting superstition or heterodoxy.”


Chapter 5: Hong Kong

“. . . not only are we a small settlement of white men on the fringe of a huge Empire of Asiatics, but that the whole of China is in the melting pot; and that the chaotic conditions existing owing to internecine strife or Communistic propaganda make it even more necessary to be strict as regards the matter exhibited.”

- E. W. Hamilton, Hong Kong Censor, 1928

This chapter looks at the development of screen policy in Hong Kong from the introduction of the first regulations in 1909, though little happened until the introduction of the Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance in 1919. Over the period the primary areas the government involved themselves in the screen industry was censorship and the approval of applications to build cinemas in different parts of the colony. The chapter follows the categories in the Policy Imperatives Model, with much of the emphasis during the period on safety or more specifically, censorship.

Safety

The first regulation of cinema in Hong Kong came in 1909 in regulations on fire safety requirements introduced following the 1908 Theatres Regulation Ordinance. The following year, an amendment was made to the ordinance empowering the Registrar General to issue permits for the exhibition of films. This power followed the licensing powers provided to local authorities in the Cinematograph Films Act of 1909 in Great Britain, but with the added requirement that a description of every scene needed to be provided of the film, before the permit could be issued. This rudimentary approach to censorship continued until the introduction in 1919 of the Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance, which explicitly assigned the responsibility for censorship to either the Captain Superintendent of Police or the Secretary for Chinese Affairs (for exhibition in Chinese theatres). This was the first formal mention of ‘censorship’ in relation to cinematograph films in legislation or regulation in Hong Kong. It isn’t clear what was defined as Chinese theatres, as all the theatres had Chinese audiences to some degree, while only a handful also had European audiences. In reality, neither the Captain
Superintendent of Police nor the Secretary for Chinese Affairs censored the films themselves, but delegated the duties to mid-level government officers. Censorship dominated government regulation of and policy towards cinema at the colonial level, as well be apparent in both this and the following chapter. In Chapter 2, the first level of the policy imperatives model outlined was safety, both physical and moral, and this imperative can be clearly seen in the initial development of screen policy and regulation in Hong Kong.

The fire safety requirements for theatres in Hong Kong followed many of the regulations found in other countries, and the legislation doesn’t appear to have aroused either concern or controversy. The regulations specific to cinematograph theatres included in the 1919 Places of Public Entertainment Ordinance, were believed to have been modelled after regulations in Seattle. Many of the provisions already existed, however, in the 1909 regulations, which included a specific section on buildings for cinematograph displays. The 1919 regulations specified as a minimum standard, that the projection box had to be encased in metal with a drop-down shutter over the lens in the event of fire. Fire-buckets with sand had to be available either inside or just outside of the projection box. No smoking was allowed within the projection booth; a fire safety officer (normally an off-duty fireman) had to be on duty during screenings, and fire exits could not be locked from the inside. In general, however, the major cinemas in the City of Victoria (the main business and residential district in Hong Kong) exceeded these requirements by constructing a concrete projection room with direct access to the street. The cinemas themselves had to be separated from other buildings with at least ten feet of space between them, and fireproof exits direct to the street from all levels where audiences would be seated. Cinemas had to be purpose-built structures. They could not be built above premises with other functions, nor could premises with other functions be built above cinemas. One building was developed (the King’s Theatre Building in the central business district) which did include shops and offices in addition to the cinema, however, the implication was that these were adjacent and part of the same building rather than under and over the cinema itself.

Hong Kong also appeared to allow the building of temporary cinemas along with other temporary places of public entertainment (targeted towards the Chinese population).
Government records show a number of cases where permits were granted for the construction of temporary cinemas, primarily in Kowloon and the New Territories. On the face of it, they appear to have contravened the 1919 Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance where the use of temporary buildings for the exhibition of cinematograph films was specifically prohibited; however, the notes in these (and other) files suggests that the construction of these ‘temporary’ cinemas may not have been uncommon. The regulations state: “…[i]n the case of a temporary building no licence will be issued for a longer period than one month, but such licence may be renewed at the discretion of the Captain Superintendent of Police.” The leases for the land for these ‘temporary’ cinemas were normally for a period of three years, and frequently renewed if the land was not needed for other purposes, and so the buildings themselves may not have been temporary (met all of the normal building codes), but were labelled as temporary as they built on land with short-term leases. In some respects the issuing of permits could also be considered under the economic imperative, as they provided the government with a source of revenue from unused land. The notes in the records accompanying applications for permits were frequently focused on whether the government had any plans to use the land for other purposes during the period of the permit (almost all of the land in Hong Kong being available only on a leasehold basis rather than freehold).

The issue of temporary cinema theatres were addressed in a revision of the regulations under the Places of Public Entertainment Regulation Ordinance of 1919 in 1931. No major changes were introduced as part of the revision, although there were explicit provisions for temporary cinemas and portable projectors introduced.

The storage of film was another area of specific regulation given the highly flammable nature of nitrate film. The legislation addressing this was passed in 1923 following the passage of very similar legislation in the British parliament and a fire in Hong Kong. Regulations were such that cinematographic film could only be stored in metal containers within rooms made of fire-resistant materials, with only a limited amount of film exposed to the air at any one time. Many of the urban buildings in Hong Kong were constructed, at least partially, from wood, and a major fire could be devastating to the colony. There had previously been a major fire in Hong Kong in the 1878, which had destroyed a significant portion of the City of Victoria. Bunkers were inspected on a
periodic basis by Building Authority inspectors or the police. Beyond these regulations, little else was introduced in Hong Kong during the period to regulate physical safety. Now, let’s return to the issue of censorship.

The approach that Hong Kong took to censorship was quite unique. In many countries or localities, dedicated censors were hired, or in the early days, it was a role of the police. Up until the invasion of Hong Kong by the Japanese, none of the Hong Kong censors were hired specifically for the role, but were government officials who had censorship duties assigned to them in addition to their normal, full-time role. There is also evidence of volunteers being appointed from women’s groups within Hong Kong, to assist in the process of censorship. Little is known about the censors themselves in Hong Kong during this period. Notes in the *Hong Kong Blue Book* reveal the names of at least some of the government officials involved, and it was not unusual to find magistrates, the Postmaster-General or some other government officials included. The name Eric Hamilton frequently shows up in the reports over the period and appears to have been the public face of the censorate in Hong Kong. Eric William Hamilton, who provided the quotation used at the beginning of this chapter, was a Hong Kong Cadet Officer who joined the Hong Kong government service in 1911. Appendix 5.1 maps out his career progression, a career path typical of a cadet officer in Hong Kong during this period.

Eric Hamilton achieved the ‘Passed Cadet’ status in 1915, meaning that he would have completed his Cantonese language training and would have been reasonably fluent in the language. This would later be useful in censoring the locally-made films. Changes in posting and role were frequent for Cadet Officers (professional, high level administrators in the colonial service); however, for Hamilton, a considerable portion of his career was spent as a Magistrate. A story published in *The Star* in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1930, tells of a judge in Hong Kong whose magisterial duties conflicted with the availability of the cinema for him to conduct his film censorship duties, and so, the film companies installed a 35mm projector in his home to enable him to view films at his convenience. Beyond this news story, there is no corroborating evidence that any film companies in Hong Kong did indeed assist any film censors in this way, though it is possible. It is very possible that the judge referred to in the news story was Hamilton, as he was assigned as a magistrate during this period, and seemed to have been the only censor who provided
comments to outside organisations. The most likely company to be able to accommodate a censor in this way would have been Hong Kong Amusements, who at this stage controlled a large number of cinemas in Hong Kong, Macao and Southern China, and acted as both a distributor as well as an exhibitor.

This story reveals a number of aspects about the censorship process during the 1920s, though. It reveals that censors had to conduct their viewings in the cinemas themselves, as there were no central facilities for censorship. Censors would view films prior to the first show of the day, which during this time-period would typically be in the early afternoon. Given the inflammable nature of film stock and the strict building codes in place for cinemas, it is interesting that a projector would have been installed in the residence of a government official. It is possible that a blind-eye was turned towards the fire regulations in place elsewhere.

Theatres in Hong Kong, as in many other places, were classified as either first-run, or second-run (or later) cinemas. The first-run theatres were the ones who would exhibit the films first in the colony and were considered the premier cinemas. During the earlier part of the 1920s, these would have been the cinemas that the Europeans attended. Appendix 5.2 maps out the Hong Kong cinemas over the period identifying the first-run houses. The first-run or initial exhibition of Western films in Hong Kong took place in only a small number of cinemas (typically three or four) during the period. The archival records do not provide sufficient detail to explain what was normal for Chinese films, although it is likely that some were premiered in Hong Kong in The New World Theatre, while others were premiered in other Chinese cinemas.

Films only needed to be censored prior to their first exhibition, and so the focus of the censors would have been on those cinemas showing first-run movies. Thus, when Hamilton testified to the 1932 Shanghai Commission on Film Censorship that there were teams of censors assigned across the colony, there probably were three, and at the maximum four teams. The presence of three women among the censors would support this (one woman for each team). It is unclear what the situation was during 1931 as a number of new cinemas opened during the year, but according to J.C. Huston, there were six cinemas in the colony exhibiting first-run movies, but not exclusively in most cases.
consular’s reports from later years revert back to listing three first-run cinemas (Queen’s, King’s and Central) or four, once the Alhambra opened in 1934.  

A Hong Kong film programme during the 1920s and 30s lasted for approximately two hours, and typically comprised of a number of short subjects including a news-reel, a serial or comedy, along with a feature. Features were typically eight or nine reels, with the total programme around twelve reels in length. Programmes would change three times a week, thus a cinema showing silent movies needed approximately 1,872 reels of film a year (or 156 feature films). With the coming of the talkies, and an increase in the number of Chinese movies, the programme structure also changed. Chinese audiences preferred longer features and so Chinese films were typically ten reels in length, and with the higher rental costs for sound movies (and possible lower supply of sound films), the number of programmes shown each week decreased from three to two sometime during the 1930/31 period.

Based on the assignment of the censor teams to specific theatres, along with the news clipping referred to above about the judge with his own projector, it is reasonable to assume that the censors would have developed good relationships with the management of the cinema/s they were conducting censorship for. Whether this led to a more favourable review of films is unclear, though not outside the realms of possibility. If the news story in New Zealand was correct, then there was an exhibitor or distributor who was willing to assist a censor to the extent of installing a projector in his home. This in itself wouldn’t constitute corruption; and at Hamilton’s level, it is unlikely there was any explicit bribery. However, close relationships between censors and the theatres for which they undertook censorship would have opened up the possibilities for leniency to be shown in the censoring process, and corruption was acknowledged as been endemic in the lower levels of the Hong Kong government. To add another dimension to this, up until 1931, the film companies or exhibitors paid the censors directly for having their films censored (at a rate set by the government). The potential certainly existed for an exchange of favours to take place in the way the censoring process was structured. From 1931, the fees were paid directly to the government with the censors being paid from the government coffers, although this didn’t necessarily reduce the opportunity for corruption.
Talkies first arrived in Hong Kong in November 1929. Outside of the first-run cinemas, there was no immediate conversion to sound as many of the second-run cinemas were catering to Chinese audiences who didn’t understand the English language anyway. Nor was it economic to immediately convert to sound as the expense of the projection and audio equipment was quite high, and Hong Kong shortly afterwards began to be impacted by the Great Depression.

In 1931, there was an overhaul of the Cinematograph regulations, including those pertaining to censorship. A Board of Censors made up of the Inspector General of Police (title upgrade with the growth in the police force), the Secretary for Chinese Affairs and the Director of Education became jointly responsible for censorship rather than just the Captain Superintendent of Police. In reality, this was formalizing a Board of Appeal for Censorship, as the day-to-day censorship continued to be delegated to lower level government officials. A greater range of individuals also became involved in the censorship process as a result of civic groups expressing a need to protect the morals of the community. According to a US Consulate report in July 1931, a committee of three women selected by the Helena May Institute, a local woman’s civic organization, were appointed to act with the censors in reviewing films. These were probably the three women that Hamilton referred to in his evidence to the Shanghai Commission on Film Censorship, although there was also the statement in a letter from the Hong Kong Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1928 that the assistant censors were both male and female, official and unofficial.

Another change in the Cinematograph regulations was an increase in the censoring fee, from HK$0.20 per reel to HK$1.00 per reel. Most of this was a censorship fee (HK$0.80 per reel) that was ultimately paid to the censor. Further revisions were made in the censorship regulations in 1933, 1934, 1937, and 1941, but none contained any substantive changes beyond adjustments to the censorship fees.

The structure of censorship in Hong Kong prior to the Japanese invasion in 1941 can be broken down into four periods:

- **Upto circa 1923.** Initially, police censorship was a function undertaken by commissioned police officers. According to Eric Hamilton in the Shanghai Commission evidence, as the motion picture business developed, the work
became too much for the police officers and so officers from other government departments were included in the role.  

- **1923-1931.** The beginning date is uncertain, but represents the year that Eric Hamilton was appointed as a film censor. Other legislation and regulations came into force during this year, suggesting this was a period when there was focus on the regulatory structure governing the motion picture industry in Hong Kong. During this period, censors were assigned specific cinemas and viewed programmes prior to their first run in the cinema. 

- **1931- June 20, 1932.** This period follows the upgrading of the regulations and ordinances regulating the motion picture industry, with the introduction of the Censorship Board (effectively a Board of Appeal), and enabling the appointment of censors from outside of the government. This was probably as a result of civic groups expressing a need for greater protection of the morals of the community. The three women appointed by the Helena May Institute, a local woman’s civic group, would have joined the government officers in the censorship at this stage. Censorship viewings continued to take place in the cinemas until July 1, 1932.

- **1932 (July 1) onwards.** Censorship viewings moved to one dedicated location (at least partially) rather than in individual cinemas.

The problem of premises to undertake censorship was addressed in 1932 with the leasing of an editing studio in the Gloucester Building from the British Film Distribution Company. What is not clear is whether all of the viewing of films for censorship moved from the cinemas to the Hong Kong Preview Studio (as it was referred to). The 1932 Police Report suggests that the censorship of all films shifted to the Preview Studio. However, it is not clear as to whether this in fact was sustained. The number of reels passing through the Preview Studio dropped after the first year, and although there was a drop in business during 1933 as a result of the depression, the increase in reels after 1933 doesn’t seem sufficient for either the increase in cinemas in later years, or to account for the opening of an additional first-run cinema (the Alhambra) in 1934. Increasing numbers of Chinese films were also entering the colony from Shanghai as well as those produced locally, and many of these would have premiered outside of the main first-run cinemas.
**Figure: 5.1: Number of reels censored through the Hong Kong Preview Studio**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of reels</strong></td>
<td>6,539*</td>
<td>4,903</td>
<td>5,927*</td>
<td>5,843</td>
<td>5,353</td>
<td>5,317</td>
<td>5,005</td>
<td>5,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of trailers</strong></td>
<td>324</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>273</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6,539</td>
<td>5,227</td>
<td>5,927</td>
<td>6,218</td>
<td>5,676</td>
<td>5,610</td>
<td>5,266</td>
<td>6,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Submitted for Appeal</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* both reels and trailers

**Sources:** “Annual Reports of the Inspector General of Police,” *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 1933-39, accessed from Hong Kong University Special Collections, Electronic Hong Kong Collection; 1933 figures from L.H. Gourley, “Hong Kong Film Censorship in 1933,” July 25, 1934, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.

The US consular reports list figures for the number and nationality of films censored through the Hong Kong Preview Studio during the first nine months of 1938, 1939 and 1940. Although this data is only for a partial year in each case, there is no reason to suspect that the relative levels are any different for the full year. As can be seen in figure 5.2, there had been a significant increase in the number of Chinese-language films (primarily locally produced by this stage), with the proportion 29% in 1938, 33% in 1939 and 31% in 1940. Although the Japanese had invaded most of Shanghai in 1937 (the International Settlement was left untouched until 1942), some film production continued in the International Settlement. Thus, some of the Chinese films shown in Hong Kong may have come from the northern metropolis, though the numbers would likely have been much lower than in earlier years. The majority of the Chinese-language production is likely to have been local. US films comprised no more that 65% of films censored over those nine-month periods.
British Film Distribution went into liquidation during 1934, and so the Hong Kong Police sought new premises for their censorship studio. Beyond the brief mention of the move to the 5th floor of the Kayamally Building in the Annual Report of the Inspector of Police for 1934, no further details are available.55 Based on the evidence Hamilton provided to the Shanghai Commission on Film Censorship, the exhibitors themselves rather than the Police rented the Preview Studio for censorship. Hamilton outlines the [funding] arrangements as follows:

The fee of Hk.$2.00 per reel becomes a charge to the theatres, which together with the censorship fee of Hk.$0.80 and Hk.$0.20 to the Colonial Government, entails a total cost to the theatres of $3.00 or say an inclusive programme cost, i.e. newsreel, short and feature films of Hk.$30.00.56

This suggests that the Police Department did not take responsibility for the lease of the Preview Studio nor did they invest in any film projection and sound equipment, unlike the case in Singapore. The individual exhibitors paid for the lease of the studio through a per-reel fee on top of the fee paid for the censors’ time.

Most of the films censored in the colony would have been destined for the first-run cinemas, of which there were four in 1934 after the opening of the Alhambra in Kowloon (in January 1934).57 As noted earlier, the three other first-run cinemas were The King’s
Theatre, The Queen’s Theatre and The Central Theatre, all on Queen’s Road, Central. The rest of the cinemas were second-run and would typically have shown films after they had opened in the colony in one of the first-run cinemas. The exception to this may have been Chinese films, which may have opened in other cinemas. Less is known about where the Chinese films opened in the colony, as The Central was the only first-run cinema that would show any Chinese films (they also exhibited foreign films). Day suggests that the first-run theatres needed ten new pictures each month. His reference is to feature films here, as there probably would have been three or four short films included in a two-hour programme as well. The number suggested is probably on the high-side based on programme changes every Wednesday and Saturday, with nine features a more normal level.

The documents in the archives are silent on the nature of the Hong Kong censorate after 1932. The US consulate reports made no further mention of how the films were censored; the reports on the Police in the annual Hong Kong Administrative Reports describe little more than the number of reels censored in the Hong Kong Censor Studio (or Preview Studio as it was also known); and there were no further public comments from Eric Hamilton. Establishment listings in the Hong Kong Blue Book give no indication that any dedicated censors were hired. Changes may well have happened during this period with the availability of centralised facilities, but the records in the archives are silent. Revised regulations for censorship were introduced in 1933, 1934, 1937, and 1941, but none contained any substantive changes beyond increases in censorship fees.

Censorship in Hong Kong during the 1920s raised few concerns. A 1920 report from the US Consulate in Hong Kong describes the situation as follows:

Censorship in Hongkong is fairly liberal. There is often considerable question as to just what should be allowed before a Chinese audience with its habits, customs, and ideas differing so much from those of Europe and the United States but in general decisions lead to the side of liberality. In general films showing the work of mobs, riots, or disorder generally or suggesting the rape of women, class consciousness or lawlessness are not favoured. Nor do the Chinese favor anything suggesting nudity.

This isn’t to say that films were not cut or banned, however, the numbers that were cut or banned was lower than in other localities and rarely were decisions appealed.
One of the few instances from the 1920s where there is record of objection to a censors’ ruling occurred in 1927. The documentation begins with a letter to the American Consul-General in Hong Kong from Krisel & Krisel, the United Artist Corporation’s China representative in Shanghai asking him to intervene. In the letter they disputed that the film *Night of Love* (1927, Samuel Goldwyn Company, George Fitzmaurice), which the censor had stated “is absolutely immoral and the depiction in many cases is indecent,” should be banned. They noted that the film had been passed by the National Board of Censors in the US and exhibited throughout the US without any protest being filed, and requested a reconsideration by the censor. Roger Treadwell, American Consul-General, subsequently met with the censor concerned (Eric Hamilton) and minuted the outcome of the meeting. Treadwell noted that Hamilton explained the position of the Hong Kong government as:

... at the present time there is a serious situation in China and that it is inadvisable to show plays which in any way depict the white man as being unfair to the yellow races or which show him in a bad light... for this reason such films as THE VANISHING RACE, TELL IT TO THE MARINES and A NIGHT OF LOVE have not been permitted to be shown in the Colony.

There was no further comment on *Night of Love*, although the censor not approving the film for exhibition may have been the result of the plot including: a feudal lord planning to abduct a bride on the eve of her wedding to rape her, the bride choosing suicide instead, revenge followed as a result, with some mob violence thrown in for good measure.

A later report made some negative comments about Eric Hamilton as a censor. Douglas Jenkins, the US Consul General in Hong Kong at the time, made the following comments in a report about the new regulations for censoring film:

Mr. Hamilton has recently been appointed Postmaster General of Hong Kong but it is understood will continue to exercise the duties of censor for the Queen’s Theatre. He is said to be bitterly anti-American in all of his sentiments and this office is informed that he never misses an opportunity of slashing American films exhibited to him for censorship whereas scenes of a like nature in the occasional British film shown will be passed without question. His action has resulted in some films being so altered as to make them worthless for exhibition purposes. The representative of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer company in Hong Kong is instructed by his company to make requests for appeals only where there is a likelihood of the appeal being successful and to be careful about irritating local officials in the
matter of requests for appeals. Consequently it is understood that Mr. Hamilton’s censoring has been responsible for a number of films having to be returned without exhibition. This Consulate General is informed that where appeals have been made in the past as regards the more important films, the Inspector General of Police has failed on every occasion to sustain Mr. Hamilton’s verdicts.64

These comments were an isolated example in the archival files and don’t ring true. Compared with Singapore, relatively few films were banned, and most of the comments in consular reports noted the fairness of the censors in Hong Kong. Hong Kong Amusements were the Hong Kong agent for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (and the dominant distributor and exhibitor in the colony) and possibly the company that provided the projector to Hamilton.65

Social Control and Development

Censorship

Whereas film censorship for moral safety reasons predominated during the 1920s, there was a shift in the emphasis on censorship to political reasons during the 1930s with the growing Sino-Japanese conflict. Complaints about the level of censorship during the 1920s (focused on moral aspects) had been relatively few. The US Consul reports frequently comment that the censors were “fair and reasonably liberal.”66 The 1927 complaint mentioned previously (p. 121) elicited a response from Hamilton, one of the Hong Kong censors regarding three American films he had recently banned. *A Night of Love* (1927) had previously been mentioned and was banned for moral reasons. The other two films, *Tell It To The Marines* (1926) and *The Vanishing Race* (1925) were banned for what would be better be described as social or political reasons. Hamilton considered *Tell It To The Marines* as “a marvellous piece of anti-American propaganda as it shows our marines shooting down Asiatics.”67 Of more significance are the comments on file regarding *The Vanishing Race* (1925), including the only known copy existing of a Hong Kong film censorship report from this period (see Appendix 5.4 for a transcription). Hamilton considered that:
Films depicting Europeans as either being inferior to Asians (the actual language used was “white man as being inferior to the yellow races”) or being unfair to them, were unacceptable and banned. Hamilton was of the view that nothing that would lower the prestige of Europeans in the eyes of the Chinese should be shown in Hong Kong. Under the circumstances, the US Consul General in Hong Kong didn’t see it proper to appeal the censorship decisions. These sentiments were common and illustrative of the social control role of censorship.

There is also a hint of a personal friendship between Tredwell and Hamilton, as attached to the copy of the censors report on *The Vanishing Race* is a handwritten note with the following message:

> Dear Roger,
> Herewith a copy of my report for your private eye.
> I’ll let you know how the cat jumps.
> Yrs,
> Hammy

The fact that Hamilton was willing to pass a copy of the censors’ report to Tredwell (normally they were kept confidential), was on first-name basis with him, and signed the note ‘Hammy,’ speaks to something more than a professional acquaintanceship.

Following the invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese in 1931, censorship in Hong Kong, specifically of politically sensitive topics, became stricter. Scenes of war in China, along with material that may upset the Japanese (Britain, and thus Hong Kong, tried to remain neutral in the Sino-Japanese conflict), were banned. This shift towards political censorship became more apparent in the late 1930s. One controversy were the two decisions banning the negative portrayal of Nazi Germany, apparently following complaints from the German Consul General to the Governor, which led to protests from the Hong Kong public. Allegations were also made within the US Consular reports that the Governor was in fact a Nazi sympathizer who showed considerable favour to the Germans. The first instance was the banning of a film titled *Inside Nazi Germany* (1938),
part of the *March of Time* series. The sixteen-minute documentary film originally released in January 1938 was purported to give audiences an understanding of life within Germany. The film led to protests in a number of countries, including the United States, in some cases due to its perceived anti-Nazi bias, but in other places due to its pro-Nazi bias. In Hong Kong, the censor initially passed the film for exhibition, but after representations from the German Consul General claiming that parts of the commentary were “very anti-Nazi”, the censor amended the approval restricting the film to silent exhibition only. A few hours later the film was banned in its entirety, apparently due to intervention by the Governor of Hong Kong. This change was appealed, but the Board of Censors upheld the decision. An official statement from the Commissioner of Police (also the Chief Censor) suggested that the decision to ban the film was not made at the request of the German Consulate, but resulting from a review by both representatives of the British residents and the German Consulate following concerns by the censor regarding the commentary. This appears to be a face-saving measure, as the censor is unlikely to have released the film initially without the review if he or she had concerns. The diplomatic intervention by the German Consul General seeking the banning of the film was not an unusual move at the time. There are a number of examples of this in the diplomatic correspondence in the files, and Ruth Vasey discusses the issue of national representation (behind many of the diplomatic interventions) in some detail in *The World According to Hollywood*.

The report that follows from the American Consulate dated September 10, 1938, comments on the apparent strictness of local censors of moving picture films, This is a radical departure from earlier perceptions of Hong Kong censors having a light touch when it came to censorship. Particular focus was placed on the absurdity of the excision of scenes portraying gunfire or shooting when many of the inhabitants of Hong Kong would have been familiar with lethal violence from living under war conditions in China.

Another *March of Time* film was banned a couple of years later. A file note to Addison Southard, American Consul General, dated June 29, 1940, notes that the “Hong Kong Hong Kong censors are not passing Vic Jurgens’ *“March of Time”* film on the Far East, as it is too anti-Japanese for the moment”. The Consulate files contain a shooting script for Hong Kong from Jurgens visit to the territory in April, 1939, along with a telegram from
Louis Rerochemont asking the Consulate to advise Jurgens to stay out of Japanese-occupied territory and not to use Japanese-owned transportation.

The Japanese government was also putting pressure on the Hong Kong Government not to allow the screening of films detrimental or antagonistic to Japanese interests. One example of this was an anti-Japanese film made in 1938 titled *March of the Partisans/Youji Jinxing Qu* (1938, Situ Huimin, dir.), one of a number of ‘national defence movies’ produced in Hong Kong to support the Chinese war effort. It was banned in Hong Kong due to the neutral stance of Britain towards the Sino-Japanese conflict, however, the ban was lifted in 1941, just prior to the invasion by the Japanese.

In 1939, another Nazi-focused film attracted the ire of the German Consul-General. *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), produced by Warner Brothers, was considered the first explicitly anti-Nazi film produced by a Hollywood studio and was banned in a number of countries. In Hong Kong, the German Consul-General approached the government, as also happened in other British colonies and dominions, to request that the film be banned, but after due consultation, both within the Hong Kong administration and with other governments in the British Empire, this film was released for exhibition. It was less damaging to ban short films such as the two *March of Time* films, than to ban a feature film.

**Use of film for social development**

Aside from censorship for social control reasons, there were also incidences of film being used for social development purposes through its use in education. What may have been the first educational uses of film in Hong Kong took place during the latter part of the 1930s. One involved the production and distribution of an educational film as part of a public education programme, and the other was the initiative taken by the Teachers Association to begin using films as an educational tool within schools. This latter initiative largely happened outside of the Hong Kong Government auspices and educational budget, although a proposal was made just before the war for the Department of Education to also purchase a projector.

In 1934, the Hong Kong Police made use of film as part of their first “Safety First Campaign.” As well as advertisements and pamphlets in English and Chinese distributed
through the Colony (even dropped from aircraft) a Safety First film depicting common accidents was produced and exhibited in local cinemas. Although the success of this first campaign was muted, further campaigns were held in following years. A second 35mm copy of the film was added in 1935 to widen the exhibition, while a 16mm print was printed to use in public spaces at night. The campaign continued until 1937 when the influx of refugees into the colony made it impossible to continue.

The first mention of films being used in schools for educational purposes arises in the Department of Education report for 1938 where it is mentioned that the Teachers Association “inaugurated a scheme for exhibiting educational films in schools in the Colony.” It isn’t clear who was funding this endeavour, but it is clear from the reports that it was initiated by teachers rather than the Education Department or the government. The following year the Annual Report goes into more detail under the ‘Aided Schools’ section where it notes that:

...six of the schools enjoyed the benefits of visual education using apparatus hired locally by the Teachers Association and films owned by the same organization. Films were American and English and illustrated work in hygiene, geography (physical and travel) and elementary science. The experiment justified extension of the scheme but further practice in the use of films is required. It should be mentioned that King’s College and Queen’s College also subscribed to the scheme.

The report on the Hong Kong film industry by the US Consulate in 1939 also addresses directly the use of 16mm projectors in schools. They report that twenty-five schools were using the projectors for educational purposes and the local agent of the American manufacturer maintained a library of both silent and sound educational films suitable for use in schools. A proposal had been made to the Education Department to extend the service with the department purchasing a projector that could be moved from school to school, however, there is no record of whether this in fact was implemented. The report also noted that a German company had also been providing 16mm projectors and films, but that the Custodian of Enemy Property at the outbreak of the war with Germany had seized them.
**Economic imperative**

In Hong Kong, although there were intermittent calls in the press for the introduction of a British quota, the issue never got as far as the legislature. Reports from the US Consulate from 1928 onwards would frequently contain a warning of expectations that legislation or restrictions would be forthcoming to ensure that British films were exhibited in the colony.

The impetus for this in 1931 was the brief exhibition in the King’s Theatre of two British films, *Splinters* (1931) and *Rookery Nook* (1930). Comparisons were made in local newspapers between the diction, accent and general mannerisms and tone of these two films with the many American films shown in the colony. As a result, an increased number of British films, both feature and short subjects, were shown in the colony, but generally were not met with acclaim.

In 1931, there was a proposal made to the Hong Kong government to convert the theatre in the Town Hall to a small cinema dedicated to screening British films. This was in response to increasing calls in the press for the screening of more British films in the colony, and the difficulties that the British Film Distribution Company had in securing exhibition space (it eventually was able to lease the Queen’s Theatre in 1934). The use of block booking by the US distributors was normal practice (as in other places), making it difficult for any other distributor to gain adequate screen time. Government records do not reveal why the proposal was declined, although there may have been fire safety issues involved.

An earlier example of the government declining an industry licence, this time on the production side, was for the *China Sun Production Company*, established in 1923 by the Lai Brothers. In 1922, the Lai family financed the building of the World Theatre in the Central district on Hong Kong Island with the intention of screening both Chinese and Western films. The following year, the three Lai brothers established the *China Sun (Minxin) Film Company* to begin producing their own films. They bought a property in Tin Hau Temple Road and planned to build an open-air studio on an adjacent lot. One of the brothers had close ties to the Dr. Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang, and had reputedly smuggled guns for Sun’s failed Guangzhou coup in March 1911. The Hong Kong government refused to grant a license to the *China Sun Film Company* for the studio, likely
as a result of Lai Man-wai’s revolutionary connections, forcing them to move their production operations to Xiguan in Guangzhou. The company produced one feature film, Love is Dangerous, or Rouge (1925), before the closure of China Sun. Although the film itself was likely shot in Xiguan, it is generally recognised as Hong Kong’s first full-length feature film.

Later in the decade, production companies became more common and there are no records of other companies being refused licences.

Following developments in other parts of the British Empire, there were occasional calls in the local papers for a British film quota to be introduced. In April 1934, the British Film Distribution Company petitioned the Governor for the introduction of film quota legislation in Hong Kong to help it continue its operations. The petition was considered by the Executive Council who declined the request, suggesting it wasn’t the right time for such legislation, and that this should be reported to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. It doesn’t appear that this had been the first time that the company had approached the government for introduction of a quota. The file number attached to this request suggests that the file had originally been opened in 1930, and US Consulate reports from the period mention the public agitation for some form of quota to be introduced. A few months later, the Secretary of State sent a dispatch furthering the discussion. The dispatch appears to no longer exist, however, the minute from the Executive Council meeting hints at what the likely content was:

The Governor in Council considered the Secretary of State’s dispatch No. 305 of the 14th August, 1934, on the subject of a British film quota for Hong Kong. It was agreed that the reply should be that if the British Film Industry wishes to capture the market from the American Industry it might be worth its while to send out a representative of the Industry as a whole to study the situation on the spot and to endeavour to ascertain where British Films and British business methods fail as compared with the American.

The issue was raised again in the Executive Council in March 1936 when the Honourable Sir Shouson Chow presented a report on the issue. Although the contents of that report are unknown, the fact that it was presented by Sir Shouson, a prominent Chinese businessman and the resulting decision was to take no further action, suggests that the views of the cinema owners regarding British films was well-represented at the highest levels of the colonial government. As we shall see, senior members of the government already had established views on the applicability of a film quota to the Hong Kong
situation, and so the discussion of the matter in the Executive Council was more of a formality with a foregone conclusion. Sir Shouson was an investor in, and on the Board of Directors of the company owning and running the King’s Theatre, the leading first-run cinema in Hong Kong at the time, and the venue where some of the British films were exhibited.\(^{106}\) The reality was that the majority of the audiences were Chinese, and the Chinese generally didn’t understand or respond well to British dramas. It was also considered inimical to the operation of a free market system to be compelling cinema owners to include a certain kind of film in their programmes. Suggestion was made in one of the US consular reports that even the British were not enamoured by many of the British films.\(^{107}\) Consideration wasn’t given to whether the Cantonese language films produced in Hong Kong could be considered as ‘British films’ (as they were produced on British territory) and thus could be used to meet quota requirements. By 1934 Cantonese ‘talkies’ were being produced within the colony, and by 1936 a substantial number of films were being produced locally.\(^{108}\) There may have been less resistance to the introduction of a quota if this possibility had been discussed.

In early 1935, John Pool, a Vice Consul at the US Consulate in Hong Kong, was able to state in a report on the motion picture industry in Hong Kong that he had assurances from a senior government official (the Colonial Secretary) that a quota was not suitable for Hong Kong conditions and there was no likelihood of its introduction.\(^{109}\) It simply did not make sense on economic grounds. There had been a couple of attempts made to increase the screening of British films in the colony through the establishment of a cinema showing a programme of exclusively British films, but both were commercial failures. That is not to say that British films weren’t shown in the colony. There would be a few shown for a brief period on a regular basis, and occasionally they would even be popular, but these were very much in the minority. The usually negative audience response was not surprising. Approximately 85% of the audiences were Chinese (98% of the population was of Chinese ethnicity),\(^{110}\) and most of them did not speak English (the actual Chinese proportion probably is higher, but given the source of information, consider this a very rough estimate).\(^{111}\) As a result, their preference was for action or slap-stick comedy, or later for jazzy musicals, none of which required any understanding of the English language, but depended on a visual feast. And as talkies started to be produced in Cantonese (initially in Shanghai, but later in Hong Kong), it can be inferred that the portion
of the audiences attending the English language cinema, whether from Britain or Hollywood, likely declined. \textsuperscript{112}

It is difficult to ascertain the true numbers for this over time. Estimates given in US Consulate reports are that US films had 75\% of the market, however, these numbers appear to be little more than a guess or estimate and shouldn’t be relied upon. \textsuperscript{113} As an example, a report from the US Consulate in Hong Kong in 1934 quotes estimates from a distributor (Hong Kong Amusements) of approximately 360 features being shown in the colony during 1933. \textsuperscript{114} Less that two months later, a report by a different member of the consulate quotes from the Hong Kong Board of Censors data of 4,903 feature films totalling 24,500,000 feet being presented for censorship during 1933. \textsuperscript{115} This assertion is incorrect and probably a misunderstanding on the part of the writer. It is likely that 4,903 reels of film were submitted for censorship through the Hong Kong Preview Studio (as the censorship studio was labelled), but that is very different from the number of feature films. \textsuperscript{116} It also raises the question regarding the number of reels of topicals and shorts (trailers were identified separately). We can make a rough estimate based on what we know of the film screenings during the period. On the assumption that four reels of every thirteen were short subjects, \textsuperscript{117} and the average length of the features were nine reels, then approximately 377 feature films and 1,508 shorts passed through the Hong Kong Preview Studio in 1933. These number suggest that the Hong Kong Amusements estimate (an industry estimate) was probably reasonably accurate.

**Entertainment Tax**

In Hong Kong, an Entertainment Tax was introduced on cinema tickets over twenty cents from January 1, 1931, although certain performances, such as those for educational, charitable or not-for-profit purposes, were exempt. \textsuperscript{118} A 1934 report suggested that “Amusement Taxes” made up about 11\% of the total admission cost. \textsuperscript{119} The revenues gained from the tax were HK$334,444.25 in the first year and then decreasing as the Depression forced ticket prices lower, until hitting a low of HK$210,153 in 1935, before rapidly rebounding to reach HK$351,989 in 1939. \textsuperscript{120} The amounts were never significant in the overall level of government revenues (about 1\% of revenue), however, had a
symbolic function by demonstrating that the taxation burden was being spread across the economy within the Colony.\textsuperscript{121}

The Entertainment Tax stayed in place through the 1930s upto the Japanese occupation at the end of 1941. With the onset of war, the Hong Kong government moved to increase its revenues with increases in a range of taxes and fees. One minor change was made to the Entertainments Tax Ordinance reducing the minimum level at which admission tickets were taxed from twenty cents to four cents. This had the effect of bringing into the taxation net the lowest priced tickets that previously had been exempt from taxation. The net revenue gain from this move was minimal, but again served a symbolic function.

**Cantonese language production industry**

The introduction of talkies spurred the development of the Cantonese language production industry in Hong Kong with over 500 films produced prior to the Japanese invasion. We know that many of these films were also exported to Singapore (and some of them were banned for political reasons). If these had been recognized as British films, then it is likely that by the latter part of the 1930's, over 30% of feature films screened in Singapore were of British Empire origin. And 30% was the proposed quota level for British Empire films from 1933 onwards. The same is probably true in Hong Kong if the proportion of screen time is considered (Chinese language films attracted much larger audiences). There were clearly two markets: one for the English-language (or very occasionally films in other languages), and the market for Chinese-language films. Most of the official reports and statistics reflect the English-language films, however, with the Chinese making up the predominant portion of the population, it is likely that Chinese films had a greater share of screen-time and audience proportion than is indicated by censorship figures or in the official reports provided by the US Consulate.

Over the period studied here, the Hong Kong government took a relatively hands-off approach to the screen industry, as they did in most areas of the economy. Censorship was undertaken on a decentralised basis with teams of part-time censors. If they were like Eric Hamilton, they may well have been film-enthusiasts who enjoyed the perks of getting paid to watch new films. The Hong Kong government made no investment in any
equipment for censorship, leaving the distributors and exhibitors to make the necessary provisions. Although there were no records of specific instructions from the government, it is clear that Hong Kong tried to remain neutral during both the low-level civil war in China (many of the competing warlords maintained homes in Hong Kong) and later with Japan. As a result, films that were sensitive to any of the parties involved would be either cut or banned.

During the period there were intermittent calls for more support for British films through the provision of a quota. The Queen’s Theatre was leased to exclusively screen British films in 1934, but the venture quickly collapsed due to lack of audience interest. The issue was also discussed in the Executive Council, but with Sir Shouson Chow, the chair of the board of directors of the most prestigious theatre in Hong Kong, being a member of the council, the interests of cinema owners always had precedence.

Let us now turn to the second colonial level case, Singapore in the Straits Settlements. As it is smaller and located some distance from China, it did not experience the same level of turmoil that Hong Kong saw during the period.
Endnotes

1 E. W. Hamilton to Manager, Hong Kong Amusements, dated 9 Jan. 1928, enclosed in E.D.C. Wolfe, Captain Superintendent of Police to Roger Culver Tredwell, American Consul General, dated 17 February 1928. USNA), RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 398, 840.6. Eric Hamilton was a Hong Kong Government Officer Cadet (Hong Kong-based civil servant appointed by the Colonial Office in London) holding the post of Deputy Clerk of Councils at this stage. Hamilton also fulfilled the role as a film censor during most of the period covered by this dissertation, and frequently was the public voice of the Hong Kong film censorate. Hamilton’s career trajectory is laid out in Appendix 5.1: Career Path of Eric William Hamilton, Hong Kong Government Cadet Officer.

2 “No. 509, Regulations made by the Governor-in-Council under Section 4 of The Theatres and Public Performances Regulation Ordinance 1908, (Ordinance No. 18 of 1908), this 19th day of August, 1909,” Hong Kong Government Gazette, August 20, 1909, 570. Accessed from Hong Kong University Special Collections, Electronic Hong Kong Collection, http://sunzi1.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/index.jsp.

Note that this was a longer form of the name of the ordinance. Later references to it simply refer to it as the Theatres Regulation Ordinance.

3 In 1913 the position was retitled Secretary for Chinese Affairs.

4 Letter from Roger Culver Treadwell, American Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin S. Cunningham, American Consul General, Shanghai, April 24, 1926. USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 374, 840.6.

5 “No. 509, Regulations made by the Governor-in-Council under Section 4 of The Theatres and Public Performances Regulation Ordinance 1908, (Ordinance No. 18 of 1908), this 19th day of August, 1909,” Hong Kong Government Gazette, August 20, 1909, 570. Accessed from Hong Kong University Special Collections, Electronic Hong Kong Collection, http://sunzi1.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/index.jsp.

6 Theatres Regulation Ordinance, 1908 (No. 18) (Hong Kong)


8 Letter from Roger Culver Treadwell, American Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin S. Cunningham, American Consul General, Shanghai, April 24, 1926, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 374, 840.6. Treadwell commented that only one or two of the smaller theatres had a projection room of sheet steel.


10 Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 6, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6. Day provides some details on the King’s Theatre Building.
HKRS58-1-110-45 Crown Land to the West of Yaumati Police Station – Application of The Hong Kong Amusement Ltd. for Permission to Occupy for the Purpose of Erecting a Temporary Cinematograph Theatre. The Tai Yat & Kwong Ming Cinema Theatres, Hong Kong Public Records Office (HKPRO); HKRS58-1-127-39 Temporary Occupation of Area on Kweilin Street, Shamshuipo for a Cinematograph Theatre, HKPRO; HKRS58-1-155-6 Application for erecting a temporary cinematograph at the junction of Waterloo Road and Reclamation Street, HKPRO; HKRS58-1-155-10 Application to erect a temporary cinematograph theatre at the junction of Jordan Road and Canton Road, HKPRO; HKRS 58-1-103 (30) Application from Hong Kong Amusements Ltd. for permission to occupy and erect a temporary cinematograph theatre on Crown Land adjoining Hunghom Inland lots 216 & 217, HKPRO; HKRS 58-1-155-10 Application to erect a temporary cinematograph theatre at the junction of Jordan Road and Canton Road by Mr. Ha Shui Tong & Kwong Chun Sang, HKPRO.


ibid.

There is also record of the race course in Happy Valley receiving a permit in 1921 on a three-month trial period for twice weekly outdoor cinematograph shows. See HKRS 58/1/98(8) Hong Kong Amusements Ltd. proposal to use the Hong Kong Jockey Club’s Grand Stand at Happy Valley for open air cinematograph shows, HKPRO.


Celluloid and Cinematograph Film Ordinance, No. 23 of 1923 (Hong Kong). Accessed from Hong Kong University Special Collections, Electronic Hong Kong Collection, http://sunzi1.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/index.jsp.

ibid.

Cadet Officers were the career administrative officers (civil servants) hired by the Colonial Office in London, typically graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, who were sent to serve in a particular colony for their career. A few of them, such as Sir Clifford Clementi (Hong Kong and Straits Settlements), and Sir High Clifford (Straits Settlements) rose to become Colonial Governors. See Henry Lethbridge, “Hong Kong Cadets, 1862-1941,” in Hong Kong: Stability and Change: a collection of essays (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978), 31-51. John Butcher, “European Society in the Inter-War Years,” in The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), 126-166, discusses Government Cadet Officers in the British Malayan Civil Service and relative pay disadvantage they suffered (due to high living costs) compared to cadet officers in other colonies. Robert Huessler, British Rule in Malaya. The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867-1942 (Oxford: Clio Press, 1981), also provides some useful background on the Malayan Civil Service.
Lethbridge, “Hong Kong Cadets,” 37, provides some detail on the language training for Government Cadets. Canton was used for Cantonese language training for both British Malayan as well as Hong Kong cadets up to the beginning of the Second World War.


When the Chief Superintendent of Police, E.D.C. Wolfe was asked in 1928 by the US Consulate for details regarding film censorship in Hong Kong, the request was forwarded to Hamilton for response. Hamilton shortly after went back to Great Britain on his home-leave and was mandated by the Hong Kong Governor, Sir Cecil Clementi, to investigate film censorship further while he was there and provide a report. For the 1932 Shanghai Commission on Film Censorship, it was Hamilton again who provided evidence.

Hamilton is identified as the censor responsible for the Queen’s Theatre on Queens Road Central, in: Douglas Jenkins, Censorship of Talking Pictures in Hong Kong,” July 24, 1931, 2, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4961 Motion Pictures/2. Hong Kong Amusements managed the theatre until July 1934. As the Queen’s Theatre was the premier, first-run cinema in Hong Kong for a number of years until the opening of the King’s Theatre close by in 1931, this would have enabled Hamilton to become the most experienced censor in Hong Kong. The other two first-run cinemas prior to the opening of the King’s Theatre, were The World and The Central, both of whom according to the US consular reports, only showed first-run pictures a third of the time.

Letter from Roger C. Tredwell, American Consul-General, Hongkong to Edwin S. Cunningham, American Consul-General, Shanghai, dated April 24, 1926, 3, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 374, 840.6, states that “Most of the theatres give three or four performances daily including Sundays. Performances are of two hours duration beginning at 2:30, 5:15, 7:15 and 9:15 P.M.”

Henry B. Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 10, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Series, 1930-39, Hong Kong, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/5, has a slightly different list of times (2:30, 5:15, 7:20 and 9:30 pm) with the Lee Theatre occasionally mounting a 12:30 pm performance as well.

Initially, all of the cinemas that catered to the Western audience (Coronet, Victoria and Hong Kong) were likely to have been first-run, as they dealt directly with distributors in other countries. This role appears to have shifted to the World (initially called New World) and Star Theatres circa 1922, although only a portion of the films shown in these cinemas were first-run. With the opening of the Queen’s Theatre in 1926, this became a ‘first-run only’ cinema and continued in this role until well into the 1930s. The King’s Theatre close by provided strong competition when it opened in 1931.

A detailed study of cinema advertisements in Chinese papers during the period would shed light on this, but was beyond the scope of this study.


Although Hamilton doesn’t specify this, it is possible that the women were the three appointed by the Helena May Institute mentioned later in this section. In 1934, a Chinese woman was added to the censorsate (Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 34, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6).


Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 5-8, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.
31 ibid., 10.

32 The average length of features during the 1930s is drawn from Patricia King Hanson (ed.), *The American Film Institute Catalogue of Motion Pictures Producer in the United States: Feature Films, 1931-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1993). Douglas Jenkins notes that Chinese features were typically ten reels in length (Douglas Jenkins, Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin Cunningham, Consul General, Shanghai, June 21, 1933, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6), a length supported by Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 33-34, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6).

33 A reel of film was approximately 825 feet in length and would last about nine minutes. These lengths were arrived at by analyzing a sample of feature films from Patricia King Hanson (ed.), *The American Film Institute Catalogue of Motion Pictures Producer in the United States: Feature Films, 1931-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1993).

34 There is no specific date as to when this change happened. J.E. Jacobs, (“Importation, Use and Distribution of Motion Picture Films in China,” June 6, 1930, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2307, 840.6) states that there were three changes per week in Hong Kong (34) while Shanghai at the time had two changes per week (Enclosure No. 2). J.C. Huston’s report the following year states that there were two programme changes per week (“Motion Pictures in China,” July 10, 1931, 62, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2153, 840.6), although Henry Day later suggests that some houses, including the first-run cinemas had twice-a-week changes while the smaller, second-run cinemas continued changing programmes three-times a week (Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 10, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6).

35 Henry Lethbridge, “The Emergence of Corruption as a Social Problem in Hong Kong,” in *Hong Kong, Stability and Change* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978), 214-237, suggests that although corruption was rife in the lower to middle levels of the government, high level officials were unlikely to have participated directly, even though they would have been aware of it’s existence. Corruption was not, however viewed as a social problem, or even necessarily viewed in the negative way it is now. G.B. Endacott, *Hong Kong Eclipse*, Alan Birch, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978) touches on corruption in the period immediately before the Japanese invasion.


37 ibid.

38 Although not directly related to censorship, it appears that Eric Hamilton was in a position to intercede on behalf of Hong Kong Amusements in other matters. In 1930 there were discussion over the renewal of the lease by Hong Kong Amusements of the New World Theatre. In the file, a comment is made by F. Eaves, the Land Officer, that “these people seem to be making money “hand over fist” should not the rent be increased to $3,000?” (the rent at that stage was $2,500). Eric Hamilton, then Deputy Clerk of Councils responded (dated 31.10.30):

> These people are not making money over fist. They did once. But the Central Theatre has hit them badly and the new one on the Yi Sang Fat site will make things worse. I am all for the golden eggs but if you squeeze the goose too hard she is apt to stop laying.

Hamilton’s support of the company could have been based on his relationship with them as a censor for the Queen’s Theatre, a cinema operated by Hong Kong Amusements. Although it is not clear this is the case, there was certainly potential for a conflict of interest in this. See HKPRO HKRS58-1-96-25 The World Theatre – I.L. 2323 – Lease of Crown Land on Des Voeux Road at rear of Harbour Office Building.
39 Al Jolson’s *The Singing Fool* (1928) opened at the Queen’s Theatre (Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 3, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6).

40 In Japan and Korea during the silent period, interpreters or narrators were frequently used to provide a narration to the audience. Intertitles on the films would likely have been in English, and so many in the audience would not have understood them. Even if they were translated, there would still have been a relatively high level of illiteracy. Thus, provision of a narrator enhanced the audience experience. In a 1931 report, mention is made of interpreters in the Canton cinemas as “many patrons of theatres of this kind are quite illiterate.” It is highly likely that if this practice existed in Canton, it would have also existed in at least some of the Chinese cinemas in Hong Kong. See: J.C. Huston, “Motion Pictures in China,” July 31, 1931, 49. USNA, RG 84 Shanghai Consulate Records, Vol. 2153, 840.6.

41 Douglas Jenkins, Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin Cunningham, Consul General, Shanghai, June 21, 1932, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.


43 D. Jenkins, “Censorship of Talking Picture Films in Hong Kong,” July 24, 1931, 2, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6526, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/2. The Helena May Institute was a woman’s civic organization that operated a residence for young single women as well as sponsoring lectures, concerts and exhibitions of an educational nature.

44 Letter from Hong Kong Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 March, 1928, TNA: PRO, CO 323/990/1 Colonial Office enquiry – films.


49 ibid.
The Helena May Institute was founded in 1916 by Lady May, the wife of the then Governor of Hong Kong, to support women (primarily Westerners at that time) unaccompanied, and living and working away from home, and to contribute to the local community. See: http://www.helenamay.com. The women selected to serve as censors were likely to have been drawn from the British and American communities.


The Alhambra opened in January 1934 (Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 10, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.) There were twenty-seven cinemas in Hong Kong in 1933 (Richard P. Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” April 2, 1934, 6, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 2492, 840.6). By 1940 there were thirty-one cinemas in operation in the colony (John H. Bruins, “Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry for 1940,” October 15, 1940, 4, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 82, 840.6). Alternative numbers of cinemas are suggested in Li Suyuan & Hu Jubin, Chinese Silent Film History (trans. Wang Rui, Huang Wei, Hu Júnin, Wang Jingjìng, Zheng Zhōng, Shān Wānlì and Lì Xùn, Běijīng: Chíná Fílm Péishí, 1997), 225, which states that there were fifteen cinemas in Hong Kong in 1927 and thirty cinemas by 1930. Although these numbers are for earlier years, they suggest that possibly the US consular officers overlooked some purely Chinese cinemas.

Howard Donovan, "The Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry during 1938," October 6, 1938, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 49, 840.6; John Bruins, "Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry for 1939," October 13, 1939, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 66, 840.6; John Bruins, "Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry for 1940," October 15, 1939, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 82, 840.6.


Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 10, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.

ibid., 6.


61 Krisel & Krisel to American Consul-General, Hong Kong, November 22nd, 1927, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 388, 840.6. Attached is a copy of a letter: E.W. Hamilton to H.W. Ray, Managing Director, Hongkong Amusements, dated November 8th, 1927.


64 “Censorship of Talking Picture Films in Hong Kong,” July 24, 1931, 2-3, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/2. In reality, there appeared to be very few appeals regarding censorship.

65 One factor that raises some question regarding this is that Hamilton does not appear to have been the censor for any of the Hong Kong Amusements theatres, but rather acted as censor for the King’s Theatre, owned and run by a number of Chinese businessmen, with Sir Shouson Chow the Chairman of the Board of Directors.


There were on occasion comments about there being ‘very strict censorship’ in the territory, but these were probably from statements by the police who wanted to give the impression of strict censorship. For instance, see Letter from Roger Culver Tredwell, US Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin S. Cunningham, American Consul General, Shanghai, dated April 24, 1926, 4, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 374, 840.6. Another counter-view was offered in Douglas Jenkins (“Censorship of Talking Picture Films in Hong Kong,” July 24, 1931, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/2) where he suggests that Eric Hamilton “is said to be bitterly anti-American in all of his sentiments and this office is informed that he never misses an opportunity of slashing American films exhibited to him for censorship...” (3). This did not seem to be the common view held of Hamilton.

67 Letter from Roger Culver Treadwell, US Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin S. Cunningham, American Consul General, Shanghai, dated December 3, 1927, 2, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 1708, 840.6.
The film was likely also known as *The Vanishing American* (1925), directed by George Seitz and distributed by the Famous-Lasky Corp. Correspondence and notes around this incident are also to be found in USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 388, 840.6. Note that Hamilton appears to have got the production companies wrong as he lists *Night of Love* as United Artists (instead of Samuel Goldwyn) while *The Vanishing Race* as MGM (instead of Famous Players-Lasky / Paramount). See Kenneth Munden (ed.), *The American Film Institute Catalogue of Motion Pictures Producer in the United States: Feature Films, 1921-1930* (New York, London: R.R. Bowker, 1971; reprint, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996).

Letter from Roger Culver Treadwell, US Consul General, Hong Kong to Edwin S. Cunningham, American Consul General, Shanghai, dated December 3, 1927, 2, USNA, RG 84 Shanghai, Vol. 1708, 840.6.


*Hong Kong Daily Press* (June 15, 1938), quoted in Addison Southard, “‘March of Time’ Film Banned by Governor of Hong Kong – Nazi Influence with Hong Kong Government?, June 15, 1938, 3, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/13.

‘Exhibition of film “Inside Nazi Germany” at Hong Kong,’ TNA: PRO, FO 371/21701 Political, 58-60; USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/13-16.


The matter was raised in the British House of Commons where Mrs Adamson (MP) asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. MacDonal, regarding this. No further information is provided in the remaining British Foreign Office records in the UK Public Records Office beyond a clipping from *Hansard* (CO 371/21701). The film itself had been permitted in England, but a cinema chain in the US refused to screen it due to its perceived pro-Nazi bias. More detail is provided in US Consulate records from Hong Kong where twenty pages of reports and comments are devoted to the incident (USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/13-16). The film itself has been preserved by the US Library of Congress as been “culturally significant”. The issue in Hong Kong appears to have been the tone of the voice-over, stridently didactic. The report dated June 15th from Addison Southard, the American Consul General, suggested that both the Governor, Sir G.A.S. Northcote, and his aide-de-camp, Captain S.H. Batty-Smith, tended to have a sympathetic attitude towards Germany, but the discontent regarding this wasn’t openly spoken about in Hong Kong due to the level of autocratic powers that the Governor possessed. Southard cited a number of examples where the Governor or his aide-de-camp appeared to give greater deference to the German Consul or interests over those from other countries. See Addison Southard, “‘March of Time’ Film Banned by Governor of Hong Kong – Nazi Influence with Hong Kong Government?, June 15th, 1938, 3-6, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/13.

Addison Southard, “‘March of Time’ Film Banned by Government of Hong Kong,” June 18, 1938, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/15. There are newspaper clippings from the *Hong Kong Press* dated June 17, 1938 regarding the official statement in a report dated June 18, from Southard to the US Secretary of State. One of the clippings appears to be an editorial questioning why the censor took the action he did and banned it when citizens in Britain were free to view the film.

Although there were always comments in the US consular reports about the “strictness” of Hong Kong censors, this would be followed with remarks about the “fairness” of the censorship process. The relatively low level of films banned in the censorship process supports the view that the level of censorship was light.

Addison Southard, “Criticism of Too Strict Film Censorship in Hong Kong,” September 10, 1938, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/16.

Memorandum for Mr. Southard, dated June 29, 1940, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 82, 840.6.

Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 133. They note that actual scenes of fighting against the Japanese were banned by the Hong Kong government under Japanese pressure.


Steven J. Ross, “Confessions of a Nazi Spy: Warner Bros., Anti-Fascism and the Politicization of Hollywood,” in *Warner’s War: Politics, Pop Culture & Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood*, (Los Angeles, CA: The Norman Lear Center, USC Annenberg, 2004), 57, downloaded from http://www.learcenter.org/pdf/WW/Ross.pdf. Although the film received widespread acclaim around the world, it also had a much cooler official response as exemplified by the US Secretary of State denouncing the film as poisoning US-German relations (55). According to Ross, the film was banned in at least twenty-four countries, including (no surprise) Germany, Italy, Japan, Holland, Norway and Sweden (57).

USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 66, 840.6, contains a letter from Warner Bros dated July 24th 1939 informing the consulate of the delays with the film. An accompanying file memorandum dated August 10th 1939 by A.E.S. (Southard) notes that the film had been released for exhibition and no intervention was necessary from the American Consulate. There is also a handwritten note in TNA: PRO, FO 371/21701 Political – USA, Showing of film “Confessions of a Nazi Spy,” 235, noting that the Hong Kong government had been enquiring about the film.

John H. Bruins, “Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry for 1939,” Oct. 13, 1939, 5, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 66, 840.6


John H. Bruins, “Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry for 1939,” October 13, 1939, 6, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Box 66, 840.6.
Sir Shouson Chow was a member of both the Executive Council (1926-1936) and the Legislative Council (1921-1936). See Victor Zheng and Charles W. Chow, *Sir Shouson Chow: Grand Old Man of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies Occasional Papers and Monographs No. 163, 2010). Henry Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 6, USNA, RG 84, Vol. 470, 840.6, notes that Sir Shouson Chow was a director of China Entertainment and Land Investment Company, which had built and owned the King’s Theatre in the central business district of Victoria.


According to Cynthia Liu (compiler), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol. 1 (1913-1941)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, Urban Council, 1997), six Cantonese talkies were produced in Hong Kong in 1934 and forty-nine in 1936.


These numbers are drawn from the *Hong Kong Blue Books*. Also noted in many of the US consular reports. Although there were significant discrepancies between official estimates and the census figures, the figure of 98% of the population of Chinese ethnicity was supported by both sets of figures during the period.

The figure of 85% is given in John C. Pool, “The Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” January 24, 1935, 3-4, USNA, RG Hong Kong, Vol. 495, 840.6.

There are no specific audience numbers to support this contention, however, by looking at the increasing number of cinemas in the US consular reports listed as “Chinese only” audiences, the increasing volume of films produced in Shanghai, the rise of a local Hong Kong film industry from 1933, and the proportion of Chinese films passing through the censor by late in the decade (see figure 5.2 on p. 123 of “Films Censored in the Hong Kong Preview Studio”), then this is a reasonable assumption.

It is possible that 75% of the films in Hong Kong may have been of US origin, but that doesn’t mean that they also had 75% of the market. Little is known regarding the level of audiences for the Chinese films and whether they followed the exhibition patterns of the European films, or instead enjoyed longer runs over more cinemas. There would likely also been a difference between the proportion of box office revenue and the audience sizes as Chinese films tended to be concentrated in the lower cost cinemas. The US consuls were more familiar with the cinemas catering to the European audiences and so more likely to overlook or not include information specific to Chinese audience, particularly if they had nothing to do with US films.

Henry B. Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 14 USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.

L.H. Gourley, “Hong Kong Film Censorship in 1933,” July 25, 1934, 1, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6. There are other problems with this report suggesting the writer did not understand what he was writing about, or had thought through his analysis. Gourley suggests on the first page of the report that August through November are the heaviest period for censorship, and then provides monthly censorship figures that if anything, suggest those months are lighter (as well as providing the wrong year for the statistics).

4,903 reels would equate to a little over four million feet of film.

Programmes were approximately two-hours long. Each reel lasted approximately nine minutes, thus thirteen reels were probably the maximum that could be shown in a two-hour programme. If the average feature film was nine reels, three to four reels would have been shorts.

Henry B. Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934, 10, USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong, Vol. 470, 840.6.

Figures drawn from the Hong Kong Blue Book of Statistics for the respective years.

Chapter 6: Singapore

Like Hong Kong, the main focus of the government towards the screen industry during the period was safety, particularly moral safety through censorship. Possible quota legislation to support the British film industry was proposed and introduced into the Legislature shortly after similar legislation was introduced in Great Britain, but was postponed and then withdrawn before the third reading. The main policy focus, though, was on censorship and how the Official Censor of Cinematograph Films interpreted his role and what was unsuitable for local audiences. Singapore gained the reputation for having one of the most stringent censorship regimes in the world, leading to complaints in the British House of Commons as well as to the MPPDA in the US. Similar to the chapter on Hong Kong, the narrative follows a thematic basis using the categories outlined in the Policy Imperatives Model.

Safety

The Straits Settlements, like Hong Kong, first introduced legislation to regulate cinematograph screenings in 1908. Similar to the British legislation, the monitoring of the film content was implicit in the licensing, and was only made explicit with a 1912 amendment to the Straits Settlements legislation.

Fire safety was regulated in the Straits Settlements at the municipal rather than colonial government level. As a result it is strictly speaking, outside the realm of this study. It is noted that the 1915 amendments to The Municipal Ordinance specifically regulating the construction of theatres, makes no mention of facilities for the projection of cinematograph films. US Consular records make no comment about the fire safety standards, nor were copies of municipal records sought in the research process. What was available were records of lawyers and architects applying for licences and seeking permission to build cinemas on government land, along with some building plans. Many of the internal notes in the files were focused on issues of traffic and whether there was sufficient parking space available (something that wasn’t raised as a concern in the Hong Kong files). There is reference to the requirement to ensure that all staircases from upper levels were constructed of concrete, and that any balconies or upper level galleries had
Figure 6.1: Floor plan of Wembly Cinema, circa 1927

Source: NAS microfilm CBS 106.
separate exits to the street outside. Portions of the building plans for the Wembly Cinema are shown in figure 6.1 to illustrate the safety requirements around the projection boxes where the greatest potential for fire existed.

The key features to note in the figure are that the rewinding room and projection room are kept separate with fireproof doors between them, and fire exits leading directly to the exterior of the building from both rooms. The rooms would also have had to have been clad in fireproof material such as asbestos boards or tin. The placement of the circular, iron fire escape from the projection room is hand-drawn in on the these plans, suggesting this was a later addition required to bring the cinema up to fire standards, and to give projectionists a way to get out in event of a fire.

Regulations regarding the storage of cinematograph films were introduced by the Singapore Municipal Commissioners in 1923 closely following the lines of the English Act of Parliament.\(^4\) Like other fire safety regulations in the colony, these bylaws were established at the municipal rather than colonial government level, so it is beyond the scope of this study (little documentation beyond the official announcement exists in any event).

**Film censorship**

The Straits Settlements were the earliest of the three locations to explicitly introduce formal cinematograph (film) censorship, through a 1912 amendment to the 1908 Theatres Ordinance authorizing police to determine what scenes were suitable for public viewing, and providing them with power to seize unauthorized films.\(^5\) Then, in 1917 an Ordinance was introduced to further amend the 1908 Theatres Ordinance and establish the post of Official Censor of Cinematographs, along with a Cinematograph Films Appeal Committee.\(^6\) The censorship office was set up as a branch of the Police Department for administrative purposes, and proved to consistently be profitable with a surplus contributing to government revenues.\(^7\)

The first record of a dedicated film censor appears in the *Straits Settlements Government Gazette* of October 5, 1917, where the announcement of the appointment of a Mr Neville Piggott as the Official Censor of Cinematographs.\(^8\) Prior to this, the Chief of Police had approved films based on a written description of the film content. The
appointment was temporary, very temporary as it turned out as there was another notice in
the Government Gazette of October 19th announcing the resignation of Mr Piggott due to
ill-health. The reason for his very short period of service is not recorded. A speculative
guess would be that he was an ex-serviceman and been suffering from what we now call
post-traumatic syndrome and simply couldn’t cope with consistent flickering of the filmic
image.

Censors that followed were also temporary. A Mr T.R. Davidson was announced as
taking up the position in temporarily in the Government Gazette of 2nd November 1917,
followed by a Mr J. Duncan Roberts on 8th February 1918. It isn’t until the 1919
appointment of Captain Thomas Macdonald Hussey as the Official Censor of
Cinematographs, that there was a permanent, long-term appointee in the position. An
Assistant Censor was appointed the same year to assist with the workload, although this
position appears to have been temporary and part-time. Captain Hussey remained as
Official Censor of Cinematographs until at least 1938 (records don’t go beyond that date),
responsible for censoring all of the films entering the Straits Settlements, and later, the
Federated Malay States. He had the reputation for being very tough in his role, rejecting a
higher proportion of films presented than was the case in many other countries. This
resulted in questions in the English House of Commons on a number of occasions, as
British films appeared more likely to be banned than those from the United States. At one
stage (in the first 5 months of 1928), 26% of British films were rejected outright, whereas
only half that proportion of Hollywood films was banned (highlighted in figure 6.2 below
reproduced from the Colonial Office files). Although this was probably an aberration,
there was considerable concern about what appeared to be discriminatory practices on the
part of the censor against British films.
According to US consulate sources in 1925, the sixteen types of scenes that would be removed by the censor was similar to that found in many other countries, and follow the broader contours of the BBFC guidelines. See Appendix 5.4.¹⁴

The early part of the 1920s saw Hussey withdrawing the censor’s permission for films previously passed on a number of occasions. Notices would appear regularly in the Straits Settlements Government Gazette notifying the public that “the Official Film Censor’s chop on the following films entitled . . . ceases to be valid and operative.”¹⁵ The reasons for these revocations are unknown. It is possible that they were films censored by the Assistant Censor and not seen by Hussey prior to release, however, the use of an Assistant Censor seemed to mainly occur while Hussey was on leave, and his first eight-month furlough did not take place until early 1924 (after this period).¹⁶

In a 1930 letter to the Colonial Office, the British International Pictures Company claimed that 50% of their films were being rejected, but subsequent correspondence suggests that in some cases the films would have been allowed if the company had been willing to make a number of requested cuts to the movies.¹⁷ Although there were certainly complaints from the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) regarding the nature and level of censorship in Singapore,¹⁸ they appeared to have understood the specific requirements and sensitivities of their international markets better than the British producers and distributors.
By the mid-1930s, however, there were many fewer complaints regarding the Singapore censorship regime. It isn’t clear whether this was due to a shift in standards on the part of the censor or whether the changes were taking place at both the point of production and in the selection of films to be imported into Singapore and British Malaya in general.

In 1935, the Straits Settlements Government began publishing on a quarterly basis a list of films that had been banned in the colony, along with the reasons for their banning. A report from a US Counsel in Singapore to the State Department implies that this was as the result of an approach by the consulate requesting more transparency in the editing decisions, similar to what was happening in India. The response back from the Straits Settlements Colonial Secretary was positive, at least in part, as they agreed to publish lists of films that were banned, along with the reasons, although not going to the extent asked for of publishing details of all excisions. These lists were published on a quarterly basis in the Straits Settlements Government Gazette from the beginning of 1935 up to the end of the 3rd quarter of 1940.

Over the nearly six years that these lists were published, it is possible to see some quite distinct patterns and changes in censorship. During 1935, the majority of the films banned were for reasons of violence or the portrayal of crime. Most of these were also from the USA. But as we move to 1940, the numbers of films from the US being banned decrease, while banned films from other locations (particularly China) increase. This can be seen with the films banned in 1938 with thirty of the sixty-four films banned from the USA, and twenty-two of these due to violence. Increasingly films were banned due to political reasons, propaganda or dealing with the war (mainly from films from China).

An issue that remains unanswered is how the Singapore censor handled the Chinese-language movies. There is no indication that he either spoke Cantonese or Mandarin, or that he had hired any staff that could translate for him. It is clear, though, that Chinese films were included among those that were banned, as can be seen in figures 6.2 and 6.3.
Figure 6.3: Analysis of Films Banned in the Straits Settlements, 1935-1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
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<tr>
<td>Violence &amp; Crime</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- USA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Other countries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political, Propaganda &amp; War</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>- China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hong Kong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Japan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>- USA</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other countries</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror &amp; gruesome images</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>- USA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Other countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject unsuitable for local audiences</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- USA</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total films banned by country</td>
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<tr>
<td>(based on listings in SSGG)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>SS Departmental Annual Reports total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Straits Settlements Government Gazettes, NAS microfilms.

Social Control and Development

Beyond safety issues, film could be used for both social control and development issues. The principal social control means was censorship, through which certain images would be excluded from local audiences. In an interview with the Manchester Guardian in 1925, Captain Hussey mentioned that among the scenes that would be cut would be anything “showing methods used by criminals.” A greater concern were potential ‘communist-led’ uprisings or insurgencies, and so particular efforts were made to ban communist propaganda in Singapore as well as Hong Kong.

Censorship regulations were an important component of the social control mechanisms in Singapore, particularly with the concern of communist propaganda being
disseminated within the colony. Revision of the Theatres Ordinance (No. 106) in 1923 granted the Film Censor and/or his assistant the power to enter any premises where they suspected films that hadn’t been approved were been exhibited. This was along with the widening of his powers to include the censorship of all film taken in the colony, both for private and for commercial reasons. By the end of the year a new ordinance specifically dealing with cinematograph films had been introduced with similar provisions to the Theatres Ordinance, although making the powers of the censor more explicit:

The Official Censor or any person authorised in writing by him or a Police Officer not below the rank of Inspector on being satisfied upon written information and after any further inquiry which he thinks necessary that there is good reason to believe that a cinematograph film not authorised for exhibition has been or is being exhibited in any place may without warrant enter and search such place and seize any film or part of a film reasonably supposed to be exhibited without such authorisation as aforesaid, and may take into custody any person reasonably supposed to be concerned in such exhibition.

None of the records existing suggest that Hussey used these rather draconian powers to raid any premises, however, the fact that they even existed speaks to the importance the Colonial Government put on suppressing politically sensitive material. An example of this concern was raised in The Times in London in 1926.

**Sir Hesketh Bell upsets the King**

An articled titled “The Cinemas in the East: Factor in the Spread of Communism” appeared in The Times of 18th September, 1926, and created some minor controversy. The event has been laid out in some detail by Rex Stevenson,23 so is only briefly summarised here. Sir Hesketh Bell,24 a retired Governor (Uganda, Northern Nigeria, Leeward Islands and Mauritius) travelled through British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies in 1926 and was alarmed by what he saw and was told while he was in Asia.25 On his return to London, he penned the article published in The Times regarding his concern that cinema was undermining the prestige of the white race (and thus the colonial rulers) in the Far East, and boosting the crime rate in the region.26 His Majesty King George V read the article and “was not amused.”27 The King sent a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, L.C.M.S. Amery, through his Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, asking if
anything could be done “to put a stop to these horrible exhibitions.” Amery responded to Stamfordham that he “was not surprised that the King felt so strongly about it,” but thought the author had exaggerated the situation, that he had previously written to the Governor of the Straits Settlements regarding the situation and received assurances that censorship was very strict. Amery didn’t immediately follow up with the Governor in the Straits Settlements about this, but waited until after the Imperial Conference held in November 1926, in the event “any recommendations on this aspect of the subject should emerge from the Imperial Conference.”

Sir Guillemard, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, did not respond immediately. Although Bell had written more generally about British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, he had included the Straits Settlements as well. Legislation and film censorship were in place for the Straits Settlements, but the other Malay States did not have same level formal controls legislated, although almost all of the films would have been censored in Singapore first anyway (as the main port of entry). The Governor of the Straits Settlements also held the title of High Commissioner to the Federated Malay States. Legislation was subsequently passed bringing the Federated Malay States into line with the Straits Settlements. Five months later, Guillemard responded to Amery noting that “the control of the exhibition of films in the Federated Malay States has been improved,” although “the greatest hope of improvement lies... in the gradual substitution of British for foreign films.”

Part of the concern that Bell referred to was the spread of communist propaganda through film, however, there was little evidence in the archives of films of this nature being exhibited during the 1920s. As mentioned earlier, during the 1930s, there was increasing amounts of political propaganda included in the films imported into British Malaya, particularly from China and Hong Kong (see figure 6.3). The censorship in Singapore followed along similar lines to that in Hong Kong. With Britain maintaining its neutrality in the Sino-Japanese conflict (Japan technically wasn’t ‘at war’ with China), it had no wish to antagonise the Japanese (while busy fortifying Singapore against an anticipated Japanese attack from the sea).
Film in education

Film could also be used for educational purposes. There was considerable debate in the centres of colonial power (particularly London) during the period about the use of film as an educational tool in developing and modernizing the ‘native’ populations in colonial dependencies (see Chapter 3). Although most of the focus was on Africa, efforts in British Malaya were also covered in some of the discussions.35 The Straits Settlements government did not follow the lead of other colonies and produce educational films for the local market, although in 1927 the suggestion was raised in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council that the government could provide a grant to encourage the production of serial films in the colony. Parallel to this was the discourse and studies regarding the use of film in schools and impact of film on children.36

The use of film in schools for educational purposes appeared in Singapore earlier than Hong Kong, but due to problems in Singapore accessing suitable educational films, the limited knowledge to maintain and run the projectors in the schools, and the lack of adequate blackout provisions, the projectors were underutilised.37 As of 1932, three schools had their own 35mm projectors (Raffles Institution, Outram Road School and St. Joseph’s Institution), but the exhibition of films could only take place in the evening as none of the schools had provision for the darkening of any of its rooms for daylight showings. By 1932 all of the schools had difficulty in obtaining suitable silent 35mm film (they had been able to obtain films more easily prior to 1932) and had experienced some technical difficulties in operating the projectors.38

Economic imperative

The quota issue received a lot more serious consideration by the Straits Settlements government. The background to this dates to the 1926 Imperial Conference in London where cinema was one of the items on the agenda.39 The issue raised by the British government at the conference was the dominance of Hollywood cinema throughout the Empire and resulting suppression of the British production industry. The British government presented a proposal to introduce a quota system into the United Kingdom that would require, over a period of years, an increasing proportion of British films to be exhibited in the cinemas, along with plans to prevent blind and block booking of movies, and to use
differential duties, to encourage British films. The hope was that, as a result of these measures, guaranteed space would be carved out for British films to be exhibited and provide an economic base for the production industry to be able to grow and become economically sustainable. The British Empire would then provide a much-enlarged potential audience, rivalling that of the US.

Following the Imperial Conference, the issue was presented at the Colonial Office Conference in 1927. Hayes Marriott, the Colonial Secretary for the Straits Settlement, was very much an active participant at the conference, and on his return to Singapore began the process of introducing the necessary legislation. Two bills were introduced into the Legislature in the latter part of 1927. The first was to amend the Theatres Ordinance and add in a requirement that cinemas project a certain proportion of British films as part of their overall programme, thus an exhibition quota. The level was to begin at 7½ percent and step up over time until it eventually reached 30% in 1933. After the first year, the proportion rose faster than proposed in the UK Bill and finished at a higher level than was provided for in the English legislation. The other bill was an amendment of the Cinematograph Films Ordinance, mainly updating the administrative machinery for the censorship of films, but including a provision for the Official Censor to record whether a film was deemed to be a British or foreign film (for quota purposes), thus providing a record-keeping function for the implementation of the quota.

The bill amending the Theatres Ordinance received two readings with relatively little comment in the Singapore Legislative Council, although on its second reading one member, the Honourable G.C. Clarke, questioned whether a quota would in fact be feasible, citing the example of New Zealand where a quota had been proposed, and then formal requirements withdrawn. At the time of the 2nd reading (November 1927), the Acting Attorney-General moved to postpone the Committee level discussion of the bill until the Imperial Act had being enacted in London. The issue of increasing the number of British films being exhibited in Singapore had been very much in the press from earlier in the 1920s. In a report to the Secretary of State from George Dickens in the US consulate in Singapore in 1925, he wrote of the numerous comments in the local papers of the harm that American films were doing to both the native population and the British inhabitants. He suggested that the source of this agitation were in fact British film exchanges, which
were putting down their Hollywood competitors in the efforts to boost their own products.\textsuperscript{45} There does not appear to be evidence to verify that this was indeed the source of the dissent, although in both Singapore and Hong Kong it did seem to be a rather small, but vocal, minority agitating against American films and calling for protection for British films.

Before the bill amending the Theatres Ordinance reached the legislature for the third and final reading, it was withdrawn from the Orders of the Day by the Attorney-General (on 26\textsuperscript{th} March, 1928) for further consideration. He later claimed that the Straits Settlements bill had turned out to be substantially different from the corresponding Imperial Act.\textsuperscript{46} Although there were a substantial number of minor amendments made between the initial bill and the version receiving royal assent, there appear to have been no substantive changes to the bill.\textsuperscript{47} The claim by the Attorney-General that the legislation was substantially different from the Straits Settlements bill masked the fact that although the Straits Settlements government had received the text of the original Imperial bill at the Colonial Conference, they had focused on a somewhat simpler form of the quota requirements without including any restriction on the blind or block booking of motion pictures. This was a significant issue as the block booking of motion pictures restricted cinema owners from having sufficient space in their schedule to also exhibit British films, unless they were included in the contract. At this stage, Hollywood companies were not producing films in the United Kingdom (which they did do later to meet quota requirements), nor were they distributing British films. Although the draft of the English Cinematograph Films bill subsequently was subject to over 250 amendments in the Committee stage,\textsuperscript{48} none of these changed the original intent of the bill. What likely happened was that there was considerable opposition to the introduction of the quota from the exhibitors in Singapore, resulting in a rethink of the situation by the Colonial Government. After a discussion of the redrafted Cinema Films (Quota) Bill in the 23\textsuperscript{rd} June, 1928 Executive Council meeting with the Inspector-General of Police and Acting Official Censor for Cinematographs, Mr. P.F. Howitt, present, the decision was made to postpone any cinematograph film quota indefinitely.\textsuperscript{49} The decision that was minuted was that “it would be premature at present to undertake legislation designed to compel exhibitors of cinematographs to exhibit a fixed portion of British films.”\textsuperscript{50} In a confidential telegram to
the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of the Straits Settlements listed four reasons why the bill was postponed:

Question of a new Bill on lines of Imperial Act was discussed fully in Executive Council and decided that introduction was premature. It was considered (a) supply of British films was not at present adequate (b) American films had no monopoly (c) it was desirable to see effect of Imperial Bill on British Films before proceeding further (d) it would be unwise to force British films on those Chinese theatres which show Chinese films only Chinese films at present are 25 per cent of whole. . . . Probably better not to publish reason (d).51

Very little information was given publicly as to why the bill was withdrawn and one can surmise that cinema owners opposed the bill and had raised their concerns with members of the government and the legislative council. The growth in the number of Chinese films being exhibited was no doubt an important factor in this. There was also the very pertinent question of whether the British film industry would be able to produce sufficient films to meet the quota requirement. In 1926, there had been only twenty-six feature films produced in Great Britain, and this was a decrease on the thirty-four films in 1925.52 And then there was the issue of the business impact on cinema owners. Audiences, particularly Chinese audiences, simply did not find British films as engaging as the Hollywood fare.53 But it is in the last point that the telegram from the Governor provides what was probably the principal reason for the bill being dropped; that there were a number of cinemas catering to the large population of Chinese in Singapore, most of whom didn’t understand any English.54 To require them to screen films from Britain in addition to the Hollywood action or Chinese films, would have been a significant imposition that would have had an impact on their business.

Although when the bill was withdrawn in the Legislative Council, there was a statement that if there was need for legislation in the future, then a completely new bill should be introduced,55 the issue never came up again in the legislature. If we look at the proportions of countries of origin of films in the Singapore market, we see that although Hollywood films were dominant during the period, Chinese and British films were increasingly important. Figures from the censor show that US-originated films made up 76% of the total films passing through the censor in 1926 (figures for earlier years are not available), and this proportion dropped in following years with a level of under 50%
recorded for 1936 (see figure 6.2). These numbers, of course, reflect what passed through the hands of the censor (which for all practical purposes can be considered all of the films in the colony), and not the numbers actually exhibited, nor the proportion of actual box office, nor more importantly, the proportion of admissions, figures that are unavailable to us.

There is reference in the U.S. Consulate papers to a plan to support the production of serial films in Singapore with direct grants or subsidies. Apparently this was debated in the Legislative Council on 22 August, 1927, but the idea appears to have quickly died. Elsewhere, in the discussions at the 1927 Colonial Office conference, it was revealed that there had been consideration of including a quota provision in the license of a cinema theatre for Singapore. The proposed licence was to include the exhibition of a minimum proportion of British films, gradually increasing over time to reach a maximum of 25%. No further records have been found of either of these discussions.

In 1931, Singapore was similarly faced with a budget deficit due to the changing economic conditions and introduced a range of new taxes and duties. Among these was an increase in the duty on petrol. In place of this duty (which was seen as taxing a necessity), an Entertainments Tax was proposed by the Honourable Mr. Abdoolcader in the Legislative Council meeting of 12th October, 1931. The suggestion was rebuffed by the Acting Colonial Secretary as unnecessary at the time, and the issue of an Entertainments Tax didn’t arise again until 1940, when an Entertainments War Duty was introduced to provide funds for the war effort. All three readings of the Entertainments Duty Bill was pushed through as a matter of emergency on 2nd April, 1940, with the funds raised specifically directed to the United Kingdom to assist in the payment of their war effort.

The focus of government screen policy in Singapore over the period was on censorship. Some of the attention drawn to censorship in the polity was more a result of how Captain Hussey interpreted what material was unsuitable for local (non-European) audiences than specific guidelines or regulations provided by the government. The result was that higher proportions of films were censored in Singapore than in many other places, certainly in the earlier part of the period. Some of this may have been a result of the censor being responsible for all of the films in wider British Malaya rather than just Singapore. And it wasn’t just Hollywood films that were primarily cut. Earlier in the period it was
apparent that a higher proportion of British films were being cut or rejected as unsuitable than Hollywood films. This may have been a result of either higher standards expected of British films and/or, the unfamiliarity with foreign requirements among British producers. It also raises the question of how the British Board of Film Censors guidelines were interpreted in Britain, as the Singapore censor and Appeals Board used the same guidelines for the basis of their decisions. In other areas of screen policy, Singapore was relatively inactive during the period. We now moved to a consider the dominion-level case, New Zealand, which would also later maintain some important ties with Singapore through establishing their only peacetime military base there.
Endnotes

1. *The Theatres Ordinance, No. XVII of 1908* (Straits Settlements)


3. As a prosperous polity, the issue of traffic congestion appears to have been a long-standing concern in Singapore, with extensive taxes used to limit the number of vehicles in the city state in the post-World War II period.

4. “No. 31, By-Laws for Regulating the Storage of Celluloid and its Allied Products Made Under Sections 204, 307, and 371 of Ordinance No. 135 (Municipal), Passed at a Special Meeting of the Municipal Commissioners of Singapore Town Held on the 29th March, 1923 and Published Prior to Confirmation by the Governor-in-Council,” *Supplement to the Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Friday, 13th April, 1923, National Archives of Singapore (NAS), microfilm NL 1208; *Celluloid and Cinematograph Film Act, 1922, 12 & 13 Geo. 5, c. 35* (UK).


6. “No. 1237, Straits Settlements Government. Ordinance No. 22 of 1917, Theatres (Amendment) Ordinance,” Sept. 28, 1917, 1624-1625, *Straits Settlements Government Gazette* (SSGG). In addition to establishing the post of Official Censor, the Ordinance established a Committee of Appeal with seven members, four appointed by the Governor and three elected by the Justices of the Peace. Three were to be considered a quorum for the purposes of hearing an appeal. The Inspector-General of Police was appointed as Chair of the Appeals Committee.

7. *Straits Settlements Blue Books*. These provide annual details of personnel employed, their salaries and other office expenditure along with the revenues from film censorship fees.


9. “No. 1367. With reference to Gazette Notification No. 1288, published in the Gazette of the 5th October 1917. It is hereby notified that Mr. F. Neville Piggott has resigned his appointment as Official Censor of Cinematographs on the ground of ill-health with effect from the 15th October, 1917,” *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, October 19, 1917, 1740.

No. 326. Ordinance No. 106 (Theatres)," Straits Settlements Government Gazette, Feb. 22, 1924, 271. There appears to have been an oversight in announcing Hussey’s appointment. The official notification does not appear in the Straits Settlements Government Gazette until February 1924 after notification of his leave of absence on full salary for 8 months is announced. Another discrepancy occurs with the date of appointment given in the Straits Settlements Government Gazette as 3 February 1920 while the Straits Settlements Blue Book lists it as 24th December 1919. References in other research, such as Rex Stevenson, “Cinema and censorship in colonial Malaya” (1975), incorrectly state either the start date for censorship in Singapore or the appointment of Captain Hussey as 1923.

Little biographical detail was uncovered about Captain Hussey other than he had been recruited in England by the Colonial Office in 1919 and posted on Colonial Service terms to Singapore. There is a Captain Thomas MacDonald Hussey listed in www.thepeerage.com (http://thepeerage.com/p9437.htm) as having gained the rank of Captain in the Hampshire Regiment. He was married to Lady Colina Elwy Campbell on 17 December 1919 (right before his/their departure to Singapore) and divorced in 1938. Captain Hussey died in 1965.

Hussey was granted eight months and six days leave from 31st January, 1924, by the Governor in the Straits Settlements. This was a typical period for long-leave as it allowed travel time to and from the United Kingdom. “No. 282. Leave,” Straits Settlements Government Gazette, Feb. 15, 1924, 231.
Sir Hesketh Bell was later to sit on the Colonial Films Committee (1929). One purpose or outcome of Bell’s trip through Asia was the publication of a book on colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies and Indo-China. His travels through British Malaya would have happened around the same time. Hesketh Bell, *Foreign Colonial Administration in The Far East* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1928).

There were frequent assertions made about cinema, and more specifically, Hollywood films “glorifying criminals and gangsterism,” and thus contributing to the crime rate. However, empirical studies to support this were frequently lacking. Evidence heard in the 1917 Commission of Inquiry instituted by the National Council of Public Morals suggested this wasn’t the case and that the cinema actually contributed to keeping young people out of trouble. See Rex Stevenson, “Cinemas and Censorship in Colonial Malaya,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, (5)2, September, 1974, 212.

Lord Stamfordham, Private Secretary to His Majesty King George V, to L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19th September, 1926, TNA: PRO, CO 273/533 Influence of Cinema pictures in the Far East.

L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to Lord Stamfordham, Private Secretary to His Majesty King George V, 24th September 1926, TNA: PRO, CO 273/533 Influence of Cinema pictures in the Far East.

L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Sir L.N. Guillemard, Governor, Straits Settlements, 11 December, 1926, TNA: PRO, CO 273/533 Influence of Cinema pictures in the Far East.

Although the requirement that all films pass through the Official Censor of Cinematographs had not been legislated by the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.) Council, the mandate that the Film Censor in Singapore would be responsible for the F.M.S. as well as the Straits Settlements and Johore (an Unfederated Malay State) was stated in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council while the Bill establishing the film censorship requirement was having its third reading. See *Straits Settlements Legislative Council Debate*, 24th Sept., 1917, B 93, National Archives of Singapore (NAS), microfilm 1118/4514.

“Enactment No. 3 of 1927, An Enactment to control the exhibition of cinematograph films,” TNA: PRO, CO 273/541/3 Influence of Cinema Pictures in Malaya.

Sir L.N. Guillemard, Governor, Straits Settlements, to L.C.M.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8th August, 1927, TNA: PRO, CO 273/541/3 Influence of Cinema Pictures in Malaya.

Louis Allen, *Singapore, 1941-1942* (London: Davis-Poynter Limited, 1977). Although tangential to the research here, this miscalculation by the British led to the swift fall of Singapore to Japan in 1942, as the Japanese entered from Thailand; the British guns were pointing in the wrong direction. Ironically, financiers in the City of London had loaned the Japanese £25 million to build the navy which assisted in the capture of Singapore, while the British government spent £20 million building the Singapore base to protect it against the Japanese. See Allen, p. 19.

TNA: PRO, CO 323/1126/16 Films: Proposed experimental scheme in Malaya; TNA: PRO, CO 323/1130/12 Film: use of among native races; TNA: PRO, CO 323/1253/3 Educational Films in the Colonies, Summary of the possibilities of the use of.
One of the most famous studies in the US during this period was the “Motion Pictures and Youth (Payne Fund) Studies”, covered in some detail in Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Also *The Film in National Life: Being the Report of an Enquiry Conducted by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films into the Service which the Cinematograph May Render to Education and Social Progress* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932);

J. Watson, “Appendix: Memorandum on the use of cinematographs in Malayan Schools,” 5.4.33, 2, TNA: PRO, CO 323/1253/3 Educational Films in the Colonies, Summary of the possibilities of the use of. The report mentions that up until 1931, the Headmaster of the Outram Road School had been able to obtain silent films of a satisfactory character, from 1932 onwards, good silent films had become scare.

Appendix 3 in the Summary of the replies to the Secretary of State’s Circular Dispatch No. 2 of 7th December, 1932, TNA: PRO, CO 323/1253/3 Educational Films in the Colonies.

Dickinson and Street, 29; Jarvie, 57-63, 68-74. The Imperial Conference was a meeting of the Prime Ministers (along with senior government officials) of the dominions of the British Empire held on a periodic basis.

Dickinson and Street, 29. No reference was made to the draft bill in the final report of the Economic Sub-Committee and this assertion is questioned by Jarvie (1992), 114.

TNA: PRO, CO 323/977/18 Colonial Office Conference – Programme of Meetings and Order of Business. This conference was the counterpart for the colonies of the 1926 Imperial Conference, and attended by senior officials, usually either the Governor or the Colonial Secretary, from each colony. The discussion on films, their educational use and censorship, was scheduled for the afternoon of Friday, 27th May. Mr. Hayes Marriott, Colonial Secretary, was the Straits Settlements representative present (immediately afterwards awarded the KBE and became Sir Marriott before his return to the Straits Settlements).

“No. 1633, A Bill intituled An Ordinance to amend Ordinance No. 106 (Theatres),” *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Sept. 9, 1927, 1700-1704, National Archives of Singapore (NAS), NL 1216, microfilm 3838. Bills in the Straits Settlements and Hong Kong, like many Westminster democracies, required three readings in the legislature for them to become law. The Straits Settlements and Hong Kong legislatures at this stage were small bodies made up of senior government officials and representatives of some of the main stakeholders in the respective colonies, and although were not true democracies (most of the representatives were appointed by the Governor), they did maintain some semblance of democratic process.


Mr G.C. Clarke, Theatres (Amendment) Bill, Straits Settlements Legislative Council, Monday, 31 October, 1927, *Supplement to Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 2nd December, 1927, 6, NAS, NL 1218, microfilm 3840. In fact, the New Zealand bill lapsed with the end of the Parliamentary session in 1927. A substantially rewritten and expanded bill was introduced in 1928, which was subsequently passed.

George Dickens, “Local Propaganda Against American Films,” September 5, 1925, 2, USNA, RG 59, Department of State Decimal Files, 1910-1929, Box 8931, 846d.4061 Motion Pictures/2.
Among the changes was the definition of a British film changed from being produced by a ‘British-controlled company’ in the original bill to a ‘British company’ in the final legislation, and a reduction in the end level of British films required to be exhibited from 1935, changed from 25% to 20%. The changes could have been easily incorporated into the Straits Settlements bill if the government had desired to do so. It was likely that other reasons resulted in it being dropped.

Dickinson and Street, 32. The Committee stage follows the second reading and is the final point at which substantive changes will typically be made before the third and final reading.

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PART III:

Dominion Level:
New Zealand

Source: New Zealand Free Lance, December 18th, 1929, cover.
Figure: 7.1: Map of New Zealand, circa 1920s

Source: Map of New Zealand, 192-, H Map HL 830/1900/a, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago.
Introduction

Philip Nichols disembarked in Wellington after an uneventful, two-day passage from Sydney, grateful that the Tasman Sea had not lived up to its stormy and ferocious reputation. Carl Berendsen and Frank Thomson met him on the wharf, whisked him through Customs and drove him straight to Parliament Buildings to be greeted by the Right Honourable Gordon Coates, Prime Minister of New Zealand. Nichols had been seconded from the Foreign Office in London to the Prime Minister’s Department in Wellington and had just spent the previous four weeks in Australia. His purpose ostensibly was to consult on improving the functioning of the Imperial Affairs Department and flow of information within the Empire. But Nichols was also there as part of another agenda. This one was secret. He was to get close to the centre of power to gain an understanding of their attitudes towards Great Britain and the Empire. There were considerable changes to the status of the Dominions underway and London was unsure how strong their loyalties were to the ‘Mother Country.’ Nichols was in Wellington to observe and understand the attitudes of the New Zealand government and people, and to feed this information back to the Foreign Office. However, they need not have been concerned about New Zealand as it was a country staunchly British continuing to hold their loyalty as patriotic Britons as more important than any nationalistic impulses.

Nichols was given an office a few doors away from the Prime Minister, from Thomson— the Permanent Head of the Prime Minister’s Department, and from Berendsen — a key advisor to the Prime Minister responsible for Imperial Affairs. Shortly after Nichols’ arrival, Berendsen took over as Permanent Secretary for External Affairs. Nichols’ regular missives back to the Foreign Office at ‘Home,’ as London was affectionately referred to by many of the Pākehā residents in New Zealand, detailed the concerns and actions of those in the small circle of the Prime Minister’s Department, along with descriptions of the more important trips outside of Wellington. In the early days he was there, he was to witness and briefly comment on the debates around the passing of the controversial Cinematograph Films Bill, or Quota Bill as it was commonly referred to, and the downfall of Coates Reform Government in the surprisingly close election in November of 1928.
After a few months of getting to know New Zealand and the New Zealanders, Nichols wrote a letter to Percy Koppel in the Foreign Office outlining what he saw as being the differences in the national characteristics of New Zealanders and Australians. What he saw throughout Australia was the existence of both an Australian consciousness, as well as a State consciousness, and a practice of “boosting” the hometown similar to what was seen in the United States. In New Zealand, however, he found the feeling to be more patriotic rather than national. Although he found that the inhabitants of New Zealand were extremely proud of New Zealand, they seemed to be prouder that they were British. More so, he felt, than in Great Britain herself.

This focus on being more British than the British themselves was a common theme from the late 1880s through to the latter part of the twentieth century. It was reluctant to take on the status as a Dominion in 1907, much preferring to be a colony of ‘Mother England.’ Nichols used as one example the difference in naming between the Australian Navy, which was referred to as the “Royal Australian Navy” and the New Zealand Navy, which was the “New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy.” Belich devoted a considerable portion of his 2001 volume to the idea of New Zealand as a “Better Britain,” and it is this characteristic that led New Zealand to be the location where British films probably had a larger portion of the screen time than in any other of the major countries in the British Empire outside of Britain herself. It was the attitude that “[w]here Britain goes, we go! Where she stands, we stand,” which led it to be one of the only parts of the Empire to pass film quota legislation largely in line with the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act in Great Britain, though some provisions were made voluntary rather than mandatory at the last minute. The observations of Nichols from the Foreign Office support this and explain much of the official resistance against Hollywood. But here we are getting ahead of ourselves. We need to provide some more background on New Zealand itself.

Background

Aotearora New Zealand is a set of islands in the South Pacific, isolated from the main centres of population globally. The history of Aotearora New Zealand dates back to the oral traditions of the Māori peoples, of when Kupe arrived from Hawaiki. Aotearoa was the name of Kupe’s canoe; Kupe, or rather his wife or daughter, depending on the
version of the legend, having being the first to sight the new land. The first European visitor to New Zealand was the Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman when he sighted the South Island of New Zealand in 1642. Although he named it Staten Landt, Dutch cartographers subsequently changed this to Nieuw Zeeland, Zeelandia Nova after the Dutch province of Zeeland. Captain James Cook on his first visit to the islands renamed it New Zealand, and that is the name it has continued to be known as. With increasing recognition of the rights of the Māori peoples under the Treaty of Waitangi, and the use of Māori as an official language, increasingly Aotearoa has been included in the name to recognise the pre-European origins of the country. Thus, New Zealand is frequently referred to as Aotearoa New Zealand.

The formal settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand by the British began in the late 1830s with the formation in London of the New Zealand Company. In contrast to the penal settlement nature of the various colonies that now make up Australia, the intention for New Zealand was to create an idealistic, better version of Britain in the South Pacific. From early on, its role was to be an extension of Britain, a South Pacific farm location helping to feed Britain.

The position of the Māori in New Zealand has been an awkward issue for the British and New Zealand governments to negotiate. The understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 differed between the Māori and the British, due in part to the translation used. This later led to the Māori Wars as the Māori resisted what they saw as the stealing of their land by the Colonial government. But, from early on they were also a part of the government. There were Māori members of Parliament from 1864, Māori members of the Cabinet, and for periods in 1909 and 1911, a Māori was the Acting Prime Minister. This was unique within the British Empire. The Māori were unlike other native peoples the British had encountered and conquered. To explain this, a myth developed of the Aryan Māori that the Māori had similar Aryan roots as the British and Northern Europeans, and that instead of migrating into Europe, they had instead journeyed through Asia and eventually ended up in New Zealand. Thus, the Māori and the British had common origins and could be considered as equals. This meant that the attitude towards the images that could be shown in New Zealand differed from Hong Kong or the Straits Settlements, or other parts of the British Empire. Therefore, it was possible for the censorship standards to
also be different from many colonial territories. Mixed marriages (between Māori and Pākehā) were not uncommon; and their depiction, although frowned upon by some of the Europeans, was not forbidden. Māori themes were dominant in the early fiction film-making in New Zealand, with overseas filmmakers coming to film Māori stories. Local filmmakers also used the Māori peoples as subjects, both in documenting their disappearing way of life (James McDonald on the Wanganui River), and as a source of stories (Rudall Hayward).

James Belich in *Paradise Reforged* suggests that New Zealand underwent a process of ‘recolonisation’ from the 1880s that tightened its links with Britain, to the extent that besides the distance of 12,000 miles, it was a virtual Scotland. In many respects, New Zealand up to the 1960s was an ideological and economic semi-colony of Britain. New Zealand wasn’t alone in this process. Belich suggests that this tightening of relations between ‘metropolis’ and ‘periphery’ could also be applied to Australia and Canada. Residents of each of these three Dominions in their own way, strived to be become ‘better Britons’ than those still at ‘Home’ or ‘Mother England.’ We will put considerations of those Dominions, as that was what they were at the beginning of the period, to one side. The focus here is on New Zealand, and the role the government played in the battle for the entertainment spending in New Zealand by Hollywood on the one hand, and the British film industry on the other. These were not the only forms of entertainment available to New Zealanders, but with the small concentrations of population and isolation from larger population centres, the menu was much thinner. Theatre troupes and vaudeville shows travelled through on occasion, but usually confined themselves to the major centres as part of an extension of an Australian tour. Radio became increasingly important during the period, with the number of radios rising from 2,800 in 1924 to over 355,000 by 1941. Local rugby matches were available on a Saturday afternoon. But with the local bars closing at 6pm, restaurants few and far between and little else available in terms of evening entertainment, the cinema (or theatre in New Zealand, as the terms were interchangeable given the lack of any regular stage entertainment) was the predominant form of entertainment outside the home.
Early motion picture industry in New Zealand

Diffusion of the early motion picture around the world was rapid, with the first known projection of motion picture images in New Zealand taking place a mere ten months after the Lumière brothers first public screening in Paris in December 1895. This screening took place on Tuesday, October 13, 1896 at the Opera House in Auckland, where ‘Professors’ Hausmann and Gow introduced Edison’s Kinematograph as part of a performance of Charles Godfrey’s Vaudeville Company. The popularity of the screenings was such that, in addition to the evening performances, Hausmann and Gow exhibited the films alone during hourly afternoon screenings in the Opera House. Other screenings quickly followed elsewhere in the country with Joseph Macmahon giving the first screening of his ‘Cinematographe’ in Wellington on 28 October 1896. There were three afternoon showings and three evening showings, with twelve films, each lasting less than a minute, on the programme. After Wellington, Macmahon continued to Christchurch, where he showed the film in a vacant shop he named the ‘Cinematographe Salon,’ and then Dunedin where he did the same thing.

Cinema quickly established itself with travelling showmen taking films and a projector through the towns of New Zealand. The first permanent venue was established in Wellington in 1908 at His Majesty’s Theatre, the same year that the country’s first film exchange began importing and renting films. Two years later, the country’s first purpose-built cinema, the King’s Theatre, opened in Wellington. In the following years leading up to the First World War, there was a construction boom throughout the country, with picture theatres opening up wherever there was a reasonable concentration of population, as well as many locations with minimal population. The introduction of radio transmissions in 1923 forced some of the smaller cinema-halls out of business, but the larger mainstream cinemas continued to draw in crowds. An article in the Evening Post in 1916 estimated that 320,000 New Zealanders (out of a population of 1.15 million) attended the movies weekly, with claims made in Parliament in 1917 that “no less than 550,000 people go to picture entertainment every week.” The basis for these figures are unknown, with the later numbers likely to be an exaggeration, if not the earlier figures as well.
Production of films on a small scale also started early. A.H. Whitehouse, one of the travelling showmen exhibiting films, filmed the opening of the Auckland Exhibition on 1 December 1898, and went on to film and then exhibited a number of other local subjects including horse racing, Māori canoe racing, and the departure of soldiers for the Boer War. In 1901, the New Zealand Government became involved in filmmaking when they commissioned Major Joseph Perry of the State of Victoria Salvation Army Limelight Department to record the Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. This film was very popular with the public, as were subsequent films taken by local cameramen of local events.

In 1907, the New Zealand government appointed James McDonald, then working in the Tourist Department creating displays for the New Zealand International Exhibition, to be government photographer and kinematographer. In this role he filmed various scenic attractions throughout New Zealand for the Tourist Department, as well as documenting events such as Shackelton’s departure to the Antarctic, the visit of the American Fleet and a visit by Lord Kitchener. In 1912, he returned to the Dominion Museum (he had worked in the Colonial Museum prior to joining the Tourist Department), where he was responsible for maintaining their photographic collection. Later, he would be responsible for filming important ethnographic films of Māori peoples for the museum.

Most of these early films were actualities (non-fiction films of actual events), but in 1912, Gaston Méliès arrived with a seventeen-member film crew in search of ‘novel settings’ for his photoplays. During their month in New Zealand, they made five scenics and three dramatic shorts based on Māori material. Māori themes in fiction films would remain dominant in the early years.

Vertical integration and conglomeration in the industry began in 1913, with John Fuller and Sons, Hayward’s Pictures, and J D Williams, three distribution exhibition companies, jointly setting up a new distributor, New Zealand Picture Supplies, to dominate the local market. For the next twelve years, the company enjoyed what was virtually a monopoly on the distribution of films to exhibitors in New Zealand. Rudall Hayward, the nephew of Henry Hayward, the owner of Hayward Pictures, would later become a filmmaker and be considered “New Zealand’s most significant film pioneer.”
Early calls for censorship

The first formal request for film censorship is believed to have been made in 1909 by the New Zealand National Council of Churches concerned at the violence in a film of a World Heavyweight Boxing Championship bout between Tommy Burns and Jack Johnson.38 Following this, a few borough councils made a formal request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs calling for film censorship, as they were concerned that films were having an undesirable influence on children and young people.39 This followed on from a question in the House of Representatives regarding whether Borough Councils had the power to ban “cinematograph films portraying prize fights or other objectionable incidents.”40 The Minister for Internal Affairs, the Honourable Mr. Buddo, responded that there was no legislative provision to forbid the exhibition of films unless they came under the provisions of the Police Offences Act, but the matter would be dealt with through legislation.41 Nothing further appeared to come of these complaints. There were further complaints from time to time regarding films that led to the Police Department conducting an investigation in 1915 into the incidence of films of a “suggestive nature and [that] have a demoralising tendency.” The conclusion of the investigation was that there were few films that could be labelled indecent although there were many that were in poor taste. The dominant distributor, New Zealand Picture Supplies Company, self-censored films before releasing them to the public.42

No further action was taken as a response to this investigation, but an incident of a slightly different nature did spur the government into action. In January 1916, a film purporting to show footage of genuine war sequences was shown in Timaru. Many of the scenes, though later determined to be fake, showed views of wounds or other images of war.43 With the possible detrimental impact that such images could have to morale within the country, the government moved quickly to prohibit such scenes with an amendment to the War Regulations allowing the Minister of Defence to prohibit the screening of any films about the war.44 This was but an interim measure until the government could introduce legislation into Parliament providing a more comprehensive response to the issue of film censorship.
Terminology: ‘theatres’ as ‘cinemas’

In this section, ‘cinemas’ and ‘theatres’ are used interchangeably. With the isolation of New Zealand from other markets, even pre-cinema, the availability of stage or live entertainment was relatively infrequent, particularly outside of the major centres such as Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. The introduction of cinema quickly led to the almost total demise of live entertainment in the Dominion, and those theatres equipped for stage performances, doubled as cinemas the majority of the time. As a result, the word cinema was rarely used, and the theatre was the location audiences went to watch the movies. All of the documentation from the period refers to theatres; however, for readers used to a distinction between the two, I use these words interchangeably in this section on New Zealand.
Endnotes

1 Philip Nichols to Percy Koppel, April 6th, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 60-66. Percy Koppel, Counsellor at the Foreign Office, formed half of the Dominions Information Department, and was supposed to be the conduit through which all communication between the Foreign Office, Dominions Office and each of the Dominions passed. The letters from Nichols were then passed to the Dominions Office by Koppel.

2 Philip B.B. Nichols was seconded from the British Foreign Office to the Prime Minister’s Department in New Zealand for two years from 1928-1930. Angus Ross, ‘Reluctant dominion or dutiful daughter? New Zealand and the commonwealth in the inter-war years,’ *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 10:1, 1972, 29.

3 References are made in the file notes and letters from Nichols “that his usefulness may be impaired if his sources of information are compromised in any way.” See Percy Koppel to Sir E.J. Harding, May 4, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 73-74.

4 Angus Ross, ‘Reluctant dominion or dutiful daughter? New Zealand and the commonwealth in the inter-war years,’ *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 10:1, 1972, 28-44. Angus outlines the reluctance that New Zealand had to being even labeled a Dominion, preferring to maintain its colonial relationship and status, its objections to the Statute of Westminster making the Dominions independent countries, and that it wasn’t until 1947 that New Zealand formally adopted the Statute and became a fully independent country.

A file note accompanying the May 4, 1928 letter from Koppel notes that “the lack of interest in foreign politics which, together with a keen sense of loyalty, leads New Zealand to follow the lead of H.M.G in Great Britain almost unquestioningly, and the loyalty of the unity of the Empire which makes such a step as the appointment of a High Commissioner in Canada somewhat suspect to the New Zealand mind.” TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 75.

5 Nichols to Koppel, 4th May, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 83.

6 Nichols to Koppel, 14th May, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 87-94. Nichols had spent one month in Australia en route before arriving in New Zealand.

7 Ibid., 88.

8 Ibid., 91.

9 Ross, 41.

10 Nichols to Koppel, 14th May, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 90.

This is a bold assertion that is difficult to unequivocally support as evidence from the period is fragmentary at best. But, if there was anywhere in the world outside of the United Kingdom where this was likely to be the case, then New Zealand would be a prime candidate. Margaret Dickens and Sarah Street (1985) quote figures of 10 percent of films Empire-produced for New Zealand in 1925, against 8 percent for Great Britain and Australia (29). A chart showing the proportions for Great Britain and the US can be found in Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment Industrialised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 246. British films achieved close to 30% of the total share of film releases from 1933-37, however, this does not mean that the share of box office revenue was similar. Due to the quota under the Cinematograph Films Act, exhibitors were required to screen 25% British features by 1935, however, this was based on screenings, and it would have been possible for exhibitors to schedule British films for morning screenings, and have reserved the most profitable screenings for American pictures.

As noted by Angus Ross, these are the words used by the Right Honourable Michael Savage, when he announced New Zealand’s entrance into World War II alongside Great Britain. The same words would be used later by other Prime Ministers, and even as late as the Falklands War in 1982, New Zealand would be the first nation to offer support to Great Britain (in this case a frigate, though not directly used in the conflict itself). Angus Ross, ‘Reluctant dominion or dutiful daughter? New Zealand and the commonwealth in the inter-war years,’ *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 10:1, 1972, 41.

Nichols to Koppel, 14th May, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 135. In the final act, quota provisions for exhibitors were made voluntary, and would only come into effect for distributors (renters) upon an Order-of-Council. A few of the smaller colonies, such as Trinidad and Tobago, did also pass quota legislation, but it was largely ineffective.


Belich, 2001., 119-120.

ibid., 180. Benjamin Franklin had proposed colonising New Zealand and civilising the Māori as far back as 1771, and then in 1814 merchants in Sydney proposed the formation of a New Zealand Company.

Ross provides some trade figures with 81% of exports going to Britain in 1923, rising to 88% in 1932. At the Ottawa Conference in 1932, Coates suggested that the United Kingdom was taking 99% of New Zealand’s lamb and mutton exports. See Ross, 41.


ibid., 11.

ibid.

ibid., 251; Gerald Bloomfield, *New Zealand: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall & Co., 1984), 261. In 1926 there were 3,600 radio licenses and 286,400 households, equating to one radio for every 80 households. Ten years later, there were 192,600 radio licenses and 349,905 households, with a ratio of little more than one radio for every two households.

Gerald Mast, *A Short History of the Movies*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 20. Although the first screening to a paying public was December 28, 1895, the Lumière brothers had been holding private screenings throughout Europe to friends and scientists since March.
24 Clive Sowry, “The Kinematograph Arrives in New Zealand,” The Big Picture, 9, Winter 1996, 22-23. According to Sowry, Hausemann was born in Christchurch, 1896 and his boyhood interest in conjuring led him to enter the theatrical profession. His adoption of the title “Professor” followed earlier conjurors. In addition to this and theatrical management, he also worked as a house painter. He met John Gow in Dunedin where they exhibited the Rontgen X-ray apparatus prior to exhibiting Kinematograph motion pictures.


27 ibid.

28 The 1948 Hearings included statistics breaking down the number of theatres into three categories: those open six days per week (195 or 34%), those open odd days per week (202 or nearly 36%), and circuit theatres that would be open occasionally or one day per week (171 or 30%). These figures give an indication of what earlier numbers would likely to have been. See: “Report of the Motion-Picture Industry Committee,” Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives of New Zealand, 1949, Vol. IV, I-17, 62.


30 Diane Pivac, “The Rise of Fiction: Between the Wars,” in Diane Pivac (ed.) with Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald, New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 51. The year-end population for 1917 was estimated to be 1,147,448 (G.T. Bloomfield, New Zealand: A Handbook of Historical Statistics, 1984, 44). Based on the census figures for 1916 of the population aged 15 and above (735,351), this would suggest that nearly 75% of the population over the age of 14 attended the cinema once a week for the latter estimate. These figures are likely to be too high, particularly as only 51% of the population lived in boroughs and cities in 1916 (G.T. Bloomfield, New Zealand: A Handbook of Historical Statistics, 1984, 56), and access to moving picture shows in the rural areas (in part from travelling exhibitors) was more sporadic.


32 ibid., 7-8.

33 Anne Salmond, “James McDonald.” In Diane Pivac (ed.) with Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald, New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 85; Jonathan Dennis, “McDonald, James Ingram – Biography,” from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3m5/1. These films were different from news-reels and other non-fiction films of the period, in that they were not intended for wide dissemination among the public in their initial form. They were filmed to provide a historic record and were kept as part of the museum collection. Clips from the films were later used by the Government Publicity Office.

34 Jonathan Dennis, ed., Aotearoa and the Sentimental Strine (Wellington: Moa Films for the 12th Pordenone Silent Film Festival, 1993), 7-8. The three fiction films were How Chief Te Ponga Won His Bride (1912), Loved by a Maori Chieftess (1912) and Hinemoa (1912).

35 ibid., 8.

36 “Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Motion-Picture Industry, 1934,” Appendix to Journals of the House of Representatives, 1934, H-44A.


39 J.R.S. Daniels and D.J. Moore, ‘Film Censorship in New Zealand,’ Advisory and Research Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1969, 1, Archives New Zealand (NZNA), IA 1 Acc W1893 64/123/1 Cinema Films – Cinematograph Film – Review of Legislation and Policies (Censorship); Paul Christoffel, Censored: A short history of censorship in New Zealand (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, Monograph Series No. 12, 1989), 11.


41 ibid.

42 J.R.S. Daniels and D.J. Moore, ‘Film Censorship in New Zealand,’ Advisory and Research Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1969, 1, NZNA, IA 1 Acc W1893 64/123/1 Cinema Films – Cinematograph Film – Review of Legislation and Policies (Censorship).

43 ibid., 2.

Chapter 7: New Zealand, 1916-1927

It is horrible to think that the British Empire is receiving its education from a place called Hollywood. The dominions would rather have a picture with a wholesome, honest British background, something that gives British sentiment, something that is honest to our traditions, than the abortions we get from Hollywood. . . . the American film is everywhere, and is the best advertisement of American trade and commerce.

- Stephen Tallents, Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board

Overview of the period

In 1916, New Zealand was heavily involved in the First World War with over 100,000 men serving in Europe. The Gallipoli Campaign and deaths of 2,700 New Zealand soldiers were already imprinted on the national consciousness, and would become one of the myths of a growing New Zealand nationhood.

The Fuller-Hayward group, with their distribution arm, New Zealand Picture Supplies, were the dominant distributors of film up to 1927 having been established in 1914. The successful entry of US distributing organisations in the mid-1920s altered the balance, however, and New Zealand Picture Supplies separated into separate exhibition (Fuller-Haywards Theatre Corporation) and renting (Greater Australasian Films Ltd) operations.

Following the war came a period of relative prosperity in New Zealand. It was an agricultural country and its products were very much in demand in Great Britain, its main market. The country grew quickly in the interwar years, as did the cinema business in New Zealand. This chapter covers the period up to 1927, during which time the safety imperative was most in focus, through the development of the censorship machinery along with establishing regulations for the handling and storage of the highly inflammable nitrate film. At the end of this period, an initial quota bill to support the British film industry was introduced into Parliament for discussion, but allowed to lapse with the end of the Parliamentary session.
Censorship

Cinematograph Film Censorship Act

Following increasing demands from the public, deputations to the Minister of Internal Affairs, and a petition from the Catholic Federation, the Cinematograph Film Censorship Bill was introduced into Parliament on 1 August 1916. The bill was quite simple. On or after the first day of October 1916, it would no longer be lawful to exhibit any cinematograph film unless a censor appointed by the Governor of New Zealand had approved it.5 The guidelines for the approval of films by the censor were similarly simple.

Such approval shall not be given in the case of any film which, in the opinion of the censor, depicts any matter that is against public order and decency, or the exhibition of which for any other reason is, in the opinion of the censor, undesirable in the public interest.6

No further guidelines were set out in the legislation, nor were there explicit guidelines provided to the Censor as developed with the British Board of Film Censors, although there were proposals later to introduce them.

William Jolliffe, the first film censor

William Jolliffe was appointed the first Cinematograph Film Censor in New Zealand as from 16 September 1916, the date of his retirement from the Crown Law Office.7 Prior to this appointment, Jolliffe had been the chief legal draftsman in the Crown Law Office and had been responsible for the drafting of the censorship legislation and regulations.8 It appears that Jolliffe had a wider interest in the motion picture industry. At the time of his appointment, Jolliffe was also a director of the People’s Picture Palace on Manners Street in Wellington.9 In addition, he appears to have had an interest in distribution. A piece of correspondence from Fraser Film Release & Photographic Co., Ltd. to Jolliffe in November 1916 suggests that he was a shareholder in the London and New Zealand Film Bureau, and was attempting to get the shares either transferred or registered in a name other than his.10 No further correspondence on this matter exists.

The workload of the censor increased rapidly. The returns for the first six months of operation showed he was censoring an average of nearly 64 hours of film a month. By the
time of the Annual Report the following year, the average workload had risen to 87 hours of film a month.\textsuperscript{11} This workload led to Jolliffe seeking additional compensation for his operator and himself. In a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs in September 1917, Jolliffe requested that the Minister provide a bonus to the Censor and his operator from the surplus of the censorship fees. He noted that the duties were “most irksome and exacting, trying to the eyes, temper and nerves.”\textsuperscript{12} As the fees weren’t intended to operate as a revenue producing tax, and the original salary had been fixed before there was information as to the probable revenue, he suggested that one-half of any surplus should be provided to the Censor and his operator.\textsuperscript{13} The Minister’s response doesn’t exist in the archives, but it is unlikely that the Minister would have acceded to his request. We see another letter from Jolliffe a few months later, this time a resignation letter as from the 31st May 1918.\textsuperscript{14} His resignation wasn’t accepted and the Minister proposed to reduce Jolliffe’s workload by converting the position to a four-day week at the same salary, and to appoint an assistant censor for two days a week.\textsuperscript{15}

**Appointment of Assistant Censor**

James McDonald, photographer at the Dominion (National) Museum, was appointed as the first assistant censor in August 1918.\textsuperscript{16} His duties were to act as an assistant censor to Jolliffe on one day of the week, and to be the responsible censor on a second day.\textsuperscript{17} McDonald already had an interest in the use of motion pictures from his earlier work with the Tourist Department.\textsuperscript{18} Subsequent to joining Jolliffe as Assistant Censor, McDonald also participated in a number of ethnographic expeditions with Elsdon Best of the Dominion Museum and Johannes Andersen of the Alexander Turnbull Library documenting the life and culture of different Māori peoples, expeditions that continued during his tenure as Assistant Censor.\textsuperscript{19} McDonald remained in the position until his resignation in 1925, when William Tanner was appointed.\textsuperscript{20}

**Film censorship evolves**

Following the appointment of Jolliffe, regulation of censorship continued to evolve. During 1917 there was considerable objection from church groups to D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) being passed without cuts.\textsuperscript{21} The Minister of Internal Affairs also
received frequent letters from around the country from people concerned at the lax censorship. At the end of July 1917, the Department of Internal Affairs sent a memorandum to the Censor suggesting a range of principles for the censorship of films:

1. That the living figure of Christ should not be permitted.
2. That nudity should in no circumstances be passed.
3. That nothing should be passed which is calculated to demoralise an audience or any section of it.
4. That nothing should be passed that could be held to extenuate crime.
5. That nothing should be passed that teaches the method of criminals, or lowers the sacredness of family ties.
6. That nothing should be passed that brings the institution of marriage into ridicule or contempt, or that is calculated to wound the susceptibilities of foreign people or members of any religion.
7. That nothing should be passed which portrays the progress and surroundings of women leading immoral lives.
8. That nothing should be passed in which there are scenes showing vice in an attractive form, even though retribution might follow.
9. With regard to indecorum of dress: Deletion should be insisted upon when a dress appears to be meant to be indecent or suggestive.
10. Nothing should be passed depicting any struggle or attack which implies an assault on the chastity of a woman.

The Minister would be glad if you will report on the above, setting out your views of their probable effect and workableness.

Jolliffe responded three weeks later that although he agreed that each of them was desirable generally, he felt that strict adherence would be impossible. The principles suggested by the Department were drawn from the British Board of Film Censors, and Jolliffe quoted T.P. O’Connor, the British Censor, in his response. He also noted that he had “refuse[d] approval of a considerable number of films which were submitted to me in sealed boxes bearing the authorised expression of his [O’Connor’s] approval.” Jolliffe preferred to consider the films as a whole on a case-by-case basis and make a determination on that basis. There were no further comments on the matter, and New Zealand film censorship would be based on the opinion of one person rather than a specific set of guidelines. Internationally, this was an unusual approach to censorship. Four
years later the New Zealand government did issue a more explicit directive regarding unacceptable subject matter.

In January 1921, the Minister of Internal Affairs sent out a letter to the various film exchanges and distributors in New Zealand outlining. In a memorandum to Jolliffe, he outlined the text included in the letter:

I have the honour to inform you that the Government has decided that any film or portion of film, where thieving, robbery, murder or suicide is made a feature of such film, will not be passed for circulation in this Dominion, and after consulting with the Censor of Cinematograph Films, I beg to advise you that this restriction will take effect as from the 1st May next.25

This directive was a result of concerns of the Cabinet regarding the content of films, and was issued following a meeting between the Minister, the Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs, and the Censor in early January.26 Whether this was interference in the statutory powers of the censor is unclear, but this question doesn’t appear to have been raised. The directive is unlikely to have resulted in any substantive change to censorship, however, and the number of excisions continued to decline, as did the number of films banned.

The Minister of Internal Affairs made another approach to the Censor in August 1926, following numerous representations from a number of different organisations. This time, the issue was films that could be injurious to children, and so the Minister requested that there be a tightening up of the censorship of all films that might be injurious to the public.27 The subsequent increase in the proportion of films banned or cut suggests that, at least for a couple of years, the directive may have some impact (See Appendix 7.1), although the increase in films banned during the early talkie period may also have been a result of the number of ‘sound-on-disc’ films rejected. In these instances, if a cut was necessary to the film, then the whole film would have to be banned.28

Although an Appeals Board had been established as part of the censorship infrastructure, rarely was the Censor’s decision overturned. From April 1st, 1917 to March 31st, 1928, a total of 25,070 films were censored, of which 396 were banned, twenty-nine appeals were made, and only nine appeals upheld.29 The Appeals Board rarely met, with the censor making most decisions on his own. On the occasion that Jolliffe did have a particularly difficult decision to make, he would telephone his wife, Nellie, and ask her to come and view the film with him.30
William Jolliffe passed away in 1927 while still holding the Censor position. His successor was Walter Tanner, an assistant censor, who had been appointed in 1925 upon the resignation of James McDonald. Tanner was a clerk in the government who had previously been deputy chief postal censor during the First World War.31 W.A. Von Keisenberg from the Tourist and Publicity Department was appointed as an assistant censor in 1927 when Tanner became the Censor, and would eventually succeed him in the position in 1938.32

Government film-making

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the New Zealand government first became involved in film production when they commissioned the Salvation Army Limelight Department to film the Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. The first ‘in-house’ production of film appears to have begun with the Tourist Department in 1907, with the assignment of James McDonald as the government kinematographer, primarily to film scenic’s for promotional use. The regular shooting of motion pictures for the Tourist Department appears to have stopped for a few years in 1912, when James McDonald returned to the Dominion Museum. Following this, the next efforts by the government was in the Agriculture Department, where the photographer, Sydney Taylor, filmed a scenic, *The Southern Alps of New Zealand* in 1916,33 and the following year was re-designated ‘photographer and cinematographer.’ Most of his output was sent to the high commissioner in London rather than shown in New Zealand.34 He would later be transferred to the Government Publicity Office shortly after its establishment in 1921.35

Footage of the First World War was popular with New Zealand audiences, following the heroism of ANZAC troops at Gallipoli, and with the large number of men serving overseas. Initially, Pathé Frères was commissioned to film some aspects of the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces in Europe, but in 1918, just before the war ended, Gunner C D (Charlie) Barton of the New Zealand Field Artillery was assigned to take over the task as official kinematographer.36 Later, Barton would film a couple of travelogues to help promote emigration from Britain to New Zealand.37
Government Publicity Office

The Government Publicity Office (GPO) was established within the Department of Internal Affairs in 1921. Beginning with a publicity officer (HTB Drew) and typist, the staff complement grew when the Photographic and Cinematographic Section of the Agriculture Department was transferred to the GPO in May 1922.38 A disused stable in Sydney Street West became the home for the government filmmakers until Cyril Morton, later to become a key figure in the establishment of the National Film Unit, joined the GPO as cinematographer in 1923, and it is at this point that government film-making began on a regular basis in New Zealand.39

From 1923 until the cessation of production of silent films in 1930, the GPO produced over 200 films, mainly of the scenic and industrial variety.40 A review of the film titles and surviving films show that scenic films (101) made up nearly forty percent of the total output, with forty-three films (twenty percent) the next largest group.41 Initially, films were produced for screening in major trade shows such as the 1922 New Zealand Industrial Exhibition in Christchurch, the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembly in London, and then the South Seas Exhibition in Dunedin in 1925-26.42 This meant that there was relatively narrow distribution of the films, although the free cinema that the GPO ran at the South Seas Exhibition attracted over 400,000 visitors.43

In late 1925, with the popularity of the GPO films having become apparent, the Publicity Officer (now Arthur Messenger as Drew had been posted to London to coordinate publicity) negotiated an exclusive distribution contract with Metro-Goldwyn (NZ) for one film a week for Australia and New Zealand for 1926.44 The series was known as Know New Zealand First in New Zealand, and Australia’s Beautiful Sister, Romantic New Zealand for Australia.45 Early estimates from MGM were that with over 500 theatres in Australia contracting the weekly programme, each programme having a life of two years, and six prints being distributed weekly, eventually there would be 800-1000 theatres per week showing a New Zealand film.46 The contract was renewed for £1,000 per year for 1927, 1928 and 1929, with increases in the number of copies distributed. A further contract was signed with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for the distribution of GPO scenic films in North and South America.47 The introduction of ‘talkies’ ended the series in July 1930, with only nine of the thirty films for that year delivered.48
The MGM contract meant that the GPO also needed to expand its operations, and so a laboratory in Lambton Quay run by AAP Mackenzie was contracted to process the film.\(^4\) In 1927, a fire in their laboratory (nitrate-stock films were highly inflammable) forced the GPO to move its operations out of the central city premises. A more permanent home was needed for the film-making operations, and so the GPO provided a five-year contract for laboratory and support facilities to Mackenzie who in turn established Filmcraft Ltd., and built the Miramar Film Studios near the end of the tram line in Miramar.\(^5\) These film studios would serve as the base for government film-making in New Zealand for the next fifty years.

**James MacDonald films Māori**

The name James McDonald has already been mentioned earlier in the narrative, both as the first kinematographer for the New Zealand government in the Tourist Department, and later as the first Assistant Censor. His most notable contribution to the development of film in New Zealand was the ethnographic films of the Māori peoples he took while working with the Dominion Museum. McDonald returned to the Dominion Museum from the Tourist Department in 1912 to the role of photographer and art assistant. In this position, he worked closely with Elsdon Best, the museum’s Ethnologist. Intermittently, he also acted as the acting director of the Dominion Museum due to the ill health of the incumbent.\(^5\)

In 1918, McDonald suggested a museum expedition to the Hui Aroha to be held in Gisborne the following year to welcome home the New Zealand Māori (Pioneer) Battalion and honour those who did not return. With the support of Apirana Ngata, the Minister of Native Affairs, the museum organised an expedition with McDonald, Elsdon Best and the librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Johannes Andersen, to gather ethnographic material on tribal lore and activities. The film of the poi dances and string games that survive from this expedition is the earliest known ethnographic film to be made in New Zealand.\(^5\)

Further ethnographic trips were organised in following years. In 1920, McDonald, Andersen and Best recorded the welcome at Rotorua to greet the Prince of Wales; in 1921, the three spent several weeks in the Whanganui River valley gathering material; and in
1923, the group visited Apirana Ngata’s Ngati Porou people on the East Coast. The films taken by McDonald continue to be recognised as cultural treasures by the Māori peoples.\textsuperscript{53}

In 1926, McDonald resigned from his museum and censorship duties, and moved to Tokaanu, where he helped found the Te Tuwharetoa School of Māori Art and Crafts, and was appointed to the Board of Māori Arts.\textsuperscript{54}

**Cinematograph Films Bill, 1927**

Following the 1926 Imperial Conference (see Chapter 3), Prime Minister Coates returned to New Zealand and awaited the text of the UK Cinematograph Films Bill, to incorporate in a similar bill in New Zealand. The first reading of the UK bill took place on 10 March 1927.\textsuperscript{55} The timeline for the text of the bill reaching New Zealand is unclear with few details available in the archives. Subsequently, the UK bill went through 250 amendments at the Committee stage, with the Committee sitting for a longer number of hours than at any other time in the history of the UK Parliament.\textsuperscript{56} There were a few changes, such as the quotas stopping at twenty percent rather than the originally proposed twenty-five percent, which were incorporated into the New Zealand bill, so we can date that bill to sometime in September 1927 or later.\textsuperscript{57} As the New Zealand bill was referred to in discussions in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council at the end of October 1927,\textsuperscript{58} the latest that the bill would have been introduced in the New Zealand Legislature would have been early to mid-October.

The text of the New Zealand bill followed most of the requirements of the UK bill, with later start dates to allow for the delay in films reaching New Zealand after release in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{59} Quotas were to be imposed on both renters (distributors) and exhibitors, and would come into effect on January 1\textsuperscript{st} 1929 for renters and July 1\textsuperscript{st} 1929 for exhibitors. For renters the quota requirement would begin at seven and a half percent of films acquired must be New Zealand or British films, with the quota rising one and a half percent annually until it reached twenty percent in 1936, at which point the increases would stop. For exhibitors, at least five percent of the films they showed were to be New Zealand or British films in the 1929 and 1930 years, with the quota then rising by two and a half percent annually until reaching twenty percent in 1937.\textsuperscript{60} After the passing of the legislation, no agreement was to be entered into for the exhibition of films at a date later
than twelve months after the date of the rental agreement, and exhibitors were entitled to reject up to five percent of films that he had agreed to rent in any one year (this level was later increased). Exhibitors and renters were to be licensed, and films were to be registered with the Minister of Internal Affairs to facilitate the administration of the quota requirements. There were also provisions regarding the definition of what constituted a New Zealand or British film (a New Zealand film having the same requirements of a British film except that it was filmed in New Zealand). 61

Among the differences between the UK and New Zealand legislation was that the quota was only based on the number of feature films, and calculated based on the number of films rather than the film footage. 62 Another provision not included in the British legislation, was a tax on gross receipts for the renting of a film amounting to five percent for New Zealand films, seven and a half percent for British films, and twelve and a half percent for foreign films. This provision foreshadowed the introduction of a similar tax in 1930, which led to the film trade war between New Zealand and Hollywood (discussed further in Chapter 7).

The purpose of the bill was two-fold: economic, in which it would provide some protection for the British film industry that was threatened with extinction; and “propagandic,” in that the British authorities wished to counteract the influences of American films on British national tastes, outlook and values. 63 Introduction of the bill raised considerable dissent within the industry. Foster, in his 1970 report, outlined the attitudes as follows:

(i) neither side of the industry welcomed state intrusion;
(ii) neither side of the industry wanted the quota; and
(iii) exhibitors were adamant that any statutory obligation imposed upon them must also be imposed upon distributors.

Distributors: attitude was “You can legislate a British quota but you can’t compel people to see them.”
Exhibitors: objected to being “forced” to do anything; and were afraid there would be insufficient British films to allow them to fulfil their obligations. 64

Although the bill was allowed to lapse at the end of the Parliamentary session to allow further discussions to take place with the industry, 65 it formed the basis of a more comprehensive bill the following year. The wording in the report from the US Consulate
suggests that the introduction of the bill was to enable industry discussion, and that it was intended at the outset to let the bill lapse at the end of the year.66

**Events within the Policy Imperatives framework**

The 1916-1927 period was reasonably quiet (compared to the period that would follow) in terms of government initiatives in the New Zealand motion picture industry. These were still early days with a rapid growth of the industry underway. Looking at the imperatives behind the government’s decisions, we can see the focus was primarily on safety and social control. It was only with the Imperial Conference of 1926 that economic imperatives began to be considered.

At the beginning of the period, much of the focus was on safety issues, as would be expected in the policy imperatives framework. The introduction of formal censorship addressed moral safety issues, while physical safety was largely handled through local authority building codes (and thus outside the scope of this study). Introduction in Great Britain of regulations to provide physical safety to audiences and operators due to the highly inflammable nature of nitrate film was quickly followed, almost word-for-word, in New Zealand in the 1925 Dangerous Goods (Cinematograph Films) Regulations.67

The 1926 Imperial Conference raised questions of social and economic control as motions were passed recognising the importance of the motion picture industry, both in terms of entertainment and education.

The importance and far-reaching influence of the Cinema are now generally recognised. The Cinema is not merely a form of entertainment but, in addition, a powerful instrument of education in the widest sense of that term, and, even where it is not used avowedly for purposes of instruction, advertisement, or propaganda, it exercises indirectly a great influence in shaping the ideas of the very large numbers to whom it appeals. Its potentialities in this respect are almost unlimited. . . moreover, it is an undoubted fact that the constant showing of foreign scenes or settings, and the absence of any corresponding showing of Empire scenes or settings, powerfully advertises (the more effectively because indirectly) foreign countries and their products.68

This moved the New Zealand government into other areas of policy, with the implication that Hollywood would have to be contained if a British Imperial film industry was to develop and flourish. From a social control perspective, it was important to limit the level
of perceived ‘Americanisation’ that was resulting from the dominance of Hollywood films. Censorship provided one avenue where excessive US patriotism and overt American values could be controlled and limited. For instance, excessive displays of the US flag or the misleading portrayal of history providing a biased and celebratory view of the United States were edited on occasion. These actions on the part of the censor were not explicitly legislated or set out in formal guidelines, but were taken on his own initiative; nor was New Zealand alone in censoring excessive displays of patriotism. In British Columbia, there were reports of unnecessary scenes showing the US flag being cut; in Australia similar cuts were made.

Economic perspectives also became more important, with the desire to support the struggling British film industry. New Zealand had used a tariff to provide a preference towards British films. But this didn’t seem to moderate the demand for US films, or encourage greater production of British films. A quota proposal was put forward during the Imperial Conference with the suggestion that this would be an effective approach in encouraging British films. That New Zealand would quickly follow in proposing a similar quota to Great Britain demonstrates the closeness that New Zealand felt towards Britain, though not without reservations been voiced as to the ability of British production companies to produce sufficient quality films to meet quota requirements. The 1927 bill, continuing legislation for the quota would lapse, however, with the end of the parliamentary session. A revised bill would follow in 1928 that incorporated the quota, along with updating other pieces of legislation related to the industry.

Physical Safety

Physical safety considerations were, and still are, primarily the purview of local authorities in New Zealand. At the beginning of the period, building codes were established and enforced locally, and likewise when the influenza pandemic arrived in New Zealand in late 1918, it was local authorities (at least in part) that took the initiative to close public halls and places of entertainment, such as cinemas. This responsibility at the local level for the safety and well-being of citizens dated back to the 1867 Municipal Corporations Act, but with the potential fire hazard that cinematograph film presented, legislation was introduced into New Zealand in 1925 introducing government oversight at
The national level for safety considerations. Prior to this, regulation was based at the municipal level, resulting in considerable differences between one place and another, with no regulation existing outside of the municipalities at all.\textsuperscript{71}

The unstable and inflammable nature of nitrate film stock had been known for a number of years, with a departmental committee in Great Britain in 1913 recommending that there be legislative measures to ensure the safe handling and storage of cinematograph film. War intervened and temporary measures were incorporated into the Defence of the Realm Regulations for the duration of the war, with specific legislation not passed in Great Britain until 1922.\textsuperscript{72} Other countries followed suit after this, with New Zealand providing regulations under the 1920 Explosives and Dangerous Goods Act, in 1925 for cinematographic film.\textsuperscript{73} This put in place guidelines and safeguards for the handling, transport, projection and storage of cinematograph films.

The designation of celluloid film as a dangerous good introduced a new regulator into the process. The Chief Inspector of Explosives, R. Girling-Butcher, as the responsible officer for the Explosives and Dangerous Goods Act, had cinematograph film added to his responsibilities. From this point he rose quickly to become a key figure in the government regulation of cinema. Under the 1928 Cinematograph Films Act, he was to add the designation--Chief Inspector of Films, and after the 1934 hearings, would become responsible for the licensing of theatres. Girling-Butcher would continue to be an important government figure in the film industry until the 1948 Parliamentary enquiry. Over that period, he became involved in the registration and licensing of theatres for quota purposes, as well as providing the Minister of Finance in 1930 with the suggestion to introduce a new form of taxation targeting the distributors, leading to the brief trade war later that year. At the government hearings into the industry in 1928, 1934 and 1948, he played an important informational and support role for the members of the respective committees. His papers were a key resource for this research project.

Although physical safety was one of the base level imperatives in the policy imperatives model, the government had little impetus to act until there was Imperial legislation in place. Once the British parliament had passed the Celluloid and Cinematograph Films Act, the New Zealand government followed suit, though it took another three years before regulations were introduced. These were subsequently
incorporated into the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928 as part of the revision of the cinematograph film legislation.

**Moral Safety**

There was greater concern during the silent period around the issue of censorship. Although Jolliffe had established himself as an independent arbiter of what was acceptable or unacceptable in films screened in New Zealand, this didn’t stop the Minister of Internal Affairs from attempting to dictate what was to be considered unacceptable content in 1917, 1921 and again in 1926.74 These approaches by the Minister were, on each occasion, following public pressure, but as noted earlier, it is unclear that these approaches had any impact on the censorship at all.

There was, however, an amendment made to the Cinematograph-film Censorship Act in 1926, giving the Governor-General the power to issue regulations regarding the censorship of posters and advertising materials.75 Previously film posters had been controlled under the Municipal Corporations Act in 1908 and the Indecent Publications Act in 1910. Accompanying regulations for the censorship of posters were not posted, however, until 1930 following the passing of the Cinematograph Films Act of 1928, and there is no evidence to suggest that the censor started reviewing advertisements and posters prior to then.

**Social Control and Development**

Censorship was the main tool used for social control during the silent era. The Griffith film, *Intolerance* (1916) was the touchstone for the greatest amount of controversy during the silent era. In Britain, the portrayal of representations of Jesus Christ was forbidden, and some of the New Zealand public felt the same should apply in New Zealand. In that instance (and many others) Jolliffe allowed the film to continue and it was not withdrawn.

One area where censorship as a means of social control was more apparent during the silent period was in the censorship of films for New Zealand’s Pacific colonies (Samoa, Cook Islands and Niue). As was the case elsewhere in the British Empire, films that threatened the image of European racial superiority would be cut. In the early days of the
Samoan administration (probably during the First World War), the External Affairs Department in Wellington would censor films before they were sent to Samoa. Michael Field recounts how J.D. Gray, the head of the External Affairs Department on one occasion had comic films replaced with *Cinderella* and a news reel of the Prince of Wales’ visit to New Zealand, as the comic films were considered “vulgar and undignified.” Later, the film censor took over the censorship duties and Field quotes from a memo that W.A. Tanner wrote (censor from 1927-38):

> One of the principal concerns in Samoa is to see that the white man is not brought into contempt by the exhibition of films which would tend to lessen the respect of the natives for the white man, which is so essential. From the motives of safety this is necessary in a territory where the natives heavily outnumber the whites. Even a picture with the famous dog Rin Tin Tin would be questionable as the dog frequently xxx and overcomes the villain – a white man.  

New Zealand was both coloniser and colonised. Interestingly, the same questions did not seem to arise in relation to New Zealand, as there was no mention of films being censored because of the presence of the Māori, or Māori being restricted from attending film screenings due to the material screened. But in Samoa, where their presence was resented and they were in the minority, they resorted to a similar stance found in other colonial territories.

An issue that had been raised shortly after the appointment of Jolliffe was introduction of a rating system to restrict the screening of films to children. Although the Minister of Internal Affairs and department head both felt that one should be introduced, they did not force the issue. The issue was revisited in 1920 with a new minister, and on this occasion it was agreed to introduce two classes of film classification: U suitable for a general (or universal) audience, and A for films only considered suitable for adults, following the approach taken in Great Britain. The rationale behind this was that the ultimate responsibility for children’s viewing lay with their parents, and the classification code would assist them in their decisions.

**Economic imperative**

The economic imperatives behind government policy or regulation of the industry began initially as another form of government revenue-gathering through taxation and
customs duties. An Amusements Tax was introduced in 1917 as a revenue measure during the war and levied at the rate of 1p for each shilling or portion thereof.\textsuperscript{79} Cinema wasn’t singled out in this as the tax was levied on all forms of amusements including sports, flower and agricultural shows, theatre and the cinema. The tax was reviewed in 1922, exempting many of the not-for-profit, educational or charitable events, but leaving the levy in place for cinema tickets. During the debate for the second reading of the Amusements Tax Bill in 1922, Michael Joseph Savage, the MP for Auckland West and later the first Labour Prime Minister, argued against the tax as the burden of it was carried by those on low incomes.\textsuperscript{80} Although his arguments were ignored, it highlighted that in that particular case the taxation burden was carried by the theatre-goer rather than the exhibitors themselves. This would later come up with the issue of film-hire tax in 1928 and again in 1930, where there was a conscious effort to find an additional form of taxation that did not fall on either the audience or the exhibitors (particularly the small, marginal operations).

Customs duties were also levied on film during the period. Duties were levied on a wide range of goods imported into New Zealand, typically based on a percentage of the cost of the underlying goods. The value of the goods was based on the cost of production. In the case of cinematograph films, customs duty was levied at the rate of 1p per foot, which effectively assigned a standard value to all film, no matter the cost or subsequent value. This meant that films were taxed on a flat basis rather than relative to their income earning potential. This anomaly was what led to the proposed film hire tax in the 1928 Cinematograph Films Bill, subsequently introduced in the 1930 budget. Films from within the British Empire were exempt from the customs duty to provide an incentive for their import, but in reality this appears to have had little effect. Leading up to the introduction of the bill in 1927, there was the suggestion to raise the duty to 3p per foot for non-British films to encourage the introduction of British films; however, the Hon. W.D. Stewart stated that:

\begin{quote}
the duty would not encourage the introduction of British films as well as the quota system which is now being tried out in Britain . . . threepence might be passed on to the public – we did not intend this to happen as the tax was not proposed for revenue purposes, but to assist the British industry . . . \textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

The quota introduced in Great Britain was seen to be more effective than Customs duties in encouraging British films to be exhibited in New Zealand.
Discussion of quotas began in New Zealand around the same time the idea was floated in Great Britain, months ahead of the 1926 Imperial Conference. Although there was dissent from exhibitors in Britain, the response in New Zealand was more neutral. Following the Imperial Conference, the New Zealand government moved to develop its own Cinematograph Films Bill, following the lines of the British version. Aside from taxes for general revenue purposes, this was the first example of overt regulation for economic reasons in New Zealand, though again following the lead of the British Parliament. Although the initial version of the Cinematograph Films Bill lapsed with the end of the Parliamentary session, it set the groundwork for a more extensive bill, which would be introduced in 1928.

With the lapse of the Cinematograph Films Bill at the end of 1927, the period of relative inactivity by the government in film policy in New Zealand came to an end. The bill raised the ire of everyone in the industry and intense negotiations followed as a new, more comprehensive bill was debated with industry stakeholders prior to its introduction to Parliament. The basis for censorship set in the early part of the period would continue for many years with little need for government intervention or change. The next chapter outlines the most active period for the government in film policy in the pre-Second World War years.
Endnotes


2 Belich, 2001, 96. With a population of about 1.15 million, this meant that 9% of the total New Zealand population was engaged in the war in Europe, or 42% of men of military age. They subsequently suffered a 58% casualty rate (killed and wounded), and had one of the highest casualty and death rates per capita of any country involved in the war.

3 Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 19-20.

4 Foster Report, Part II, 6.

5 *Cinematograph-film Censorship Act, 1916, No. 10* (New Zealand).

6 ibid.

7 James W. Brodie. 'Jolliffe, William - Biography', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3j7/1; J.R.S. Daniels and D.J. Moore, ‘Film Censorship in New Zealand,’ Advisory and Research Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1969, 3, NZNA, IA 1 Acc W1893 64/123/1 Cinema Films – Cinematograph Film – Review of Legislation and Policies (Censorship). Although this is given as his official date of employment, J. Hislop, the Under Secretary for Internal Affairs was already sending memo’s to Jolliffe on 13th September, 1916. See J. Hislop to W. Jolliffe, 13th September, 1916, NZNZ, IA 83 Envelope No. 9 Mr Jolliffe’s Papers – General 1916-1923. Note that his name is frequently misspelled with one ‘l’ throughout the records. 16th September 1916 was also Jolliffe’s 65th birthday.

8 ibid.


10 Fraser Film Release & Photographic Co., Ltd. to William Jolliffe, 22 November, 1916, NZNA, IA 83 Env. 10 Mr Jolliffe’s Correspondence 1916-17. Fraser Film Release was based in Sydney, Australia, but had an Auckland branch.

11 Based on figures in the *Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives*. One reel of film was approximately 825 feet, which lasted 9 minutes.

12 Jolliffe to Minister of Internal Affairs, 28th September, 1917, NZNA, IA 83 Env. 9 Mr Jolliffe’s Papers – General 1916-23.

13 Jolliffe to Minister of Internal Affairs, 28th September, 1917, NZNA, IA 83 Env. 9 Mr Jolliffe’s Papers – General 1916-23. Jolliffe mentioned his salary was £500, while his operator was paid ‘a pittance.’ Total fees for the 1917-18 year came to £1,950 17s 6d (*Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1918, H22, 8).

14 Jolliffe to Hon. G.W. Russell, Minister of Internal Affairs, 24th April, 1918, NZNA IA 83 Env. 9 Mr Jolliffe’s Papers – General 1916-23.

15 Russell to Jolliffe, 27th May, 1918, NZNA IA 83 Env. 9 Mr Jolliffe’s Papers – General 1916-23.

16 Jonathan Dennis, 'McDonald, James Ingram - Biography', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1-Sep-10 URL: http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3m5/1

22 IA 83 Env. 9 Mr Jolliffe’s Papers – General 1916-23 (NZNA), contain copies of a number of memorandums that Jolliffe made to the Minister of Internal Affairs in response to the letters. A transcript of a September meeting between the Minister of Internal Affairs and a deputation of exhibitors reveals that many films were continuing to circulate within New Zealand from prior to the introduction of censorship, and it was those films, the Minister suggested, that were causing many of the complaints.
23 Department of Internal Affairs to Jolliffe, 31st July, 1917, NZNA, AAAC Acc. W4156 4 3/7/7 Censorship of Cinematograph Films in NZ – Ministerial Correspondence.
24 Jolliffe to the Under-Secretary of Internal Affairs, 21st August, 1917, NZNA, AAAC Acc. W4156 4 3/7/7 Censorship of Cinematograph Films in NZ – Ministerial Correspondence.
25 Minister of Internal Affairs to Jolliffe, 28th January, 1921, NZNA, AAAC Acc. W4156 4 3/7/7 Censorship of Cinematograph Films in NZ – Ministerial Correspondence.
26 G.F. Newton, Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs to W. Tanner, Censor of Cinematograph-films, January, 1931, NZNA, AAAC Acc. W4156 4 3/7/7 Censorship of Cinematograph Films in NZ – Ministerial Correspondence.
27 Minister of Internal Affairs to Jolliffe, 4th August, 1926, NZNA, AAAC Acc. W4156 4 3/7/7 Censorship of Cinematograph Films in NZ – Ministerial Correspondence.
28 Foster Report, Part II, 7. Warner First National were the only studio releasing films in New Zealand in the ‘sound-on-disc’ format, and this was relatively short-lived.
32 J.R.S. Daniels and D.J. Moore, ‘Film Censorship in New Zealand,’ Advisory and Research Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1969, 6, 12, NZNA, IA 1 Acc W1893 64/123/1 Cinema Films – Cinematograph Film – Review of Legislation and Policies (Censorship).
35 ibid.


40 Clive Sowry, “Morton, Cyril James – Biography,” from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m64/1; David Newman, “The Image of New Zealand as Portrayed in the Films of the Government Publicity Office, 1922-1930” (paper for HIST 316 New Zealand Social History, Department of History, Victoria University of Wellington, 1984), identifies 266 films produced by the GPO, with another five (all scenics) omitted from the study and later noted in the margins. Sowry, in New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History, notes some other titles such as New Zealand in a Hundred Minutes (1923) not included in the Newman study.


43 ibid., 83. Many of these visitors would have attended multiple times as the total population of New Zealand at the time was 1.4 million. This speaks to the importance of the exhibitions as a leisure and tourist activity at the time.

44 ibid.

45 ibid.

46 NB Freeman, MGM (Australia) to the Secretary of the Publicity Committee, 25th January, 1926, NZNA, TO 49/18 part 1 Films – Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Films Ltd – General File.

47 Clive Sowry, “Non-Fiction Films: Between the Wars,” in Diane Pivac (ed.) with Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald, New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 83

48 MGM (Sydney) to Schmitt, Australian Representative for the New Zealand Government, 9, July, 1930, NZNA, TO 49/18 part 1 Films – Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Films Ltd – General File.


50 ibid., 84.
52 ibid.
53 ibid.
54 ibid.; Anne Salmond, “James McDonald,” in Diane Pivac (ed.) with Frank Stark and Lawrence McDonald, New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2011), 85.
55 Dickinson and Street, 30.
56 ibid., 32. Jarvie,126.
57 The Committee for the UK bill met through August (Jarvie, Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign, 126).
58 Mr G.C. Clarke, Theatres (Amendment) Bill, Straits Settlements Legislative Council, Monday, 31 October, 1927, Supplement to Straits Settlements Government Gazette, 2nd December, 1927, 6, National Archives of Singapore (NAS), NL 1218, microfilm 3840. What is puzzling is the Honourable G.C. Clarke’s suggestion that formal requirements for the quota had been withdrawn after being proposed in New Zealand. The formal requirements for exhibitors were only made voluntary late in the legislative process for the 1928 bill, a more comprehensive bill than the initial bill introduced. A report from the US Consulate in Wellington regarding the legislation is dated November 28, 1927, which seems a long lag time (W.R. Lowrie, ‘Proposed Law Regulating Cinema Films,’ November 28, 1927, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1910-29, Singapore, Box 8931, 847H.4061 Motion Pictures/7).
60 ibid., 2.
61 ibid., 2-3.
63 ibid., 188.
64 ibid., 190-191.
Information on early building codes in New Zealand are sketchy, but seem to have been established and enforced locally until the 1931 Napier Earthquake, at which time the government moved on a national level to develop the first building code with specific guidelines to improve building performance during earthquakes. These came into force in 1935. See http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/earthquake/regs.html; L.M. Megget, “From brittle to ductile: 75 years of seismic design in New Zealand,” (Keynote address delivered at New Zealand Society for Earthquake Engineering 2006 Conference), Retrieved from http://db.nzsee.org.nz/2006/Paper01.pdf.

Response to the influenza pandemic, URL: http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/1918-influenza-pandemic/response, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 4-Nov-2008. There is little available about this period in New Zealand history, although it killed nearly as many New Zealanders as their involvement in the First World War. Belich (2001) quotes a passage from Geoffrey Rice, Black November: The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in New Zealand (1988), 2 (113), which implies there was a nationwide decree regarding closing of most public services, but the New Zealand History online site suggests actions were also initiated at the local level.

Foster Report, Pt II, 15.

The Celluloid and Cinematograph Films Act, 1922. 12 & 13 Geo. 5 c. 35, An Act to make better provision for the prevention of fires in premises where raw celluloid or cinematograph film is stored or used. Originally a department committee had recommended the legislation in 1913, but that had been interrupted by the First World War, with temporary provision incorporated into the Defence of the Realm Regulations for the duration of the war [See Earl of Onslow, House of Lords Hansard, June 20, 1922, George V year 13, columns 971-990, Fifth Series, Vol. 50.]

Foster Report, Pt. II., 16.

J.R.S. Daniels and D.J. Moore, “Film Censorship in New Zealand’, Advisory and Research Branch, Department of Internal Affairs,1969. NZNA, IA 1 Acc W1893 64/123/1 Cinema Films – Cinematograph Film – Review of Legislation and Policies (Censorship).


Michael J. Field, Mau: Samoa’s struggle against New Zealand oppression (Wellington: AH & AW Reed, 1984), 69. This probably happened in 1920 or soon after as the only visit by the Prince of Wales during that period was in early 1920. There was a version of Cinderella released in 1914 by Famous Players starring Mary Pickford (dir. James Kirkwood).

ibid., quoting from Tanner to Internal Affairs, 31st October, 1929, NZNA, IT 84/1 Censorship of films for Samoa 1920-36.


M.J. Savage, debate on 2nd Reading of Amusements-tax Bill. New Zealand, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, October 3, 1922, Vol. 197, 502. Although Savage specifically mentioned picture-theatre admissions during the debate, much more contentious was the taxation of that sacred cow in New Zealand, sport.

Extract from The Dominion, 5th October 1927, Exhibit 3, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.

“Film Industry,” Evening Post, 20th February, 1926. NZNA, IA 83 1 Quota in New Zealand 1926-32.
Chapter 8: New Zealand, 1928-1934

Overview of the period

The activity by the New Zealand government in the area of screen policy in the years from 1928 onwards mirrored what was happening elsewhere in the British Empire. The period opened with relative prosperity in New Zealand as the world economy continued to recover from the First World War and recession of the early twenties. Stock markets were booming and the cinema business experiencing considerable prosperity with the introduction of talkies. However, this all changed at the end of the decade following the initial collapse in the stock markets around the world, followed by the government austerity measures and deflation. New Zealand was no different, as it suffered a severe contraction in its export trade, subsequent rise in unemployment and tightening of government finances.

It was also a period of consolidation within the industry as chains of cinemas started to form and independent cinemas increasingly cooperated in ‘buying pools’ to maintain some buying power. In a process of growth and consolidation common in many industries, the period initially saw the growth of a number of competing cinemas chains based on geographic locations, and then with increasing competition, a process of consolidation began. Two major groupings emerged by the time of the 1934 Commission of Inquiry. Amalgamated, backed by Fox Film Corporation (subsequently Twentieth-Century Fox), and the “Combine,” a number of circuits that formed cooperative buying pools and agreements to limit the competition for films from the distributors (thus minimising their costs) and to limit competition within specific locations (thus maximise profits). The “Combine” would eventually become the Kerridge-Odeon Group, the only real competitor to Amalgamated in post-Second World War New Zealand. Henry Hayward, the dominant exhibitor in New Zealand at the 1928 Select Committee Hearings, had by 1934 lost most of his former cinema empire and was running a small chain of cinemas in suburban Auckland.
Government intervention in the cinema industry became increasingly overt during this period with a Select Committee hearing evidence in consideration of the Cinematograph Films Bill in 1928, a trade war with Hollywood over taxation of distributors revenues in 1930, hastily introduced regulations for cinema licensing in 1932 (subsequently declared *ultra vires* by the New Zealand Court of Appeal), and a Commission of Inquiry into the industry in 1934. On occasion, there were calls for the nationalisation of the industry; however, this was never seriously considered. Government involvement in production also continued during this time, though at a low level given the financial constraints of the period.

**Parliament intervenes**

**1928 Select Committee on Cinematograph Films Bill**

Following the lapse of the Cinematograph Bill with the end of the 1927 Parliamentary session, legislators, officers from the Department of Internal Affairs, and members of the industry began negotiating details of a revised and more comprehensive bill. Nichols, the officer from the British Foreign Office mentioned in the introduction to this section, noted in his April 6th report to London that a couple of days earlier he had witnessed heated discussions taking place between Berendsen (advisor to the Prime Minister as well as Imperial Affairs), the officer responsible for enforcement from the Department of Internal Affairs (probably the Chief Inspector of Explosives, Girling-Butcher) and representatives of the exhibitors over the Film Quota Bill. Little additional information is available, but it is apparent that negotiations continued on for some months during the first half of 1928.

The bill was finally ready for its first reading in Parliament on the 7th August 1928. The Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Gordon Coates, introduced it, and it was immediately referred to the Industries and Commerce Committee to consider and to conduct hearings. That the Prime Minister introduced the bill and was a member of the committee considering the bill, illustrates the importance given to it and the industry. This is further supported by the direct negotiations that the Prime Minister had with the Motion Picture Distributors Association (MPDA) of Australia and New Zealand, both at the time of these hearings and in later years.
The first meeting of the select committee on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of August was brief. The Honourable Mr. Harris was selected to head the committee, and Wednesdays were designated as the normal hearing day.\textsuperscript{5} One lawyer, O.C. Mazengarb, played a particularly important role through the hearings, questioning the witnesses and shaping the arguments against the bill. Mazengarb was a Wellington-based lawyer, who represented the MPDA of Australia and New Zealand. Joining him throughout the hearings, although playing a less prominent role, was James Robertson, the Secretary of the Motion Picture Exhibitors Association of New Zealand. Also present throughout the proceedings, though mainly silent until the end, was Harold Johnston, counsel representing British Dominion Films, a newly established distributor based in Australia and focused on the distribution of British films. Johnston would later become the New Zealand representative for the MPDA of Australia and New Zealand, and play an important role in the 1930 film hire tax negotiations.

The revised bill was more comprehensive than the 1927 version. The decision had been made to amalgamate all of the legislative provisions dealing with cinematograph film into the one piece of legislation. As a result, the censorship provisions from the 1916 Act and provisions for safety regulations around the safe handling and transport of film were added to the bill. During the committee hearings, reference was frequently made to the Australian Royal Commission into the Motion Picture Industry, which had completed its hearings earlier in 1928 after sitting for some nine months and extensive travel through Australia hearing from over two hundred and fifty witnesses.\textsuperscript{6} The New Zealand bill followed the Imperial Act in Britain much closer than the recommendations from the Australian Royal Commission.

The bill itself was split into seven parts: Censorship of Films and Posters (Part I), Registration of Films (Part II), Storage, Transport, and Projection of Films (Part III), Quota of British Films (Part IV), Restrictions with Respect to Film Contracts (Part V), Film Hire-tax (Part VI), and provision for the appointment of an Advisory Committee (Part VII). Parts I (censorship) and III (storage and related safety) were not contentious, as they were updates of existing legislation. The issue of the quota for British films, restrictions on film contracts, and film taxation were the issues that were to receive the most attention and opposition from the industry.
In anticipation of the bill being introduced (they had been consulted about the provisions in the bill earlier in the year), the Conference of Motion Picture Exhibitors had prepared a submission that the Dominion Secretary of the New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors Association submitted to the committee. In it, they highlighted their concerns over Parts II and III (registration of films and the film quota, the order changed subsequently), which they felt were the most important provisions of the bill. The registration of the films provided the machinery for the quota provisions to function, and they felt that these “form an exceedingly clumsy, laborious, and costly method of attaining the Government’s objective.” The Exhibitors Association felt that the British Cinematograph Act would automatically result in a flow of British films to New Zealand, while there was no need to foster a film production industry in New Zealand, as it was unlikely that there would be an industry of any size for many years. As an alternative, the MPEA suggested that the Government set up a Film Board of Trade to meet its objective, made up of representatives from the exhibitors, distributors, government and public, and empower them to make regulations in areas affecting the industry, such as formation of quotas.

The first day of proper hearings began on 15th August, with O.C. Mazengarb-- a lawyer representing the MPDA of Australia and New Zealand, Harold Johnston-- the lawyer representing the British Dominion Films Company, John Robertson-- Secretary of the New Zealand Motion Pictures Exhibitors Association, Ernest Hunt-- a Public Accountant and Auditor, and Sir Victor Wilson-- the President of the MPDA of Australia and New Zealand. Wilson would be a key witness during the committee hearings, appearing before the committee on four of the seven days the committee held public hearings. A total of twenty-two witnesses appeared before the Select Committee.

Mazengarb, counsel for the MPDA, was the first to present his opening address. There were a number of objections they had to the bill, some of which were of a more minor nature, such as the constitution of the Advisory Committee under clause 41 of the bill, as well as clause 39 of the bill relating to blind bookings and the right of rejection. The major issues were the clauses providing for a quota of British films to be imported and exhibited, particularly the quota for renters, and the issue of film hire tax. For both of those issues, Mazengarb later called witnesses to further argue the case. The representative
for the British Dominion Films Company, Harold Johnston, had little to say in his opening address, noting that they were there to thank Parliament for including the preference for British films in the bill, but that they did support some of the technical objections made by Mr. Mazengarb.\(^{13}\)

John Robertson, the Secretary of the New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors Association, followed, outlining that they felt the bill was cumbersome and unnecessary, believing that the quota of British films required to be shown in the bill would be shown anyway, regardless of whether it was required in legislation or not. He introduced some specific recommendations for changes. Firstly, that the clauses referring to inclusion of short films in the quota should be changed to exclude all short films (films under three thousand feet). The next change requested was in clause 33 dealing with the exhibitors quota, where he asked that all “long-run” theatres be exempted from the quota requirements.\(^{14}\) Changes were also requested to clause 37, which dealt with limitations of the length of contract, to allow the contract to run for twelve months from the date of the first screening in each theatre. Robertson then revealed a practice that renters used of requiring exhibitors to sign a contract, but not immediately signing it from their side, nor leaving a copy of the contract, thus binding the exhibitor, but not the renter. A request was made for the amendment of the rejection clause, changing the five percent figure to “five long films.”\(^{15}\) The final request was to limit the quota schedule to six years, as after that time it was felt that British films should have become sufficiently established to survive on their own merit.\(^{16}\)

The major testimony and questioning from the committee was of Sir Victor Wilson, President of the Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia and New Zealand, and effectively the representative of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America in Australasia.\(^{17}\) After his initial address on the 15\(^{th}\) August, Wilson continued to be the focus of the committee the following week (21\(^{st}\) and 22\(^{nd}\) August) with cross-examinations from the committee, as well as Berendson, Robertson and Johnston.

When asked about the quota, Wilson indicated that although they believed it would be introduced, the MPDA didn’t believe it would be necessary if a tariff was introduced providing a preference for British films, as was planned in Australia, as “... every British film of any standing has been shown in Australia and New Zealand.”\(^{18}\) He
compared the quota requirements in the bill for both renters and exhibitors with the situation in Australia where only the exhibitors’ quota existed, and the exhibitor had no difficulty obtaining sufficient films. In his opinion, there was no need for a renter’s quota.\(^{19}\) The presence in New Zealand of a British distribution company dedicated to the distribution of British films, he thought, obviated the need for the American companies to also supply a specific level of British films, and they may, as a result, have difficulties obtaining sufficient films to distribute.

Mazengarb then directed the questions towards taxation and the impact on the industry. When asked if the companies would continue to be able to show a profit in New Zealand after paying 12½% tax on gross revenues, Wilson prevaricated and said that the individual companies would have to comment on their own figures.\(^{20}\)

The questioning of Wilson continued the next day (22\(^{nd}\) August), before the committee went on to hear evidence from J.A. Sixsmith-- Secretary and Director of Famous Players Lasky Films Corporation, C.F. Eskell-- General Manager of Universal Films Australia, along with Rowland Hill-- Secretary of Universal Film. The questioning turned to the objections Wilson had against the quota, though he recognised that some kind of quota was needed at the exhibitor’s level. His objections against a renter’s quota were threefold. The first was that the preference in Britain made it unnecessary in New Zealand, since British organisations would distribute films produced by British producers.\(^{21}\) A company had been set up in Australia to do this, British Dominion Films Company, which, although not yet fully operational, was represented at the committee hearings by Harold Johnson. The second objection was that due to the presence of this British company, it was likely that only some of the American renters would be able to obtain sufficient films to meet the quota (mainly those producing their own films in Britain), and for the remainder it would be a highly competitive environment. Concern was expressed that there may be insufficient British films for all of the renters to be able to meet their quota.\(^{22}\) The third objection was towards a related matter, the right of rejection, which was not linked to enabling British films to be exhibited, nor was there any requirement that the replacement films be obtained through the company the contract was with.\(^{23}\)

Over the next few days, a number of other witnesses spoke to the Committee, beginning with the representatives from the major film companies – Fox Film, United...
Artists, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Famous Players Lasky Films and Universal Films. Following the US film companies, local stakeholders, including Henry Hayward, head of Fuller-Hayward Picture Enterprises, the largest group of exhibitors in New Zealand, his nephew--filmmaker Rudall Hayward, as well as local exhibitors, presented their viewpoints to the committee.

On Tuesday, 28th of August following presentations from a number of independent exhibitors, and examination of John Robertson as a witness for the exhibitors, Sir Victor Wilson was recalled for further questioning. That evening, a special screening was organised for the committee, which included a feature film organised by Universal showing Māori life in New Zealand.

The hearings on Wednesday, 29th August, were to be the last in which witnesses were called to give evidence and focused on those supporting the British film industry. Harold Johnston, the counsel for the British Dominions Film Company, made his statement and was questioned by the committee. The film censor, Walter Tanner, followed, along with representatives of two small companies distributing British and Continental European films. Johnston presented that the company had been formed in expectation that a quota would be established for both exhibitors and renters; however, if the company was to be taxed in the way outlined in the bill, then it would make it difficult for them to operate in New Zealand. Under the terms of their contract with British producers, British Dominion would remit to the producers 55% of the rents received, with the remaining 45% to cover all of the expenses and provide profits. The turnover tax proposed would shrink their portion to 37.5%, and there would have to be approximately a 20% increase in box office revenue to cover that. Johnston also provided support for the twelve-month contract period to begin from the date of the first screening rather than date of signing. In terms of the renters quota, he noted that although he had been instructed to support its elimination (it isn’t clear by whom), their mandate was to support the British production industry and they would be content with any measures the committee felt were necessary to fulfil this aim. Johnston called one witness, the censor, to comment on the number of British films that had passed through it office and had been rejected.

Tanner, in his role of censor, was able to provide the committee with statistics of British and non-British films passing through his office. One interesting comment he made
was that the Australian film, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927), failed to meet the requirement for it to be a British film, although he didn’t go on to explain as to why that was the case. From August 1926 through to the end of July 1928, sixty-two British features (excluding *For the Term of His Natural Life*) had been submitted for censorship with none rejected, while of the 1,230 foreign films submitted a number had been rejected. For the 1927-28 financial year, 6.7% (39 of 580) of the US films had been rejected, while 23% of other foreign pictures were banned.

The final day of public hearings was on the 31st of August, where Robertson summed up the case for the exhibitors, and Mazengarb gave his final arguments for the distributors. Robertson kept his remarks reasonably short. He repeated the suggestion that the quota be suspended in lieu of exhibitors voluntarily fulfilling the requirements, as suggested earlier in the hearings. In addition, he highlighted four amendments to the legislation sought by exhibitors: the exclusion of short-films to simplify the quota, increasing the contract time to eighteen months to include time for booking ahead of contract commencement, confirmation of contracts within seven days of the exhibitor signing, and the increase in the rejection clause to ten percent from the proposed five percent. In addition, Robertson suggested that the schedule for the quota be brought into line with the British Act by deleting the last two years.

Mazengarb in his final remarks reiterated that the sections to which they objected were Parts IV (renters quota of British or New Zealand films), V (time-limit on the length of contact, with a five percent right of rejection), and VI (imposing a film-hire tax on the gross receipts of renters). He argued that there was no need for a renter’s quota when an adequate number of British films were coming into New Zealand and being screened anyway. Compulsion was unnecessary for something that was already happening on a voluntary basis. The competition that would result from the American distributors if the quota came into effect, would impact the three companies more exclusively focused on British films, and what was more important was that there would be sufficient British films overall to meet the exhibitors quota requirements.

The strongest objections were reserved for the proposed tax on gross revenues of the distributors (renters). The first objection was that taxation on the film industry in New Zealand was already higher than in Australia, and the proposed tax would take it to double
the rate in Australia. Secondly, Mazengarb noted that the majority of film exchanges (distributors) in New Zealand were already showing a greater percentage of profit to turnover than other forms of trading companies in New Zealand. As a result, they were also paying a higher level of income tax.

Thirdly, the tax proposed would result in most of the renters showing huge losses on their New Zealand operations, causing them to restructure how they operate their business, possibly withdrawing from New Zealand altogether if they weren’t able to pass the tax onto the exhibitors and audiences. And lastly, the proposed tax would put out of business the distributors wholly owned and operated within New Zealand and Australia. The levels of tax proposed would immediately cause the companies to suffer losses, which would result in them going out of existence very quickly. The tax, he argued, would be very inconvenient, as distributors would have to maintain a dual set of accounts to calculate the taxes on films separately from collateral materials.

Within these arguments, Mazengarb presented a suggestion that the film hire tax should instead be based on profits, with a fixed percentage of turnover being represented as a floor or minimum level of profit (he suggested five percent), and then the greater of either actual profits or the minimum level of profit based on gross receipts, attracting the normal level of income tax. He noted that only thirteen percent of the gross box-office revenues from cinemas left the country. This argument seemed to have influenced the committee in their subsequent deliberations and changes to the bill.

The committee then adjourned until 13th September, when the bill was considered clause-by-clause, along with a list of suggested amendments introduced by the Prime Minister. At the outset, it was agreed to drop the film-hire tax from the legislation, although it would come back in another form in 1930. In its place, a clause was inserted that the deemed taxable income would not be less than $12.5\%$ of gross receipts, yielding clearly a fraction of the tax, but ensuring that the distribution companies would be paying a minimal level of income tax. The provisions for quota films were simplified. Instead of following the British lead, and incorporating both short and long films into the quota requirements, it was agreed to only include films longer than three thousand feet in length, effectively removing short films from the quota requirements. Specific mention of New Zealand-produced films was also omitted from the bill, including them in the more general
term of ‘British’ films. The inclusion of New Zealand films in the bill is interesting, as the local production industry at the time was very small, and there weren’t ambitions to significantly increase the size of the industry. The provision was, if anything, purely of a symbolic nature.

The revised bill passed rapidly through the House of Representatives and Legislative Council with the third reading in the house on the 18th September 1928, followed by the Legislative Council on the 26th September. The 1928 Cinematograph Act would remain in force (with amendments along the way) until 1961.

**Film Hire Tax & Trade War with Hollywood**

By the mid-1930s, the Great Depression was beginning to impact the New Zealand economy and society, and the government began looking for additional sources of revenue to balance its budget. Attention was drawn to the motion picture industry with the reputed large sums being remitted back to Hollywood. It was also apparent to the government that in a period (since the 1928 Select Committee) when the revenue earned by the renters had increased by nearly 100%, the customs duties collected had decreased by 28%. There was a general perception among the public and politicians that the Hollywood distributors were evading taxes in some way. The government was aware that by charging a Customs Duty on a per foot basis, they were failing to tax based on the differing economic values of different films. This principle was to cause much of the disagreement between the New Zealand government and the Hollywood distributors.

In the context of needing to increase tax revenues to make up budget shortfalls, in June 1930, Girling-Butcher, Chief Inspector of Films, proposed two possible approaches to increasing revenue from the motion picture industry, in a way that would ensure the taxes were borne by the renters (distributors), rather than passed on to the cinemas themselves (who were already heavily taxed). The first proposal was for a tax on the gross receipts of the renters, while the alternative was for a form of ad valorem, or added value tax of 25% could be applied to the net income after deduction of certain local expenses. The first proposal was effectively a form of special income tax, and opposed by the Commissioner of Taxation on the principle that it was discriminatory. The second proposal, he felt, merited some further discussion. Most ad valorem taxes were levied at the point of
creation or importation into New Zealand, and were based on a standard percentage added to the costs (thus, added value). This was very difficult with film, however, as it was unknown at the time of importation exactly what the value of the film was. The celluloid strip of film, on which customs duty per foot was already been levied, had little value. The content on the film could be very valuable, depending on audience response. The film hire tax, which had been proposed by the Chief Inspector of Films, was in effect tax on the amount that was assumed would be remitted overseas to film producers and distributors rather than a true *ad valorem* tax.

This tax had originally been proposed as part of the 1928 Cinematograph-films Bill, but had been removed from the bill before it passed into legislation. The initial departmental discussions raised considerable dissent, as the Comptroller of Customs didn’t think it was a customs duty, and thus not his responsibility, while the Commissioner of Taxes felt the proposed tax was discriminatory and fundamentally unsound (as an income tax, although customs duties in themselves tended to be highly discriminatory). The alternative, a true *ad valorem* duty, was difficult to implement as no one knew the actual cost of each movie or what a reasonable attributable cost would be, and even then, it still wouldn’t reflect the differing levels of revenue obtained from each film. However, the proposal from the Chief Inspector of Explosives remained intact, was approved by the Cabinet on 10 July 1930, only a matter of weeks after being suggested, and was included in the budget presented in late July. The new tax, which included anything from within the British Empire, was set at 10% for British films and 25% for non-British films (primarily Hollywood). The Customs Duty of a penny per foot was to remain, although when it became apparent that the potential revenue from the film hire could be higher than initially anticipated, it was privately agreed within government circles that the customs duty could be dropped. This later became a bargaining chip for the government.

The response was explosive, with the film renters immediately making appeals to the Prime Minister (who was also the Minister of Finance) outlining why they believed the proposed new tax was unfair and confiscatory. Following this, Sir Victor Wilson, the President of the Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia and New Zealand (and daughter organization of the MPPDA) made a trip to New Zealand to meet with the government and argue against the imposition of the tax.
Sir Victor Wilson arrived in Wellington in early August and met with Prime Minister Forbes to press upon him the necessity of abandoning the proposed taxation. He suggested that an alternative would be an increase of the per-foot customs duty to raise the additional revenue desired. Wilson guaranteed that the industry would be able to meet the amount the government was looking for and promised that the additional amount wouldn’t be passed onto exhibitors (an event considered highly likely by the government). The Prime Minister was unmoved on this, countering Wilson’s arguments with the problems with the customs duty as it stood at the time. Wilson returned to Australia to continue the advocacy from there warning that a number of distributors might cease business in New Zealand, as it would no longer be profitable. In response, Girling-Butcher, the Chief Inspector of Films, made some comparisons on the tax situation between Australia and New Zealand and ascertained that rentals in New Zealand tended to be higher, while the new taxation was comparable to Australian levels. As there was no suggestion that Hollywood was about to cease operations in Australia, the government was confidently able to maintain its position.

Negotiations continued through August, but there was no change on the part of the government. With the failure to shift the government’s position and the budget bill passing the first reading in Parliament, the edict came from Will Hays in New York that members of the MPPDA were to cease business in New Zealand. By this stage, Prime Minister Forbes had left New Zealand for the Imperial Conference and the Education Minister, Arthur Ransom, had taken over the issue in his role as Acting Prime Minister.

Harold Johnston, the New Zealand representative of the film distributors, met with the Acting Prime Minister on September 2nd to discuss the issue further. The boycott of New Zealand by the distributors, although they refused to characterize it as this and argued that it was actually a lock-out, was already publicly known by this stage. One of the early requests by the distributors was for the new tax to be suspended while the government held an inquiry into its impact. The government had initially refused due to the lengthy and comprehensive 1928 Select Committee inquiry into the industry. First, it wanted to see the results from the tax over the period of a year before considering any changes. In the meeting at the beginning of September, the Acting Prime Minister, Ransom agreed to explore some form of inquiry into the film hire tax, but wouldn’t commit beyond
reconsidering the issue. Based on this statement, Johnston cabled his Australian superiors informing them that there would be some form of inquiry. Sir Victor Wilson quickly returned to New Zealand to continue the discussions, though a subsequent letter from the Acting Prime Minister dated 12th September 1930 informed them there would not be another inquiry.

Initial projections by the government were that the new Film Hire tax would generate approximately £30,000 during the first 9-month period in addition to £30,000 generated from the Customs duty (of one penny per foot). Distributors disputed this figure and suggested that the actual amount was more likely to be between £85,000 and £120,000 per year. Based on this, the government increased their projections to £50,000 and secretly agreed that the customs duty could be removed. The higher figures cited by the distributors was rejected by the government who argued that decreasing business due to the economic conditions would result in lower revenues. The Chief Inspector of Explosives noted that the Customs returns for the first six months of 1930 (January to June) showed the value of American films imported as £96,671, but the statement produced by Sir Victor Wilson showed total revenue of £219,870 for the same period. On this basis, Girling-Butcher claimed that the film business was evidently responsible for a large concealed importation.

The key area of dissension was the form of taxation, and this came up in a number of meetings between the MPDA and the government, leading the Acting Prime Minister to write to the American Consul General complaining that the film industry was attempting to interfere in the internal affairs of New Zealand with its disagreement over forms of taxation. This discontent on the part of the distributors was also apparent in a confidential despatch by the American Consul General in Wellington to the Secretary of State, as the distribution arm of the industry did not want a direct tax on their revenue, which is what the film hire tax was. The per-footage duty already in place was something the distributors liked, as they were able pass the cost straight to the exhibitor and avoid paying it themselves. The New Zealand government recognized that the flat footage duty did not reflect the true value or diversity of revenue generation levels of different films, as it was impossible to project the future revenue of a film at the point of entry. Exhibitors were
already being taxed on the sale of tickets in addition to income taxes, and various property
taxes.

The Exhibitors felt caught in the middle of this, and suggested to the government at
the beginning of October that they should have a three-way round table or conference
between themselves, the renters and the government to try to find a solution to the
impasse. This the government agreed to and a conference was held in the early part of
October. As a result, three recommendations were made to the government:

1. That the 1p per foot customs duty on film be abandoned,
2. That the film hire tax remain in place in the interim while,
3. An inquiry into the film hire tax take place to ascertain its true impact on
   the renters.

Sir Victor Wilson refused to vote on these proposals, as he felt that he was outnumbered by
the exhibitors and the government; however, the government accepted the proposals as a
way forward to solve the boycott. The stumbling block was Sir Victor Wilson and the
renters who would not agree to the proposals.

It was at this point that the New Zealand government began alternative
negotiations. They asked their official Customs representative in New York to begin direct
discussions with the Hays organisation (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of
America), presenting the proposal that had been rejected by Sir Victor Wilson. Wilson,
and the Australian distributors association were unaware of these parallel discussions that
had been initiated. The government also drafted regulations to use against the US
distributors in the event the dispute was prolonged. As part of the Finance Bill introduced
into the House in October, a provision was introduced regarding the assessment of taxable
income for film renters, enabling the government to dramatically increase the assumed
taxable base and, if necessary, backdating it to April 1929 in the event renters decided to
withdraw from New Zealand. In addition, the government gazetted regulations that
would allow them to prohibit the importation of film into New Zealand without the
consent of the Minister of Customs. The date upon which this was to come into force was
left undetermined and up to the Minister of Customs, but clearly was a warning to the
renters/distributors that they could be kept out of New Zealand indefinitely if the dispute
was prolonged.
A report dated October 29th from Bernard Gotlieb, the US Consul in Wellington, outlined what appeared to be a stalemate in what he described as a test case as to “whether American film interests can successfully combat a radically new and prohibitive type of impost on their supplies to foreign markets.” As Parliament had adjourned, there could be no legislative action taken to annul the tax until June the following year. If American producers stuck with their resolve not to accept the New Zealand film hire tax in principle, due to the dangerous precedent it would set, then supplies of American films would dry up within three months. He was of the belief that the New Zealand government would eventually give way and at least suspend the operation of the film hire tax pending an inquiry. He also claimed that a decided weakening was evident in the attitude of the exhibitors who hitherto had been solidly behind the Government. Gotlieb was correct, although he probably was not aware of the extent that exhibitors were calling on the government to come to a compromise and end the dispute.

The MPPDA met in New York on November 7 and agreed to the New Zealand government’s proposal with one small amendment that exhibitor’s representatives not be present at the inquiry when the financials for the renters were presented. The government readily accepted this, and by November 11 they knew they had a deal.

On November 11, Sir Victor Wilson was invited to call upon the Acting Prime Minister at which time he was shown the cable from Stevenson in New York, stating that an agreement had been reached on the basis previously referred to. The Vice Consul, William Cochran, Jr., noted: “Wilson seemed to have been put in the most unenviable position where it appeared that his principals had lost all faith in him and acted not only over his head, but to some extent contrary to his advice.” Cochran suggested that damage had been done to American trade and the feeling between the two countries. From the beginning, the public, the press, the Parliament and the exhibitors had all been hostile to the American film interests. There had been a definite growth of negative feelings towards the United States over the previous six months, in part due to the [threatened] stoppage of films. “This has been viewed by public opinion and the press as an attempt by large American corporations to dictate to the Government of little New Zealand and has consequently been resented” With agreement in place, supply of film soon resumed.
The inquiry began in the United States with the Official Representative of the Customs Department attempting to gather additional financial information on behalf of the Treasury, but with little success. Although Stevenson met with Colonel Herron of the MPPDA at least two times during January 1931 and with Paramount Pictures once, very little information was forthcoming. Little has been recorded subsequent to these meetings suggesting that the issue quietly died. The government felt that the onus was on the distributors to prove that they were being overtaxed. As there was insufficient evidence to prove this, there was no need for further action by the government.

Industry results subsequently demonstrated that there was indeed a reduction in revenues and taxes. For the first nine months ending March 1931, taxes collected were £47,592, and the tax subsequently decreased annually through the Depression. Although there a number of factors that could explain the decreases in film hire tax revenue, the major one was simply the Depression and resultant reductions in ticket revenue, along with the increase in numbers of British films shown (with a 10% rather than 25% tax levied).

The “Combine”

The “Combine” arose out of a desire by four of the exhibition chains to avoid competing among themselves for film supplies, and thus pushing up the cost of the films. In 1932, Fuller-Hayward, John Fuller & Sons, J.C. Williamson Picture Corp and Kemball Theatres formed a number of agreements with one another to collaborate and form buying pools for films in localities where they were competing, thus minimising the cost of their film supplies and increasing their buying power with the distributors (renters). As a result, they were able to pressure the renters to reserve the best pictures for their cinemas rather than any competing independent cinemas in the area. The four chains participating in these agreements became dubbed the “Combine” in line with the similarly named ‘Combine’ in Australia. In addition to the four formal members of the “Combine,” two other chains were informally associated with the ‘Combine,” either through majority shareholding, as was the case of Christchurch Cinemas, or a joint venture, as was the case with R.J. Kerridge in Gisborne. In both cases, it was highly likely that both
organisations benefitted from their association with the “Combine” when it came to negotiating film supplies from the distributors.

Each of the companies was strong in particular localities. Fuller-Hayward was the strongest of the group, with cinemas in each of the main centres except for Christchurch (although they were the major shareholder in Christchurch Cinemas, and so indirectly they were in a dominant position) as well as a number of the major towns. In Wellington, they were relatively weak with only one theatre in the city. Kemball Theatres was strong in the Wellington area, particularly in regards to first-run cinemas in Wellington city. J.C. Williamson Pictures had a couple of theatres in each of the main centres, as well as a few of the larger towns, and jointly operated with Kemball a number of theatres in the larger towns in the lower North Island. John Fuller & Sons had a smaller circuit, primarily owning (rather than leasing) first-run theatres in the major centres, though with holdings in Australian cinemas as well. By the 1934 Committee of Inquiry, John Fuller & Sons had effectively become a subsidiary of Fuller-Hayward, and so Girling-Butcher only referred to three companies in his briefing to the Committee of Inquiry.\textsuperscript{84}

With the strength that came with the pooled buying agreements, the individual companies in the “Combine” began to aggressively move on competing independent cinemas, or expand into towns where only independent cinemas operated. On the one hand, the companies were suffering financially as a result of the Great Depression and earlier building during the height of the boom.\textsuperscript{85} Fuller-Hayward, previously the flagship of Henry Hayward’s cinema empire, was being operated by the trustees for the debenture holders; Williamsons Films had gone into liquidation and its assets taken over by Williamson Picture Corp; Kemball Theatres had negotiated a reduction in interest rates with its preference share and debenture holders;\textsuperscript{86} and John Fuller and Sons were struggling with high overheads as a result of owning most of their cinemas.\textsuperscript{87} However, given the leverage that the buying pools provided, the companies underwent expansion with the aim of dominating all of the markets where they could be profitable. It was within this environment that Amalgamated Theatres rose to expand from a regional Auckland chain to a national chain competing head-to-head with the “Combine” in all of the major markets.

At the end of 1936 film renting year, the various pooling and film allocation agreements expired and were not renewed. This resulted in renewed competition among
the chains for film supplies. In later years Kerridge would takeover or absorb the interests of most of the former ‘Combine” to become the major competitor to Amalgamated for several decades following the Second World War.

**Amalgamated Theatres**

The origins of the Amalgamated Theatres chain began with the Hippodrome Theatre in Auckland, when the owner, Dr. Rayner, went into partnership with MJ Moodabe, one of the theatre’s employees (it had previously been leased out to other operators), to operate it as a cinema in 1921. Their success enabled them to lease additional theatres; and by 1926, they were operating four cinemas. They renamed their company, Amalgamated Theatres with Moodabe and Rayner each holding 50% until the death of Rayner in 1931, at which point the Moodabe family bought out the Rayner estate and took full control of the company. By this stage, they had expanded throughout the Auckland province and operated eighteen cinemas.

With the formation of the “Combine” in 1932 creating uncertainties in the future supply of film to Amalgamated, the company began to aggressively expand into all of the major centres, followed by major cities and towns. By the time of the 1934 Committee of Inquiry, they were the largest single exhibition chain in the country, although still overshadowed by the pooled interests of the “Combine,” and relatively weak in terms of first-run houses. Sometime during the first half of 1934, Amalgamated Theatres entered into an agreement with Fox Films Corp (later Twentieth-Century Fox) for exclusive rights in New Zealand to all of their films. They also negotiated exclusive supply agreements for Gaumont-British and Gainsborough Studios (both of whom had links with Fox in Great Britain), thus ensuring a supply of films to meet the British quota requirements.

**Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932**

In March 1932, Thomas List (Chairman) and Garnet Saunders (General Manager), of Taranaki Amusements, wrote to the Minister of Industries and Commerce outlining the predatory tactics that Kemball Theatres were using to move into the New Plymouth market. The letter is transcribed in Appendix 7.1, in which they described the situation of an oversupply of cinemas seats currently existing in New Plymouth that had resulted in
only two cinemas operating full-time, with one cinema open three days a week and one closed altogether. To minimise overheads, the four cinemas (owned by three companies), were collectively managed by one General Manager, Garnet Saunders.

The companies had recently been confronted with an approach from Kemball Ltd. threatening to build another theatre in New Plymouth in competition to those already existing unless the existing cinemas agreed to pool with Kemball on the basis of a fifty percent/fifty percent share. The companies had protested strongly at the proposal, as Kemball was demanding fifty percent of profits of an established business without risking any of its own capital. Kemball responded that they had the buying power for all the good films, and would use it in the same way they had previously in other towns such as Lower Hutt, unless they accepted the Kemball terms. Taranaki Amusements was thus approaching the government to intervene against these predatory practices.91 In other countries (such as Canada and the US), this practice was seen as a form of “racketeering” and was illegal.94 Foster suggests that only Kemball used these tactics to gain a share in local businesses, while Fuller-Haywards and Amalgamated Theatres preferred to buy a stake in the local businesses. Also in these cases, they were prepared to threaten independent exhibitors of starvation of films to induce them to sell.95

The letter resulted in an immediate and rather hasty drafting of regulations under the Board of Trade Act, 1919, which were passed as an Order-in-Council effective from 7th April 1932.96 The regulations allowed the Minister of Industries and Commerce to direct the Chief Inspector of Films to receive applications for and to issue exhibitors licenses, and not to issue any license where the Minister was satisfied that:

(a) the locality already had sufficient cinemas to meet normal requirements;
(b) the opening of an additional cinema in the locality would cause undue hardship to existing exhibitors
(c) that erection of an additional cinema in a locality would likely result in unreasonable economic waste.97

Looking at the regulations, there were problems inherent in the wording. There was no definition as to what ‘sufficient cinemas’ meant, nor what would constitute ‘unreasonable economic waste.’ The major exhibitors reacted strongly to what they saw as “drastic regulation,” but there was a clear division of interests within the New Zealand
Exhibitors’ Association as the smaller and independent exhibitors sought for the regulation to remain in force as it provided them with a degree of protection. As a result, there was no formal, concerted resistance from the Exhibitors’ Association against the regulations.

The regulations were somewhat of a mess. The Chief Inspector of Films was under the Minister of Internal Affairs, who was responsible for the administration of the Cinematograph Films Act and licensing for quota purposes; however, the licensing for economic purposes was the responsibility of the Minister of Industries and Commerce. The regulations also were in conflict with the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, and this would set the stage for a hearing in the Court of Appeal the following year. Although the regulations may have caused the “Combine” and Amalgamated Theatres to give thought to the advisability of a new theatre in a particular location, only two applications were refused from the twenty-four submitted during the time the regulations were in force.

The regulations were too late for Taranaki Amusements, as they felt obliged to accede to the Kemball Theatres demands for their own survival, and so came under the control of the “Combine.” Saunders, though, was asked to testify at the 1934 Committee of Inquiry as a result of his letter; and he did so, it appears, with some reluctance. At the hearing Saunders contradicted a number of assertions that he made in his original letter. He was now more positive about the arrangements with the “Combine,” as the three New Plymouth cinemas could access the buying power of the “Combine” for the best films, something that would not have been possible if they had set up a competing cinema. In the version presented before the committee, the three cinemas had approached the “Combine” with a proposition to avoid the building of a new cinema, and to enable them to retain control of the local market. This contradicted his earlier letter. The committee questioned him at some length about this, and then he asked for the committee to go ‘in-camera.’ This had the effect of requiring the various lawyers and other witnesses to leave the hearing room, so that Saunders could address the committee privately.

An important factor inhibiting his reply throughout was that the lawyer for the “Combine,” F.C. Spratt, was in the room and allowed to stay, even during the ‘in-camera’ testimony. This no doubt inhibited any discussion of the coercion behind the agreement, although it did allow Saunders to open up and reveal that the agreement negotiated included a sixty-percent / forty-percent profit share in favour of the local theatres, with a
guaranteed weekly rent for each of the theatres included in the operational costs. Thus, there was a guaranteed return for the shareholders of each of the cinemas, as well as a guaranteed flow of movies.

**Kerridge v. Girling-Butcher, 1933**

Following the introduction of the regulations under the Board of Trade Act, theatre building in New Zealand ground to almost a halt. R.J. Kerridge, a Gisborne-based cinema owner was expanding his chain of theatres outside of the Gisborne region, and applied in December 1932 for a licence to open a cinema in Rotorua. On 10\(^{th}\) December 1932, the Chief Inspector of Films responded declining to issue the licence. The letter read:

DEAR SIRS,—
Cinematograph Films Act. —Application for License from R.J. Kerridge for License for Theatre at Rotorua.

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 5\(^{th}\) instant re. the above, enclosing a letter and application for an exhibitor’s license under the Cinematograph Films Act from Mr. R. Kerridge.

In reply I have to advise that I have received an instruction from the Hon. Minister of Industries and Commerce made pursuant to the Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932, directing me not to issue this license. I propose to act under this direction until it is revoked.

The direction from the Hon. Minister was dated the 15\(^{th}\) July last, and, if in the interim the conditions at Rotorua have altered, I would suggest that your client make further representation to the Hon. Minister of Industries and Commerce.

Yours faithfully,
R. GIRLING-BUTCHER,
Chief Inspector under Cinematograph Films Act.102

It appears from the 1934 Committee of Inquiry report that at the time there were only one, or possibly two, cinemas operating in Rotorua, likely by one or two independent operator/s.103 By the beginning of 1934, there were two cinemas being operated in the town, both by Kerridge in association with local interests, with an application by Kerridge to build a third cinema.104

Kerridge, through his lawyers, subsequently filed a petition for a writ of mandamus105 with the New Zealand Supreme Court asking them to direct the defendant
(Girling-Butcher) to consider and deal with the application under section 32 of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1932 without reference to the Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932. With the leave of both Kerridge and the Crown Law Office, the Supreme Court ordered that the case be forwarded to the New Zealand Court of Appeal for its determination.\(^{106}\)

The argument for the writ of mandamus was based on two points. Firstly, that the Board of Trade (Cinematograph) Regulations were *ultra vires*,\(^ {107}\) and that the regulations were ‘repugnant’\(^ {108}\) to section 32 of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928. There were a number of problems associated with this. The Minister of Internal Affairs was the Minister who had responsibility for the administration of the Cinematograph Films Act, and the Minister of Industries and Commerce was responsible for the Board of Trade Regulations.\(^ {109}\) The regulations were ‘repugnant’ in that the Cinematograph Films Act provided the right for an exhibitor to receive a license as long as they met all the requirements (which Kerridge had), while the Board of Trade regulations allowed the Minister of Industries and Commerce to take that right away. The regulations were also ruled *ultra vires* (there was some dissent among the justices on this point), in which they went beyond the powers given the Governor-General in Council to make such regulations as was deemed necessary in the public interest, and were beyond the intent of the legislation.\(^ {110}\)

The case was heard in front of the full Court of Appeal of five judges who, although they differed in detail, ruled in the majority for the plaintiff (Kerridge) that the regulations were *ultra vires*, and were also repugnant to section 32 of the Cinematograph Films Act.\(^ {111}\) As a result, Girling-Butcher was required to issue an exhibitor’s licence to Kerridge for a new cinema in Rotorua, and the court had established that the government couldn’t limit competition within the cinema market under current regulations. The ruling showed, though, that the substance of the regulations was required; however, the hastily written Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932, were defective in the form presented.\(^ {112}\) This government would continue to return to this issue over the next few years as it sought to find the right balance that allowed for both competition within the industry and protected independent cinema operators and investors from coercive and predatory tactics.
1934 Committee of Inquiry into the Motion Picture Industry

Following the Court of Appeal ruling in 1933 holding the Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932 invalid on the grounds of repugnancy, representations were made to the government from both the independent exhibitors and distributors asking for their intervention. There were other issues causing discontent within the industry as well. In 1930, the Exhibitors’ Association had approached the Department of Industries and Commerce complaining about a number of clauses in the film-hiring contract that were unfair and detrimental to the operation of cinemas. A deputation from the Exhibitors’ Association lobbied the Prime Minister in August 1933 regarding theatre licenses and rejection rights. Independent exhibitors also had petitioned the House of Representatives in 1933 complaining about the “inequitable conditions contained in the film contract they were compelled to sign in order to secure the necessary supplies of film to keep their theatres going.” The Labour Bills Committee of the House, which had heard the petitions, recommended that they be referred to the Government for further consideration. A private member’s Bill was also before the House regarding the opposition to the compulsory minimum charge for admission to theatres. With all of these issues, it was clear a more in-depth investigation of the situation was required.

The Government convened the House of Representatives’ Industries and Commerce Committee as a Committee of Inquiry into the Motion Picture Industry. The committee was chaired by Alex Harris, who had also chaired the Select Committee on the 1928 Cinematograph Films Bill, and therefore was familiar with many of the issues and stakeholders. The remainder of the committee had not been involved with the 1928 review. Nine issues were included in the order of reference for the committee:

1. look at forms of contract used and whether a standard form needed to be introduced
2. review the level of taxation of the industry
3. review the ‘blind’ and ‘block’ booking arrangements and whether changes should be made
4. whether to restrict exhibitors to hiring only those films that were reasonably needed (to stop them from hiring additional films to block competitors)
5. insurance on loss and damage to films
6. whether the minimum charge of 1s in the contracts was reasonable and in the public interest

7. whether there should be restrictions in the building and licensing of additional theatres was desirable in the interests of the industry and public interest to prevent economic waste

8. Whether the Cinematograph Films Act needed to be amended

9. Whether a Committee for the internal control of the industry was necessary

The Chief Inspector of Films, Girling-Butcher, who was still the Chief Inspector of Explosives as well, once again provided a briefing for the committee members; his briefing paper published as an appendix to the final report. The committee held its first meeting on Tuesday, 13th March 1934 and sat for twenty-one days. Twenty-seven witnesses testified before the committee (besides government officials), a few of whom had previously testified at the 1928 hearings. Unlike the 1928 hearings, the US distributors didn’t speak directly to the inquiry committee, but were represented by Robertson MacGregor Stewart, the Secretary of the Film Exchanges Association. Nor did Sir Victor Wilson testify this time round, although he had met with the Film Exchanges Association a couple of weeks prior to the hearings.

There was considerable focus on the small exhibitors, who were looking for relief from the business practices of the major exhibition chains, particularly the “Combine.” Eight of the twenty-seven industry witnesses were small exhibitors who testified regarding the challenges they faced in the operation of their businesses. In particular, the committee focused on the competitive practices within the industry.

Summary of committee recommendations

The committee presented its report to Parliament in early May 1934. Initially, there was little comment with the US Consulate noting that the report “failed to arouse much opposition on the part of the film exchanges – the section of the industry most concerned.” This statement overlooked that the formation of the enquiry originally was as a result of representations from the exhibitors, and they were very much concerned with the outcome of the enquiries. Although the film exchanges, particularly the US distributors,
potentially had much to lose, there were also areas where they could gain from the outcomes of the enquiry.

Less than half of the report submitted to the Parliament was the result of the committee’s deliberations. Most of it was a briefing document provided by the Chief Inspector of Films, Girling-Butcher, and included as an appendix. This appendix provided both the committee and the wider public with a detailed view of the size, state and operations of the cinema industry in New Zealand at the beginning of 1934. The key points from the hearings and the responses of the committee are summarised below following each of the orders of reference.

1. Whether the present forms of contract used by the film exchanges are reasonable and equitable, and as to the desirability or otherwise of the provision of a standard form of contract and the terms and conditions of such contract.

The committee agreed with the exhibitors that there should be some form of standard contract due to the necessity for exhibitors to operate under a system of “blind” and “block” booking. During the hearings, all the exhibitors, except Amalgamated Theatres, expressed the opinion that there were problems with the various forms of standard contracts then in use.125 In the case of Amalgamated Theatres, Robert Allen-- the Company Secretary, disagreed that any change was necessary, as his company hadn’t experienced any problems seeking variations to contracts when they were necessary.126 This was not surprising given the size of the company and the negotiating power it had with the film distributors. Robertson Stewart, testifying on behalf of the US distributors (Film Exchanges Association of New Zealand), expressed a similar view, not surprisingly, as many of the conditions favoured the distributors, however under cross-examination and consideration of the Canadian contract, agreed that some changes would be reasonable.127

During the process of deliberations, the committee considered the range of contracts used by the different renting organisations, along with the standard form in Canada, and noted that some of them were over complicated and included clauses with doubtful meaning.128 Thus, they recommended that the contracts should be simplified and made more equitable in their wording.
2. Whether any amendments are desirable in regard to the amount or form of taxation to which the industry is at present subject.

Robertson Stewart for the US distributors argued that the taxation was too high, but the argument wasn’t sustained in cross-examination. Burton and Smith for the “Combine” also argued that the rate of tax was unduly high, but again, in cross-examination their arguments weren’t sustained.¹²⁹ Evidence from Casey from the Land and Income Tax Department suggested that the 12½ percent tax yielded a similar amount to what the income tax would yield without the film hire tax.¹³⁰ One distributor (Australia and New Zealand Pictures) suffered difficulties with the introduction of the film hire tax, and although given respite by the Tax Department, continued to have financial problems at the time of the Inquiry.¹³¹ Aside from this one case, the industry appeared to have continued functioning normally. Thus, the committee felt that the level of taxation on the industry was not excessive and, aside from recommending one small change in wording for clarification, felt the film hire tax rate could be left unchanged.¹³²

3. Whether the present system of “blind” and “block” booking should be continued, and whether provision should be made for statutory rejection rights, either additional to those at present operating under the Cinematograph Films Act, or alternative to such rights, or whether special rejection rights should be provided with respect to “block” booking, and whether differential rejection rights as between exhibitors should be permitted or prescribed.

With the exception of Henry Hayward, all of the witnesses appearing before the inquiry stated that the practice of “blind” and “block” bookings was a necessary and unavoidable aspect of the business if the exhibitors were to be assured a continuous supply of films.¹³³ Hayward argued that the British system should be introduced, where all films should have a ‘trade showing’ before they could be legally contracted for exhibition.¹³⁴ As he was running a small chain of suburban cinemas in Auckland, he was able to operate satisfactorily based on spot bookings, however, other exhibitors in the industry, both independent and the larger chains, preferred to have a guaranteed source of supply.

One amendment recommended by the committee, was that for all films booked under the “blind” and “block” system, exhibitors should have the right to reject 25% of films from distributors. This was necessary to ensure that independent exhibitors were not being left with inferior films that would significantly reduce their box office earnings.¹³⁵
4. Whether the hiring of films by any exhibitor in respect of any theatre under his control should be restricted to such number of films as is reasonably necessary for the effective operation of such theatre, and whether special provision is desirable for the division of the “service” of individual renters between competitive theatres under equitable conditions.

The last part of the question dealt with the issue of Statutory Rejection rights, which in the 1928 legislation had been set initially at 5%, and later at 10%. This threshold had been raised due to situations where some independent exhibitors had experienced difficulty obtaining adequate supplies of films, because their competitors (often the larger chains) had contracts with most of the major distributors, and did not exercise their final rights of selection or rejection until close to the end of the contract period. As a result, some films would sit on the shelf for twelve months after their first showing in the major centres before becoming available to independent exhibitors, at which time they were unacceptable to them. This was not in the interests of either the independent cinemas or the distributors.

All of the representatives of exhibitors, with the exception of Thompson (Gaiety Theatre, Napier) and Allen (Amalgamated Theatres), were in favour of improving the statutory rejection rights to 25% from the 5% that existed in the 1928 Cinematograph Act. Thompson felt that 10% would be sufficient as a higher number would be to the advantage of the ‘Combine,” while Allen argued that the current situation was satisfactory. Allen had already conceded that as Amalgamated Theatres were the main opposition to the ‘Combine,” they were in a very favourable position with the renters. As a result, rejection of unsuitable pictures, as well as deviations from otherwise standard portions of their contract, was less likely to be a problem.

The committee felt there was sufficient evidence to show that there were real or potential problems in obtaining a sufficient supply of film for some independent exhibitors given the expansion of and competition from the “Combine” and Amalgamated Theatres. The remedy proposed by the committee was both legislation, to make it an offense to hire more films than needed for the operation of a theatre, and through incorporation within a standard contract a clause whereby an exhibitor had a specific time limit (twenty-one days) to reject a film after it became available.
5. Whether the proposals of the Exhibitors’ Association with reference to insurance against loss or damage to films are reasonable as an alternative to the condition insisted upon by the renters under the present contract, and, if so, whether provisions should be made for giving effect to such proposals.

This was a minor point in the overall proceedings that both renters and exhibitors agreed was a matter internal to the industry and could easily be handled internally. As a result, the committee did not see it necessary to make any recommendations on the matter.

6. Whether the clause in the contract requiring a minimum charge of 1s. for admission to theatres is reasonable, or whether a modification is desirable in certain cases in the public interest.

The minimum clause had been introduced in 1930 at the time of the film hire tax dispute, although it wasn’t clear as to who initiated it. The Film Exchanges’ Association claimed that it was introduced at the request of the exhibitors, although the renters clearly benefitted from the clause. The Exhibitors’ Association responded that they had consistently advocated for a reduction in the minimum admission charge in some special situations, and that any request for a minimum had not been authorised by them. The problem was in the suburban cinemas in the Auckland area, where a number of them had offered admissions below the minimum to meet the needs of a market suffering from depression conditions. Amalgamated Theatres was a major culprit (they weren’t a member of the Exhibitors’ Association) along with Henry Hayward who ran a small suburban chain of cinemas in the Auckland suburbs. The renters could resort to cessation of film supplies to the offending cinemas, though it wasn’t clear as to whether they had resorted to those steps. In the case of Amalgamated Theatres, it would have been unlikely that those measures would have been taken given their importance as a competitor to the “Combine.”

Evidence was submitted to the committee showing that New Zealand and Australia were the only countries with standard, minimum admission charges included in film contracts, and that the New Zealand minimum was substantially higher than the lowest admission prices in the US, Canada and Australia. However, it was also recognised that the minimum level of economic charges varied from location to location, and in many of the smaller towns, the lowest admission charge was higher than the one shilling (1s)
provided for in the film contracts.\textsuperscript{147} The recommendation of the committee was that the 1s should not be universally applied, and that in some circumstances the minimum should be six pence.

7. \textit{Whether any restriction on the erection or licensing of additional theatres or those already existing is desirable in the interests of the industry or in the public interest to prevent economic waste.}

This issue was a major focus for the committee, resulting from the NZ Court of Appeal declaring the 1932 Board of Trade regulations \textit{ultra vires}.\textsuperscript{148} It was also an issue where many of the stakeholders had shifted their support for or opposition to the regulations, depending on how competitive conditions affected them at a specific point in time. Where building additional cinemas was working to their advantage, then exhibitors didn’t want any regulation; however, when competing interests impinged on those of an exhibitor, they would then shift to being supportive of regulation. A cinema building war had erupted between Amalgamated Theatres and the “Combine,” although the capital to build the cinemas had been largely attracted from small investors locally. The result of the competition in the cinema building market had resulted in New Zealand having far more cinemas (and seats) on a per capita basis than any other major, developed market.

\textbf{Figure: 8.1: Cinemas in relation to population, 1934}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Theatres per Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>one theatre for 4,577 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>one theatre for 6,341 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>one theatre for 10,960 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>one theatre for 8,665 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>one theatre for 13,010 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>one theatre for 17,727 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>one theatre for 28,852 population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>one theatre for 45,838 population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If new licenses applied for in New Zealand are granted, then NZ will have ONE theatre for every 3,419 of its population.

\textbf{Sources:} Reproduced from notes from deputation from Motion Picture Exhibitor’s of New Zealand, undated. NZNA, IA Acc W1917 32/14 pt. 1 Cinematograph films licences – Enquiry into Film Industry 1932-34; Written statement from New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors Association to Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 13. NZNA IA 59 4/8 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.

The over-capacity and competition in some of the towns led to the independent cinemas in those localities finding the business uneconomic with cinemas being closed as
The threat of additional competition was also used by the “Combine” to extract profits from local markets without the “Combine” investing any capital or building any cinemas.

Girling-Butcher in his briefing paper to the Committee outlined a situation in Canada where Paramount had obtained dominance in the exhibition side of the industry, leading to the investigation by a Royal Commission. The methods that they used in Canada had been replicated in New Zealand by the “Combine.” The “Combine” would announce its intention to enter a particular town already served by independent exhibitors, but taking an option (at a small cost) on a suitable site for a cinema. This would then be brought to the notice of the independent exhibitor/s, and negotiations would be begun for the “Combine” to take a stake in the existing business. This would involve the formation of a new exhibition company, with the “Combine” taking fifty per-cent through the guarantee of the supply of film from the renters (due to its buying power), while the local exhibitor would have to provide all of the capital in the form of the cinema building. If the independent cinema owner refused, then the “Combine” would put the proposal to local investors to build a new cinema with the guaranteed supply of film, and ultimately force the independent exhibitor out of business. Evidence of this happening in New Plymouth was presented to the Committee, where four independent cinemas were operating together in a pooling arrangement with a common General Manager, and then were approached by Kemball Theatres who wanted a fifty per cent stake in the business. The letter Saunders read to the Committee is transcribed in Appendix 7.1. Taranaki Amusements (who Saunders represented) was forced into an agreement with the “Combine,” and consequently would only give a portion of his testimony to the Committee ‘in camera.’ According to the confidential testimony Saunders gave, under the new arrangement with the “Combine,” the local companies were still assured a fixed amount as rental for the theatres along with sixty per cent (shared between them) of the net profit. W.R. Kemball, senior, the member of the “Combine” who negotiated that particular agreement, was invited to testify before the committee, but declined. As a result, the committee accepted Saunders’ testimony as presented.

The shift in the industry was quite apparent from the figures presented to the committee by Girling-Butcher compiled from figures proved by the Commissioner of
The estimated gross revenues for the exhibitors and renters decreased substantially from 1930 to 1934. This was concurrent with a rapid expansion in the building of new cinemas.

**Figure: 8.2: Gross Revenues for Renters and Exhibitors, 1930-34**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Renters' Gross Receipts (£)</th>
<th>Estimated Gross Theatre Receipts (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930-31 (nine months)</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>1,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>321,132</td>
<td>1,284,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>282,906</td>
<td>1,131,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34 (ten months)</td>
<td>272,015</td>
<td>1,088,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 12.*

The full extent of the cinema building was not enumerated to the committee; however, the partial figures provided gave some indication of the competitive building practices. During 1932 and 1933, when the theatre licensing regulations were in force, fourteen of the twenty-six applications for theatre licenses were for new buildings. In the first four months of 1934, sixty-five applications were received, of which fifty-one were for new buildings.

**Figure: 8.3: Applications for additional licences, 1932 and 1933**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1932 &amp; 33</th>
<th>Jan to May 1934</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamated Theatres</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Combine&quot; Interests</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerridge Interests</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Breakdown of types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1932 &amp; 33</th>
<th>Jan to May 1934</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing theatre transferred</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing theatre rebuilt</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New theatre built or building</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final plans approved for new building</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application with draft plans</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application only for new theatre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 26  65

*Source: Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 12.*

At the beginning of 1934, just prior to the Committee of Inquiry, Girling-Butcher listed a total of 498 cinemas with a seating capacity of 223,845. Amalgamated Theatres and the "Combine," along with Christchurch Cinemas and Kerridge (both aligned with the
“Combine” though not officially part of it) controlled 133,062 of the seating capacity, or nearly sixty per cent of the cinema seats in the country, including almost all of the first-run cinemas in the major centres.

Figure 8.4: Summary of cinema holdings, January 1934.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Theatres</th>
<th>Seating capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamated Theatres</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamated Theatres with local interests</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamated Theatres (buying arrangements)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuller-Hayward Theatre Corp</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuller-Hayward Theatre Corp with local interests</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuller-Hayward, Kemball and J.C. Williamson</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuller-Hayward and Kemball</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.C. Williamson Picture Corp</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.C. Williamson and Kemball Theatres</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemball Theatres</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemball Theatres with local interests</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemball Theatres (buying arrangements)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Cinemas (partially owned by Fuller-Hayward)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.J. Kerridge and Fuller Hayward</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>98</th>
<th>94,539</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R.J. Kerridge, Gisborne</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.J. Kerridge with local interests</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13</th>
<th>9,724</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent theatres (in towns exceeding 1,000 in population)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent theatres (in townships having less than 1,000 in population)</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>144</th>
<th>14,400</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small townships visited by circuit exhibitors</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 29.

The committee was not certain the situation had got out of control; however, it recommended that the government introduce suitable legislation along with accompanying regulations, to enable the reintroduction of cinema licensing if the situation warranted it. Although the cinema-going public were not adversely affected by the excessive building (to the contrary, they probably had more choice for a period), it was not clear that small investors had a full picture of the situation, or that in the end the result would be monopoly.
control over the industry (in the words of the committee; in reality it would become an oligopoly).

8. Whether any amendments are desirable in the present provisions of the Cinematograph Films Act or Regulations.

Two issues had come up during the hearings. The first were representations made by some headmasters of Auckland secondary schools along with some related organisations, asking that censorship be tightened. After hearing from the Censor of Films, the committee felt that current censorship arrangements were adequate, and there was no need for any changes. The second issue related to film societies and their request to be exempt under the censorship regulations, as all of their films had to go through the Censor of Films. The committee agreed that there was no reason why film society members, as long as they were eighteen years of age or over, could not view films that might not be suitable for the general public, although the Censor should still examine all of their films and report on them to the Minister.

9. Whether any provision is desirable for setting up a Board or Committee for internal control of the industry, and the settlement of difficulties which may arise as between renter and exhibitor, also the constitution of such Board and whether Government representation is desirable.

The committee did not consider it necessary to set up such a body if a suitable arbitration clause was inserted into the film-renting agreements. They did, however, recommend that the previous Advisory Committee operating under the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, be reconstituted to consider all of the legislation proposed as a result of the inquiry and subsequent report, and make recommendations to the Minister.

Upon release to the public, the US Consulate reported to the State Department the feeling of the US distributors towards the final report. Overall, there was little opposition to the report and the recommendations were considered “practical and reasonable and, if enacted, should not prove detrimental to the interests of the American producers.” The adoption of a standard contract between exhibitors and distributors was seen as one of the most significant recommendations arising from the report and likely to redress the balance in the relationship between exhibitors and distributors. The proposal to grant exhibitors a flat twenty-five per-cent rejection right on all film regardless of the country of origin.
(previously there was a differentiation between British film and anything from outside the British Empire) was seen as positive for US distributors who anticipated that exhibitors would reject a higher proportion of “low grade British pictures” than they had previously.\textsuperscript{164}

By the end of the year, with the enactment of the Cinematograph Films Amendment Act, comments from the US Consulate were less positive. Walter Orebaugh commented: “[n]owhere else in the world, it is believed, are the exhibitors treated so well as they are at present in New Zealand, as a consequence of the new legislation.”\textsuperscript{165} Not only was he referring to the twenty-five per-cent rejection right, but also the three-week period in which exhibitors had to decide whether to reject a film and the decrease in the minimum ticket price.\textsuperscript{166} Concern was also expressed at the building of a large number of new theatres that was underway, the reason for the earlier intervention by the government through the introduction of cinema licensing.\textsuperscript{167} The US distributors feared that the building of additional theatres in a market that was already saturated would ultimately result in lower net revenues.\textsuperscript{168} Amalgamated Theatres were behind the building of most of the theatres, although not by committing their own capital. Instead, they contracted local investors or syndicates to finance and build the cinemas, and Amalgamated would then rent them.\textsuperscript{169} In this way, they passed the investment risk onto smaller partners (a common practice in the film industry), minimised their capital investment and overhead, and maintained flexibility for the future (it was easier to cancel a lease than to sell a cinema building in an area with too many cinemas).

This strategy also enabled Amalgamated to force competitors out of business in smaller towns. By 1934, Amalgamated were the largest theatre chain in the country, and secured for 1935 exclusive exhibition rights to all Fox Film Corporation films, as well as those from Gaumont British and Gainsborough Studios.\textsuperscript{170} At the beginning of 1934, Amalgamated controlled thirty-one cinemas,\textsuperscript{171} and one year later had extended their operations to control sixty-nine cinemas, by far the largest cinema chain in the country.\textsuperscript{172} In 1936 Fox took a fifty per cent share in Amalgamated Theatres becoming the first US studio to hold a major stake in a New Zealand cinema chain.\textsuperscript{173} This caused some discontent elsewhere in the industry, as had been evident in the 1934 Inquiry where rumours of Fox support had first surfaced. As the Moodabe brothers continued to be in
management control of Amalgamated (until the 1950s), they could claim that the company also continued to be controlled in New Zealand.

Events within the Policy Imperatives framework

Safety

As mentioned earlier, physical safety was the jurisdiction of local bodies rather than the national level government, although a national building code did come into being following the devastating 1930 Napier Earthquake. The building code focused, however, on structural integrity in the event of earthquakes, rather than other forms of catastrophe. The 1928 Cinematograph Films Act and accompanying regulations set out the necessary safety requirements for the handling, storage and exhibition of cinematograph films, and as a result the number of fires in cinemas were minimal, with the resulting damage negligible.

The devastating cinema fire in Paisley, Scotland in December 1929, and the deaths of seventy-one children, resulted in questions in New Zealand regarding safety of cinemas in the Dominion. It appears that the Wellington City Council sought advice from the Chief Inspector of Films regarding the safety of cinemas and he responded in a June 1930 memorandum, where he noted that, out of approximately 80,000 performances during the previous financial year (ending 31st March, 1930), there had been eight projection fires, and in most cases the audience in the theatres concerned were unaware of the cause of the stoppage for the picture, or that the fires had occurred. Panic was seen as being the greater hazard (part of the problem in the Paisley fire), and the area that Girling-Butcher felt greater attention needed to be devoted to through the training of all theatre staff in emergency procedures.

Shortly after Girling-Butcher submitted the memorandum to the Wellington City Council, there was also a deputation to the Prime Minister by the Motion Pictures Exhibitors Association regarding the same issue. In this case, the exhibitors were looking for a rationalisation of authorities responsible for safety in theatres, as at that point in time the Department of Internal Affairs, the local authority and Fire Boards all had responsibility of some kind. The exhibitors specifically were looking for legislative action that would remove the firemen from duty in the cinemas, as they were potentially a source of panic.
As the exhibitors saw it, the role of the fireman would be to get the fire brigade to the theatre as quickly as possible, creating the potential for panic, whereas properly trained staff would ensure that the audience exited from the theatre as quickly as possible. The cinemas also had to pay for the fireman to be on duty, so no doubt they saw this as an opportunity to reduce costs. Following this, there was little further comment regarding fire safety.

Of greater concern in the public sphere was the issue of censorship standards. On a regular basis there would be calls in the media for the censorship standards to be tightened up. The issue of censorship was reviewed briefly as part of the 1934 Committee of Inquiry, with a deputation from representatives of Auckland headmasters appearing before the committee, and a lengthy written submission from Mrs Marion Algie.176 The conclusion from the Committee was that the censorship of films was being carried out in a satisfactory manner and there was no need for any change.177

Social Control and Development

Censorship Issues – *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930)

In one of the more spectacular decisions of his tenure as film censor, Walter Tanner rejected the Academy Award-winning film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) in June 1930 stating that it was:

. . . suggestive in parts. Packed with the nauseating side of war from start to finish. Its only merit is that it is claimed to be an indictment of war and strong peace propaganda. This is doubtful. In any case it is a question whether the screen should be used for propaganda of any kind.178

The film was subsequently taken to the Appeal Board where the three members decided by a majority (thus one member disagreed) that the censor’s rejection of the film should be upheld. This was the first country in which the film had been banned, although in Australia it was cut before release.179 The distributors, Universal Film Manufacturing Co. (Australasia) Ltd., did not give up at this stage and proceeded to cable the British Board of Censors to find out why they had passed the film,180 while also organising a private screening for a number of Parliamentarians.181 Following this, a deputation of eighteen Members of Parliament then approached the Hon. P.A. De La Perrelle, Minister of Internal
Affairs, to explore what else could be done to ensure the release of the film, and he subsequently referred the issue to the Crown Law Office.\textsuperscript{182} The Crown Law Office advised that as the censor and appeals board had acted properly and appropriately, there was nothing else that could be done unless the film was re-edited and resubmitted as a new film.\textsuperscript{183} This was subsequently done, and on 30\textsuperscript{th} July, Tanner also rejected the “reconstructed” version of the film. Once again the film was taken to appeal, but on this occasion passed. On the first occasion the Appeal Board had been chaired by a substitute, W.G. Riddell, a magistrate due to the illness of the chair, H.M. Gore.\textsuperscript{184} On the subsequent appeal, Gore was well enough to take the chair and his vote shifted the decision to a majority in favour with one excision and an ‘A’ certificate.\textsuperscript{185} It is interesting that, although twelve years had passed since the cessation of hostilities in Europe, there was still an apparent fear that anti-war propaganda could have a detrimental effect on the morale of the population. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the film was banned once again (along with eight others) because of its anti-war tone.\textsuperscript{186}

\textbf{Censorship Issues – \textit{Hell Below} (1933)}

A more minor censorship controversy arose in 1933 over the film, \textit{Hell Below} (1933),\textsuperscript{187} which was rejected by the censor on the grounds that it was historically inaccurate, as he didn’t believe that any American naval unit operated in the Adriatic Sea during the First World War.\textsuperscript{188} The Wellington Consulate cabled the Department of State seeking their assistance and received back a response that the presence of an American naval unit in the Adriatic Sea was noted in the 1918 Report of the Secretary of the Navy.\textsuperscript{189} Tanner agreed to release the film with the addition of a foreword to the film noting that “[n]o United States Naval unit operated in the Adriatic during the Great War,” and that the film was dedicated to the sailors who served in submarines.\textsuperscript{190}

The reason for this was that the censor, Tanner, understood that his duties included censorship for political purposes, and so there were a number of instances during this tenure where films were banned or cut for political reasons. Thus, he was not willing for the US to make claims in fictional films about the First World War that weren’t true. He had previously (1927) cut 150 feet from an American film, where it claimed the USA played a major role at Jutland (they didn’t play any role), and banned the Russian films, \textit{Road to Life} (1931) and \textit{Turk-Sib} (1929) on the basis that they were Soviet
propaganda.\textsuperscript{10} Approaches were made to the Minister of Internal Affairs in December 1932 to have censorship for political purposes abolished; however, this request was declined and censorship for political reasons continued to be exercised by the censor, albeit infrequently, for many years following the Second World War.

**Economic imperatives**

Economic imperatives became increasingly important following the 1928 Select Committee Hearings. The impetus for the revised Cinematograph-films Act in New Zealand had been the introduction by Great Britain of a quota for British Empire films, both at the distribution and exhibition level. Being the loyal Dominion, New Zealand followed suit with the 1927 Cinematograph-films Bill. The end of the Parliamentary session led to the bill lapsing, however, it provided the basis for more intensive discussion with the industry, and a complete review of all of the cinematograph-film-related legislation. The 1928 version of the legislation represented a complete review of legislation related to the cinema industry following extensive consultations with the industry. There had been considerable discussions around the quota issue with the renters unequivocally opposed to them, while the exhibitors accepting the quotas in principle, albeit reluctantly. At the end of the Select Committee hearings, the exhibitors proposed that they follow the spirit of the quota on a voluntary basis rather than have the requirements imposed upon them. This, the government agreed to, and incorporated into the legislation a clause making the exhibitors’ quota only effective by Order-in-Council;\textsuperscript{192} it would remain dormant and only become mandatory if the spirit of the agreement was not adhered to by exhibitors.

For the renters, it was different. There was no voluntary agreement, as they were opposed to the quota. However, there was a clause allowing the Minister of Internal Affairs to exempt them from the quota on written application each year if it “was not commercially practical by reason of the character of the British films available, or the excessive cost of such films in relation to foreign films,” with the exemptions publicised in the government gazette.\textsuperscript{193} This effectively made the quota optional for them as well, although it would be noted publicly. This option was taken up by renters on a regular basis, but not to the detriment of the overall percentage of British films screening in New Zealand.
The Film Hire Tax trade war of 1930 provided a number of lessons that would have importance in following years. Firstly, the MPDA (and MPPDA) underestimated the level of opposition in New Zealand and failed to bring the exhibitors onside at the outset to provide pressure on the government. Secondly, although Hollywood’s efforts were channelled through their Australian representatives, the New Zealand government and public saw it as Hollywood interference and resented both the US and Australia as a result. In the end, the New Zealand government achieved what they were looking for with few concessions. This loss by Hollywood would stand out as an exception in the trade wars that would follow, where the demands of Hollywood would normally prevail over those of the governments they opposed.194

Licensing of cinemas (Board of Trade Regulations)

As mentioned earlier, a significant battleground in the cinema landscape during the 1930s was the licensing of cinemas, or more specifically, the battle for the right to operate cinemas in particular localities. The early skirmishes of these battles have been covered earlier in this chapter, with the rise of the ‘Combine” and subsequent regulations gazetted in April 1932.195 According to Foster, “its *raison d’etre* was to curb a form of racketeering, whereby cinema chains were using their advantage of large scale operations to take over independent exhibitors or force them out of business.”196 Between the boom in cinema building and competition between the different cinema chains seeking to increase their advantage with film bookings, there was a consequent oversupply of cinemas, decreasing the viability of their business in many locations. The introduction of economic licensing was designed to control the number of cinemas built and decrease the economic waste as a result.197 This was the most controversial aspect of the cinema licensing, as it involved the government in the competitive struggle between the different chains, as well as between the independent cinemas and chains in the provincial towns. After the Court of Appeal declared the regulations invalid on the grounds of repugnancy to the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, they were then restored following a favourable recommendation from the 1934 Committee of Inquiry.198 Further restrictions would be made later in 1936 as part of the Industrial Efficiency Act (see the following chapter).
The 1928-34 period was significant for the level of focus put onto the industry by the government, and changes made in the structure of the industry, in part as a result of government intervention. The period opened with the development of an expanded Cinematograph Films Act to meeting the request from the British government for support for the British film industry, as well as to resolve some of the other issues within the industry, and select committee hearings into the proposed legislation. Six years later, the government embarked on another investigation, this time through a Committee of Inquiry, to seek to resolve the growing problems and instability in the industry. Between those two studies, comprehensive legislation governing the industry was enacted, a trade war with the US over taxes won, and predatory competition in the industry responded to with regulations that were subsequently declared *ultra vires* by the New Zealand Court of Appeal.

Although there would be further intervention and changes made by the government in later years, the legislation, regulatory bodies and industry structure that evolved during this period would dominate for the next forty years. The following period, until the establishment of the National Film Unit part way into the Second World War would be less intense, but with new levels of control introduced by the government.
Endnotes

1 In Australia there was a Royal Commission underway into the film industry, and India had the Cinematograph Committee undertake an exhaustive study. The Cinematograph Act had been passed in Great Britain, and the talkies were in the very early stages of being introduced.

2 Henry J. Hayward, *Here’s to Life! The Impressions, Confessions and Garnered Thoughts of a Free-Minded Showman* (Auckland: Oswald-Sealy, 1944), 106.

3 Philip Nichols to Percy Koppel, April 6th, 1928, TNA: PRO, FO 372/2446 FO Correspondence – Empire Policy, 62.

4 LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.
The members of the committee were the Hon. Mr. D. Buddo (Liberal, Kaiapoi), Mr. J.S. Dickson (Reform, Parnell), Mr. W. Girling (Reform, Wairau), Mr. W.S. Glenn (Reform, Rangitikei), Mr. A. Harris (Reform, Waitemata), Mr. T. Howard (Labour, Christchurch South), Sir John Luke (Liberal, Wellington North), Mr. R. McKeen (Labour, Wellington South), Mr. T. Seddon (Liberal, Westland) and the Right. Hon. Mr. G. Coates (Reform, Kaipara).

5 Minutes of Meeting, Cinematograph Films Bill Committee, 10th August, 1928, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.


7 LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.

8 J. Robertson to Rt. Hon. J.G. Coates, Prime Minister, July 27th, 1928, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928. Part II in the early draft of the bill was the registration of films, and Part III was the quota provisions. The order was subsequently changed when the bill was introduced into Parliament.

9 ibid.

10 ibid., 2.

11 ibid., 3.

12 Mazengarb, address to the Select Committee on the 1928 Cinematograph-films Bill, 31st August, 1928, 1-14, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.


14 “Long-run” theatres were theatres that would continue running a feature for as long as the business would justify it, unlike most cinemas at the time who would have changes of programme at least once a week. In reality, there were a very small number of long-run cinemas in New Zealand at the time.

15 John Robertson, address to the Select Committee on the 1928 Cinematograph-films Bill, 15th August, 1928, 20, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.

16 ibid., 21.

17 Although technically separate from the MPPDA, negotiations during the 1930 trade war demonstrated that the MPDA of Australia and New Zealand reported to the MPPDA in New York. Sir Victor Wilson had previously been an Australian senator who was recruited by the MPPDA/MPDA in 1926 to represent the interests of the US distributors in Australia and New Zealand.

ibid. Of course, he only represented the renters, and so he was less concerned whether a quota existed for the exhibitors or not.

ibid., 34,

ibid., A-2, Sir Victor Wilson, address to the Select Committee on the 1928 Cinematograph-films Bill, 22nd August, 1928, A-2, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.

ibid.

ibid.

ibid.

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ibid.
ibid., B-8, B-11.

ibid., B12.

Minutes of Meeting, Cinematograph Films Bill Committee, 13th September, 1928, 1, NZNA, LE 1 875 1928/2 Committees – Cinematograph Films Bill 1928.

ibid.

New Zealand, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council, 18th September, 1928.

R. Girling-Butcher to the Secretary of the Treasury, 19th September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Minister of Finance to Commissioner of Taxes, 21st June 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930; Secretary to Treasury to Minister of Finance, 9th July 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Commissioner of Taxes to the Minister of Finance, 30th June 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.


Secretary to Treasury to Minister of Finance, 9th July 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Girling-Butcher to Mr. Ashwin, 8th August 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Notes of meeting between Deputation from Film Exchanges Association of New Zealand and Prime Minister, Prime Minister’s Office, 22nd July 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.


Notes of meeting between Harold Johnston and Acting Prime Minister Ransom, 2nd September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Acting Prime Minister to Sir Victor Wilson, 12th September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Secretary to Treasury to Minister of Finance, 7th August 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Girling-Butcher to Mr. Ashwin, 28th July 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

“Stop Selling in N.Z.: Will H. Hays Orders. Distrbs. Obey,” Everyones (Sept. 3, 1930), 10. It is questionable whether Hays actually had the power to order this.

Notes of meeting between Harold Johnston and Acting Prime Minister Ransom, 2nd September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Acting Prime Minister to Sir Victor Wilson, 12th September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Secretary to Treasury to Minister of Finance, 7th August 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Notes of meeting between Harold Johnston and Acting Prime Minister Ransom, 2nd September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.

Girling-Butcher to Secretary to Treasury, 11th September 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and Tax – 1930.


Bernard Gotlieb, “The New Zealand Film Situation,” 29th October 1930, USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 5117, 847H.4061 Motion Pictures/12.
“Film Boycott likely to be Withdrawn on Basis of Settlement Brought forward by Government,”
*The Sun*, 7th October 1930. Newspaper clipping in NZNA, AALP 846 32a 30/6 pt. 2

Bernard Gotlieb, “The New Zealand Film Situation,” 29th October 1930, USNA, RG 59
Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 5117, 847H.4061 Motion Pictures/12

ibid.

W.J. Stevenson to Comptroller of Customs, 17th October 1930, NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 2 Films
Insurance and Tax – 1930.


“Regulating the Importation of Films for Cinematographs and Similar Instruments, C. No. 73,”

Bernard Gotlieb, “The New Zealand Film Situation,” 29th October 1930, USNA, RG 59
Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 5117, 847H.4061 Motion Pictures/12.

NZNA, T 1 52/560 pt. 1 Films Insurance and tax – 1930

E.D. Good to W.J. Stevenson, Official Customs Representative in New York, 10th November,
1930, NZNA, C. Acc. W1786 110 22/254 Tariff – Film Hire Tax, 1935-58; W.J. Stevenson to
E.D. Good, Acting Comptroller of Customs, 10th November 1930, NZNA, C. Acc. W1786 110
22/254 Tariff – Film Hire Tax, 1935-58; E.D. Good to Secretary to Treasury, 11th November

W.P. Cochran, “New Zealand Film Tax Controversy Settled,” November 12, 1930, USNA, RG

W.J. Stevenson to Comptroller of Customs, 29th January 1931, NZNA, C. Acc. W1786 110

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 6.

Foster Report, Part II, 63.

Bertrand and Collins, 15. The label ‘combine’ was applied to the sister companies, Australasian
Films and Union Theatres, both headed up by W.A. Gibson.

The shareholding of the Christchurch Cinemas at the time of the 1934 Committee of Inquiry was:

- Fuller’s Pictures, Ltd. Wellington £95,200
- Hayward’s Pictures, Ltd., Wellington £95,200
- C. Morton Ollivier, Christchurch, Consulting Accountant £5,000
- John Fuller, Sydney £14,200
- Benjamin Fuller, Sydney £14,200
- Edward Sydney Luttrell, Christchurch £13,200
- Ernest E. Luttrell, Christchurch £1,000

Testimony of Edward Righton to Committee of Inquiry, 26th March, 1934, U23. NZNA, IA 59
5/10 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 28.

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 47.

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 20.

ibid.

Foster Report, Part II

Foster Report, Part II, 65.

Foster Report, Part III, Appendix 7, 125-126.
Robert Allen, the Secretary of Amalgamated, would not state publicly at the hearings whether they had an exclusive agreement with Fox Films Corp. Although he said he would submit a copy of the sales agreement they had with Fox to the Committee on a confidential basis, there is no record of it in the archival records. By the end of July, however, the agreement was public knowledge. Exactly when the agreement was made has yet to be ascertained.


ibid., G1-G3.

Foster Report, Part II, 234-235.

Foster Report, Part II, 235.

“Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932,” New Zealand Gazette, 23, 7th April, 1932, 728; Foster Report, Part II, 236.

ibid.

Written submission from Robert Allen, Amalgamated Theatres to Committee of Inquiry, 1934. NZNA, IA 59 4/8 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 10.


ibid., G1-G33.

Kerridge v. Girling Butcher, Court of Appeal, New Zealand Law Reports, 667 (1933).

“Test Case in N.Z. to Decide Govt’s Power in Film Biz,” Everyone, 5th April, 1933, 10. This article suggest that there was only one cinema operating in Rotorua at the time.

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 28.

A ‘writ of mandamus’ is a rarely used court order requiring a lower court or other organisation to either perform or refrain from performing a particular act required by law as an obligation. In this instance, it was to require Girling-Butcher to consider an application to build a cinema without regard to the regulations accompanying the Board of Trade Act. Retrieved from: http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/writ+of+mandamus.


When a contract or regulation is considered ‘ultra vires,’ it means that it is illegal or void, because it is beyond the scope of the powers of the body issuing it. See: http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/ultra+vires.

‘repugnant’ in this sense means that they were in conflict or beyond the intent of that section of the Cinematograph Films Act.

The Board of Trade had previously been disbanded and their duties passed to the Minister of Industries and Commerce.

Kerridge v. Girling-Butcher, 662.

ibid., 646-647.


ibid., 20.


116 Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 2.

117 ibid.

118 The Committee composition was: Alexander Harris (Independent, Waitemata), Alfred E. Ansell (Ansell, Chalmers), P.A. de la Perrelle (United, Awarua), P. McSkimming (Independent, Clutha), C.A. Wilkinson (Independent, Egmont), Hon. A.D. McLeod (Reform, Wairarapa), Hon. J.G. Cobbee (United, Oroua), H. Holland (Labour, Buller), Dan G. Sullivan (Labour, Avon), and J.A. Lee (Labour, Grey Lynn).

119 Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 1.

120 Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 16-35.

121 Witnesses who testified at both inquiries were John Robertson (Dominion Secretary, NZ Motion Picture Exhibitors’ Association, Lee Hill (Sound Films Production Co., Dunedin), Noel Gillespie (Christchurch Cinemas, Australia and New Zealand Pictures), Henry Hayward (Auckland Cinemas), W.R. Kemball (Kemball Theatres), and Walter Tanner (Cinematograph film Censor).


123 Noel Gillespie and Edward Righton from Christchurch Cinemas; William Lorigan, Theatre proprietor from Te Kuiti; Gordon Harcourt, Capital Theatre in Miramar; Garnet Saunders from Taranaki Amusements; H.W. Thompson who ran the Gaiety Theatre in Napier; F.A. Ganderton from Waipukurau; John Carroll, Chairman of the Te Aroha Picture Company as well as the companies running the Civic Theatres in Hamilton and Tauranga, and H.W. Shortt, who owned Shortt’s Theatre in Wellington.


126 Written submission from Robert Houghton Allen, Amalgamated Theatres Ltd, to the Committee of Inquiry, 1. NZNA, IA 59 4/9 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.


128 Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 4.


131 ibid., Z20. [Cross-examination of Casey, hearings before Committee of Inquiry, 4th April, 1934, Z20. NZNA, IA 59 4/10 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.]

132 Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 6.

133 “Memorandum Regarding Evidence Before the Committee,” 2. NZNA, IA 59 4/9 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.

134 Written submission from Henry Hayward, Committee of Inquiry, 23rd March, 1934, 2. NZNA, IA 59 4/10 Film Industry Inquiry – 1934.
It was in the interests of the renters to maintain a competitive market among exhibitors for their films, as this would result in higher prices paid for films. Amalgamated Theatres was the only competitor able to counter the buying power of the “Combine.”

The benefit to renters (distributors) was the reduction of price competition at the bottom end of the market, thus ensuring a certain level of income from the rental of films.

At the time of the 1928 Select Committee hearings, Henry Hayward was the largest exhibitor in New Zealand as well as having substantial distribution interests. In the intervening time, he lost his business empire and had begun building a new business operation.
Although there had been rumours of an exclusive contract at the time of the 1934 Committee of Inquiry, Amalgamated wouldn’t confirm this was the case during the hearings. By the end of the year, though, once the amending legislation had been passed, Amalgamated prominently advertised their exclusive contracts. See Walter Orebaugh, “Motion Picture Notes – October, 1934,” November 13, 1934, 3. USNA, RG 84 Consular Posts, Wellington, New Zealand, Vol. 153, 840.6.

Committee of Inquiry, 1934, 10; Foster, 20. 233-238.


Foster, Part II, 239.

Andrew Kelly, *Filming All Quiet on the Western Front: ‘Brutal Cutting, Stupid Censors, Bigoted Politicos,’* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 116. *All Quiet on the Western Front* (dir. Lewis Milestone, Universal), won Oscars for Best Picture and Directing, but met with both large audiences and controversy in other countries as well (as did the original best-selling book). Not surprisingly, the film was later banned in Germany, Austria and Italy, while it received some significant cuts before being screened in Australia.

Kelly lists a number of scenes that were removed in the recut of the film on pp. 116-117.

Gore was also President of the N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts. He died a few months after the *All Quiet on the Western Front* decision. The other two members of the Appeal Board were women, Mrs K. Preston and Mrs F.M. Brighton.

Daniels and Moore, 7-8. According to Gottlieb in the US Consulate, the one excision was of a “somewhat risqué canal scene.” See Bernard Gottlieb, “Dominion Film Censorship,” September 3rd, 1930, 3-4. USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files 1930-39, Wellington, Box 6276, 847h.4061 Motion Pictures/7.
Kelly, 117.

*Hell Below* (1933). Dir. Jack Conway, MGM.

Telegram from Gray to Secretary of State, June 26, 1933. USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Wellington, Box 6276, 847h.4061 Hell Below/1.

Telegram from Department of State to Gray, June 26, 1933. USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Wellington, Box 6276, 847h.4061 Hell Below/2.

Calvin M. Hitch, “Refusal of New Zealand Film Censor to Permit the Exhibition of American Film,” July 10, 1933. USNA, RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1930-39, Wellington, Box 6276, 847h.4061 Hell Below/3.


Clause 33 (6), Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, No. 20, 19 Geo. V. (NZ)

Clause 29, Cinematograph Films Act, 1928, No. 20, 19 Geo V. (NZ)

A significant example is Great Britain 1947-48, and it had also happened previously in France in 1928.

“Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations, 1932,” *New Zealand Gazette*, 23, 7th April, 1932, 728; Foster Report, Part II, 236.


ibid.

Foster, Part II, 20.
Chapter 9: New Zealand, 1934-1941

“If ever a national post-mortem is performed on us, I think they will find there are three words written on New Zealand’s heart—ANZAC, HOLLYWOOD, and HOME.”
- Gordon Mirams, Speaking Candidly, 1945, p. 125

Overview of the period

Following the Committee of Inquiry, the government introduced legislation to address the recommendations made in the report. These amendments to the earlier Cinematograph Films Act would bring some relief to exhibitors and stability to the industry. Consolidation continued, however, during the period as the less economic cinemas were forced to either close or merge with one of the larger cinema chains. At the same time, the cinema chains came to agreements with each other to limit the level of competition in the industry. This led to new restrictions being implemented by the government.

As the country (and world) emerged from the Great Depression, it became increasingly clear that another war might be on the horizon. At the same time, the relationship between Great Britain and her Dominions (or former Dominions once they had ratified the Statute of Westminster) was changing and evolving. In the event of war, Great Britain was looking for the wider Empire to be supporting her efforts. In 1928, Philip Nicoles from the Foreign Office had been dispatched to New Zealand under the cover of ‘Imperial Liaison’ to investigate where the country’s loyalties lay. In 1939, it was John Grierson, as the Film Officer for the Imperial Relations Trust, who was given the role of visiting the country, this time with the mandate to review the government’s efforts in film-making, and to establish a non-theatrical distribution infrastructure for British Empire/Commonwealth films within the country. The first objective is well known, but it is the second objective that was of most value to the British war effort, and has remained hidden from historical view. The period of this study ends with the establishment of the National Film Unit within the office of the Prime Minister of New Zealand to provide the government with a vehicle for wartime publicity and propaganda.
Cinematograph Films Amendment Act, 1934

As a result of the Committee of Inquiry, the government introduced legislation in four areas: (1) to allow exhibitors to reject twenty-five per-cent of films that were block booked; (2) the introduction of a standard film renting contract for the industry; (3) providing the power to prevent monopolies in the distribution and exhibition sectors; (4) clarification of the Censor’s powers and provide the right to appeal against his decisions.¹

Increasing the statutory right of rejection to twenty-five percent was important in New Zealand, as unlike most countries, single feature programmes were normal (most other countries followed a double-feature model) as a lower quality film resulted in much lower box office returns.² This wasn’t as important in countries with double-feature programme as typically the lower quality films would be paired with a higher-quality feature.

The legislation included provision for a standard form for rental contracts, however the negotiations between the exhibitors and renters were a slow process and the form itself was not introduced until the following year.³ Minimum admission prices was an important issue during the committee hearings, and so provision was made in the legislation for the minimum admission price not to exceed 6d in the event a compromise was not reached between renters and exhibitors.⁴

To address the issue of unfair trading or monopoly of film supplies, the legislation made it illegal for a renter to refuse to rent a film, unless it had already been rented to a competitor, or was subject to negotiations and for exhibitors to hire films in excess of what they required for exhibition.⁵

Finally, amendments were made to the Censorship provisions in the original act. The Minister of Internal Affairs was given the right of appeal against the Censor’s approval of a film enabling the Minister to intervene in the event there was public dissent or controversy over a Censor’s decision (though members of the public weren’t allowed to appeal directly).⁶ Following the release of the report by the Committee of Inquiry, there had been further pressure from the public regarding the exhibition of unsuitable films to children.⁷ As a result of this and the submissions made to the committee, the legislation provided a requirement for the Censor to include in his certificate of approval for any film
a statement as to the suitability of the film for exhibition to children, and for this information to be included in press information and other forms of advertising.⑧

The secret Motion Picture Film Industry Committee

Two events took place during 1936 that led the government to consider further intervention into the industry. The first was the passing of the Industrial Efficiency Act, enabling the government to plan industrial activity with the aim of achieving a more balanced economy.⑨ The Act was applicable to all industries and involved the setting up of a Bureau of Industry within the Department of Industries and Commerce to register and provide licensing of industries, and to prepare plans for the reorganisation of industries.⑩ The second event was the expiration of the various film supply agreements among the different members of the “combine” resulting in a competitive scramble to secure new film supply contracts. The resulting competition led to an increase in the level of film hire that all of the exhibitors had to pay, along with fears of renewed instability in the business.⑪

In January 1937, the Minister of Industries and Commerce set up a secret Motion Picture Film Industry Committee to advise him on potential changes to the industry.⑫ The committee was comprised solely of government officials with the only industry representative being John Robertson, who was a Member of Parliament as well as the Secretary of the Motion Picture Exhibitors Association. The other members were Professor James Shelley — Director of Broadcasting and Chair of the committee, Walter Tanner — Film Censor, R.M. Girling-Butcher — Chief Inspector of Films, Dr. J.W. McIlraith — Chief Inspector of Primary Schools, Ron Fenton — Manager of the Government Film Studios, and F. Johnson, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Industries and Commerce.⑬ Their mandate was the following:

1. To investigate what additional sources of supply of high quality films are available from European countries which combine cultural and educational features without distracting from the entertainment appeal.

2. What steps of a practical nature can be suggested for the use of motion pictures in schools for educational purposes. In this connection the committee was to explore fully the capabilities of the Government Film Studios to produce a proportion of films suitable for this purpose.

3. To explore the feasibility of putting into operation the greater control of the industry in the national interest, a plan under the provisions of the
Industrial Efficiency Act, 1936, or alternatively, the distribution of films under the control of a Department of State.

4. To consider a suggestion that film criticism should be included in broadcasting programmes to improve public tastes in respect of films.

5. Any other matter which in the Committee’s opinion is desirable to give effect to the Prime Minister’s desire to use the exhibition of films to improve the culture of the people.\(^\text{14}\)

The committee found that one of the principal causes of dissatisfaction with the industry was film supply, and recommended that motion picture distribution should be taken over by the State, and that the motion picture industry should become a licensed industry under the Industrial Efficiency Act, 1936.\(^\text{15}\) To enable this to happen, the government needed to have agreements with the major international distribution companies; and the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash, who was on a trip to the United States and Britain at the time, was tasked with meeting with the key distributors and exploring possible distribution arrangements.\(^\text{16}\) The proposal was that the producers would continue to receive a percentage of revenue from theatres in New Zealand not less than what they were currently receiving.\(^\text{17}\)

At the same time as this was being explored, the Advisory Committee for the Minister of Internal Affairs had been meeting to revise the Board of Trade (Cinematograph Films) Regulations that had previously been found *ultra vires* in Kerridge v. Girling Butcher. The Crown Law Office advised that the new regulations would still be found *ultra vires*, but could be made valid if they were issued under the Industrial Efficiency Act, 1936. The suggestion that the industry may be placed under the Industrial Efficiency Act created significant dissent among members of the New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors Association, as well as apprehension among the distributors. In June 1937, while the Prime Minister was in London, he received a deputation from the Motion Picture Distributors Association, resulting in a hold being put on the proposal until further discussions could be held in New Zealand.\(^\text{18}\) The plan was flawed from the outset, as under the Industrial Efficiency Act, the majority of an industry had to agree to be regulated under the Act before it would become applicable to a specific industry. Although independent exhibitors would likely be supportive, that was less certain for the major chains, and certainly would be the case for the distributors themselves.
Formation of a Board of Internal Control

In an attempt to stabilise film supplies, the major exhibition chains entered into what would be known as the “Keep off the Grass” (KOG) agreement between each other. The agreement limited competition by assigning exhibitors to specific distributors wherever they were in a competitive situation, and although initially set for one year, continued in some form until 1945, with Kerridge-Odeon and Amalgamated Theatres continuing them until 1959. In removing the impact of competition, the exhibitors made it more difficult for the distributors to raise their prices for film rental.

The potentially more devastating move from the point-of-view of the distributors came the following year when the government gazetted an amendment to the Cinematograph Films (Issue of Exhibitor’s Licences) Regulations, 1937, enabling the government to regulate the supply of films in New Zealand. Under the regulations, the Licensing Officer (Girling-Butcher, who had taken on an additional role and title by this stage) could, at the time of issuing an exhibitor’s licence, specify the number of first-run, second-run and third-run films that a theatre could exhibit. To the US distributor, this appeared to be interference in their ability to freely conduct business with the different exhibitors, as the government appeared to be dictating the conditions of business. In discussions with the US Consulate, Girling-Butcher stated that the powers were simply of a permissive nature, and that he had no intention of exercising them unless he needed to set specific limits on a cinema to resolve a conflict. The intention was that the existence of the powers would force competing groups of exhibitors to compromise and come to an agreement without resorting to the government. The response from the US distributors was to cease negotiating any further film supply contracts until the amending regulations were removed. Sir Victor Wilson, President of the Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australasia asked the President of the New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors Association to meet with the Film Exhibitors Association and Amalgamated Theatres, to persuade them to join together in lobbying the government to withdraw the regulations, and to form a board with equal representation from distributors and exhibitors, with an independent chairman, to take the place of the Advisory Committee appointed under Section 41 of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928.
Initially the government refused to meet with deputations from the industry, as they perceived the distributors were using coercive actions against the exhibitors (by refusing to negotiate any film supply contracts) to try to force them to amend the legislation. However, after a period of no movement, they relented sufficiently to allow Girling-Butcher (as Chief Inspector of Films) to negotiate on the Government’s behalf, and allow the formation of the Board as long as there were two government observers included. In June 1939, the New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors Association, the Film Exh ibitors Association and the Film Exchanges Association of New Zealand concluded an agreement to create the Board of Internal Control for the Motion Picture Industry of New Zealand. The Board had nine voting members: four appointed by the Distributor’s Association, two by the Exhibitors Association to represent the exhibition chains and two elected by the independent exhibitors. The chair, a Stipendiary Magistrate, was to be appointed by the Board, with the Departments of Internal Affairs and Industries and Commerce being entitled to send representatives to take part in discussions, but not to vote. The Board had five functions:

a) to act as a tribunal for the settlement of disputes arising out of the contractual relationships between renters and exhibitors.

b) to act as an advisory body on matters touching the welfare of the motion picture industry

c) to consider any matter referred to it by the Minister of Internal Affairs or other Government authority

d) to arbitrate on any question submitted to it by the voluntary agreement of the parties to a dispute within the industry.

In addition, the Minister of Internal Affairs also agreed to provide it a statutory function by designating it as the Advisory Committee under Section 41 of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928. With the creation of the Board, the industry gained a greater degree of self-governance, along with the vehicle for consistent and ongoing consultation with the government.

**Government film-making**

**Depression and the Government Publicity Office**

The arrival of the Depression along with enforced economies on government expenditure resulted in significant changes to the Government Publicity Office (GPO), as
the government reorganised and rationalised government services and departments to reduce costs. In 1930, the GPO was amalgamated with the Department of Tourist and Publicity, and all of the production staff dismissed, with the exception of Cyril Morton who stayed on as “government film supervisor.” The resulting decrease in revenue from the government eventually pushed Filmcraft into receivership, but they managed to continue operating for a few more years with production of the occasional publicity film for the government.

In 1936, the lease of the Miramar Film Studios was taken over by the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts and Publicity, following the transfer of the Government Publicity Office to that department from Internal Affairs. Filmcraft subsequently sold the studios to the Tourist and Publicity Department in 1938 for £14,000, and they formed the basis of the Government Motion Picture and Advertising Studios. These facilities would later become the physical base for the National Film Unit in New Zealand, and for many years would be the only fully equipped motion picture studio in New Zealand. The owner, AAP McKenzie, stayed on with the studios as the Business Manager, and would see them become a critical film production asset for the government following the visit of John Grierson.

John Grierson visits New Zealand

The visit of John Grierson to New Zealand in 1940 has been the subject of a certain degree of mythology. The common understanding has been that Grierson visited New Zealand following an invitation by the Prime Minister’s Department to review and provide advice on government filmmaking and/or documentary film production, which (in some versions) subsequently led to the establishment of the National Film Unit (NFU). This narrative has been primarily constructed from New Zealand sources, which are fragmentary at best. More complete documentation of the New Zealand visit exist in the Grierson Archives at the University of Stirling in Scotland, and those documents suggest a slightly different and more complex narrative.

The background for the trip to New Zealand and Australia goes back to early 1938 when the Imperial Relations Trust (IRT) in Great Britain decided to turn their attention to non-theatrical film production and distribution in Australia and New Zealand (following
the work that Grierson had begun in Canada). The Imperial Relations Trust had been established in 1937, following an anonymous gift of £250,000 to Lord Baldwin, the Prime Minister at the time, to enhance relationships between Great Britain and her Dominions. The Trust decided early on to devote a considerable portion of the income towards film due to the impact it had on audiences. John Grierson, formerly head of the film unit for the Empire Marketing Board and General Post Office, was contracted as a part-time Films Officer. It was in this role that he visited Canada to both investigate the current state of film for the Imperial Relations Trust, and to advise the Canadian government. The same two-pronged purpose would later be used in the visit to New Zealand. With the developments in government film and non-theatrical distribution well underway in Canada, the Imperial Relations Trust Films Committee turned their attention to Australia and decided at their March 1939 meeting to begin discussions to enable Grierson to visit New Zealand during the same trip as his travels to Australia.

In the narrative that is commonly told regarding Grierson’s visit, it is the New Zealand Prime Minister’s Department who invited Grierson at the urging of Dr. William (Bill) Sutch, an officer in the Minister of Finance’s Department. Although this was technically correct in the sense that the Prime Ministers’ Department issued the invitation, the archival records suggest that the initiative originally came from the Imperial Relations Trust. Shortly after the March 1939 IRT Film Committee meeting, Sir Stephen Tallents (a member of the IRT) visited the High Commissioner for New Zealand, W J Jordan, and this was followed by a letter from the Chair of the IRT Films Committee, Lord Clarendon. With the introduction made, Grierson met Gilbert McAllister, the manager of the New Zealand Public Relations Council in London, for lunch on 21st April 1939. Subsequent meetings followed, as Grierson mapped out a plan for his visit with McAllister. At least in part, their agendas coincided. Grierson wanted to visit New Zealand to develop an infrastructure for the distribution of British Empire/Commonwealth non-theatrical films and the production of films suitable for international distribution. The New Zealanders wanted assistance in improving their governmental film output. The result was a proposal that was forwarded to the New Zealand Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Michael Savage by the New Zealand High Commissioner. While these discussions were happening, the Minister in charge of Tourist and Health Resorts, the Honourable Frank Langstone, was
visiting London, and McAllister arranged for him to also meet Grierson. Their meeting went well, and Langstone wrote to McAllister on 2nd June 1939 to say that:

I think that the idea of Mr. Grierson’s visiting New Zealand in the near future is excellent, and on my return to the Dominion I shall ask my Department to associate itself with Mr. Grierson in every possible way.39

On 14th June 1939, High Commissioner Jordan forwarded to Tallents the response from the New Zealand Prime Minister quoting him saying:

You can assure Sir Stephen Tallents that we will be very pleased indeed to welcome the representative of the Trust and to do everything possible to make his visit a success. . . . I am quite sure that the film is a particularly valuable medium for the developing of understanding between the various countries, and I hope that in co-operation with the Government’s own film producing organisation, some valuable result will come from this project.40

Grierson, thus, had obtained his official invitation from the New Zealand Government, along with the personal support of one of the cabinet ministers. The Australian response was less positive, but that is outside this narrative.41

Originally, Grierson had planned to visit New Zealand and Australia in the latter part of 1939. He was en route from Canada and in Los Angeles meeting with Walter Wanger and other industry contacts before taking a ship to the South Pacific, when Britain declared war on Germany on September 3rd, 1939.42 This resulted in a change of plan, as Grierson, with his background in studying mass communication, immediately began monitoring and surveying media coverage of the war in the United States. He soon noticed that Germany had the upper hand in the propaganda war and sent a cable to Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador in Washington, DC, offering his assistance.43 Lothian summoned Grierson to Washington DC, and the trip to New Zealand and Australia was consequently postponed.44

John and Margaret Grierson arrived in Auckland, New Zealand on February 16th, 1940 aboard the SS Mariposa.45 The ship docked at 8:15pm, and as no one was allowed to access the docks after 6pm due to war restrictions, they were unable to disembark until the next day. A.A.P. McKenzie, the Business Manager of the Government Film Studios, met them at the wharf, along with Frederick Bull, Canadian Trade Commissioner, and Mr. Stalsted, the New Zealand Manager for Cable and Wireless Limited.46 The plan was for
McKenzie to take the Griersons on a scenic tour through the North Island via Rotorua over the weekend (they disembarked on a Friday); however, Grierson wasn’t interested in a scenic tour and preferred to head straight to Wellington. Archival records don’t indicate as to whether the original plan was followed through or not, but by the following week, John and Margaret Grierson were in Wellington where they spent most of the following four weeks.

Grierson maintained a very full schedule during his time in Wellington, visiting with government officials and others who could assist him in furthering his agenda, speaking to different groups, and spending time with the Government Film Studio staff. His papers reveal portions of his schedule, but much is left to speculation. Correspondence remaining in the archival records indicates there were a few people who he met with multiple times: Bill Sutch — Secretary-economist in the office of the Minister of Finance, Stanhope Andrews — editor of National Education and film critic, Sir Thomas Hunter — Vice-Chancellor, University of New Zealand, Dr. CE Beeby (then Temporary Secretary of Department of Education, made permanent following Grierson’s departure), and John Thomas Paul, Director of Publicity.

What is strikingly absent is evidence of much interaction with the staff of Government Film Studios. An agenda exists in both the Cyril Morton files in Archives New Zealand and the Grierson Archives at the University of Stirling for a meeting between Grierson and the production staff outlining a number of questions. There is suggestion in the agenda that there had been a previous meeting, but aside from this, there is little indication in the records of much contact between Grierson and the production staff. More extensive contact is likely to have taken place at the management level with McKenzie, the Manager of the Government Film Studios, as the main report Grierson wrote in New Zealand focused on Government production.

The Grierson report

Just prior to his departure from New Zealand, Grierson submitted a final report to a number of people within the New Zealand government. The report encapsulated his observations and recommendations on production within the government, distribution of
government-produced films, non-theatrical distribution, and executive oversight via a National Film Council (with some similarities to the National Film Board of Canada).

Although Grierson felt that the New Zealand government had made a good start in the production of tourism, agricultural education and public relations films, there continued to be a major gap in the production of films promoting citizenship and New Zealand’s international reputation.\(^{52}\) His recommendations spanned a number of areas. Grierson suggested that there should be a more directive policy towards the production and distribution of government film, with a central coordinating body to set priorities and ensure a more efficient and effective use of resources.\(^{53}\) This would involve the establishment of a National Film Council (similar in some respects to the National Film Board of Canada) and appointment of an executive officer to act as the liaison and mediator between the production studio and the individual departments, and the authority to make the necessary decisions.\(^{54}\) The ‘Studio’ or ‘Government Film Unit’ would produce the films for government departments under the direction or approval of the coordinating body (National Film Council), with all costs charged to the appropriate department as if it was an external organisation.\(^{55}\) The unit would continue to be housed in the Tourist and Publicity Department; however, the executive officer (National Film Controller) and National Film Council would be attached to the Prime Minister’s Department.\(^{56}\)

A number of appendices were attached to the report outlining recommendations on some other film-related issues. Grierson proposed the formation of an advisory film committee to be attached to the Council for Adult Education to coordinate demand and supply of non-theatrical films, with an executive officer heading up the distribution organisation.\(^{57}\) The functions of the National Film Council were outlined along with the ideal attributes of the National Film Controller.\(^{58}\) To support the war effort, Grierson recommended that the Director of Publicity put together a small panel of representatives from all sections of the film industry to formulate plans for the best way to use film and the industry infrastructure to support the government.\(^{59}\) For distribution of New Zealand government films in the United Kingdom, Grierson suggested that a wider group of agencies should be used to supplement the efforts of New Zealand House in London, particularly the Empire Film Library.\(^{60}\) In Appendix 5, Grierson noted that although the proposed Government Film Unit would be the primary organisation for the production of
government films, it should not preclude the use of good commercial creative units as well, as this would both be efficient as well as helping to maintain close and harmonious relations with the film trade generally. As a result of complaints from the production staff at the Government Film Studios in Miramar, Grierson included some comments suggesting that a review of the salaries should be taken by the National Film Council, and raised the question as to whether the salaries provided sufficient incentive for good creative work. He felt that most positions, aside from the Film Controller, Studio Manager and Production Supervisor, should be on a temporary, project-basis rather than as permanent civil-service positions. The remaining appendices covered minor issues such as the need to establish an inventory of all film equipment across the different government departments, development of close relationships with the commercial production portion of the industry, and to rationalise the information included on credit titles.

In addition to the major report, Grierson wrote a few shorter reports. The Prime Minister (Fraser) received a report from Grierson outlining in more detail his discussions with Sir Thomas Hunter and proposing a clearing-house for educational films in the non-theatrical market. The report was written during his stopover in Auckland en route back to Canada after his time in Australia, and after further consultations with Hunter, Beeby and Schmitt. What happened following this report is not clear. Miss Jackson at the IRT received information that the proposal for the Committee had been put in abeyance.

Another report that Prime Minister Fraser received was on the creation of a National Information Service for the marketing of New Zealand and its produce.

The final report Grierson provided to the Prime Minister is the basis for some of the mythology surrounding Grierson’s New Zealand trip, but was not adopted by the Government in its original form. The government already had film studios in Miramar and initially focused their efforts on that rather than re-creating the unit in the Grierson model. The National Film Council was never created although a committee with the less august name of Film Production Subcommittee, under the chair of Stanhope Andrews, was established to take on some of the envisaged duties, under the auspices of the War Publicity Committee. Nor was the position of National Film Controller created or Grierson’s preferred candidate for the position, Bill Sutch, appointed to any position overseeing film production. Some sixteen months after Grierson’s report, Andrews was
appointed as Producer of the National Film Unit, a position that embodied some of the responsibilities of the National Film Controller with the position of Studio Director. Andrews was Grierson’s original choice for the film library/distribution body, but was appointed to head up the National Film Unit after heading up the Film Production Subcommittee, observation of the workings of the Government Films Studios, production of the short film, *Country Lads* (1941), and his own reports to the Director of Publicity, JT (Thomas) Paul and the Prime Minister. *Country Lads* (1941) was a short film celebrating the spirit of the New Zealand servicemen as they departed for the war overseas, made utilising newsreel footage filmed by the Government Film Studios. Some of Andrews’ reports and notes to Paul are in the Hocken Library, and consistently note that the studio needed reorganisation and the appointment of someone of the appropriate calibre to lead their efforts. At the time, Andrews was Assistant Secretary for the New Zealand Educational Institute. Soon after Grierson’s visit, Andrews wrote his own report titled “National Publicity and Adult Education in War Time. Practical Suggestions for Integrating New Zealand’s War Effort through Radio, Films, Press, etc. on a Democratic Basis,” which was forwarded by Frank Combs (in the Department of Education School Publications Unit) to the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash. It is unclear as to whether this is the report Andrews later refers to as the one persuading the Prime Minister, or some other report that no longer exists. Handwritten notes accompanying the report suggest that, although there were some interesting points contained within the report, this would have been insufficient on its own to have persuaded the Prime Minister. Andrews wasn’t appointed to head up the National Film Unit until some fourteen months later, by which time he had provided Paul with a number of confidential reports. Andrews’ production of *Country Lads* (1941), received considerable positive comment from both politicians and the press. According to Andrews, though, the Prime Minister did not take kindly to Grierson’s rather direct and brash style, interpreting it as a misplaced sense of superiority.

Interestingly, there seems to be relatively little in the archival files indicating much contact between Grierson and JT Paul, although he would have been one of the key individuals for Grierson to work with, as he had considerable authority in the area as Director of Publicity. Paul was not one of the recipients of the final report that Grierson wrote, nor did Paul reference Grierson’s report at any point. A copy of a letter that Grierson sent Paul references a proposal Grierson received from Paul that Grierson largely
disagreed with. Paul’s letter to Grierson is not included in the file, as Grierson returned it with notes on it. The wording that Grierson uses in his response was the same as used in the sections regarding war information in his major report to Fraser, Nash, Schmitt and Langstone. However, it is highly likely that at least one of the recipients of the report would have shared it with Paul.

The report lay dormant following Grierson’s departure and Andrews became actively involved in scripting and advising on war promotion films through his position on the Film Production Subcommittee (attached to the War Publicity Committee), and produced the first of the Weekly Review series Country Lads (1941). In addition, he provided his own report to Fraser regarding the structuring of the government film production operation a few months after Grierson, and with all of these attributes in his favour, appeared to be a natural fit to lead the National Film Unit in 1941, when the government film production services were reorganised and re-branded. After Grierson’s departure, Sutch doesn’t appear to have had any further interest in film.

The recommendations in the report were not taken up in the form suggested; however, the discussions Grierson had with the various officials along with the report likely influenced the later developments in government film in New Zealand. A letter from Sutch to Grierson in early April, 1940 suggested that the common view regarding the report was that the recommendations were “. . . top heavy. . . The main difficulty will be not to swell the unit but to have an independent man. Surrender of sovereignty is not relished.” The formation of the National Film Unit will be discussed further shortly, and while the Film Advisory Committee does not appear to have taken shape in the form originally envisaged, Griersons’ proposal clearly led to the establishment of the National Film Library as part of the Department of Education. In the Stanhope Andrews papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library, there is a recommendation letter from November 1940 to accompany an application for the Supervisor of Teaching Aids position. Walter Harris was appointed to the position rather than Andrews, and he commenced his role in the Department of Education at the beginning of May 1941.

I find the suggestion that Fraser threw away Grierson’s report and ignored it altogether as suggested by Stanhope Andrews, rather problematic. Grierson’s vision was for a government film unit servicing the needs of the country, nation building, war
propaganda and building cohesion within the British Commonwealth through contributions of film to the Empire Film Library. The focus of Fraser and his Cabinet, however, was on war-time concerns and using film for propaganda and other information needs. With the focus on short-term, war needs, the scope did not have to be as broad as that suggested by Grierson. Where possible, use of existing people or infrastructure was preferable over setting up something new. It is in this context that the implementation of Grierson’s report needs to be considered. Implementation did not happen immediately, nor was it followed in all of its detail, but the general contours of the report would be later seen in the establishment of both the National Film Unit and the National Film Library.

**Laying the groundwork for the National Film Library**

The greater focus of Grierson’s trip, and largely unrecognised accomplishment, was initiating the formation of what would become the National Film Library. This came as a result of a number of meetings and telephone calls between Grierson, Sir Thomas Hunter and Dr. Beeby. One of the concerns of the IRT was distribution of non-theatrical film within and between the Dominions. Grierson had set up the National Film Board in Canada, which included a distribution network for its films. In London, the Empire Film Library existed as part of the Imperial Institute (totally separate from the IRT, although they did some funding for the film library from the IRT), but in other parts of the Empire, suitable distribution infrastructure had yet to be developed. In conjunction with Sir Thomas Hunter, Grierson developed a plan to pull together the films that Sir Harry Batterbee (High Commissioner for Britain) possessed along with the educational films existing in different parts of the government. Grierson sought some seed funding from the IRT to enable a larger collection of films to be purchased to provide the core of the New Zealand collection.

In a letter to Sir Thomas Hunter, Grierson outlined his plan for a coordinating body for the distribution of non-theatrical film in New Zealand. His description of the current situation was scathing:

The effort is piecemeal and scattered. There is no planning of the development of such film services from a national or educational point of view. There is no co-ordination of effort which promotes the economical service of machinery, films and audiences. At the same time, supply is
positively prevented by the lack of an organisation of national status which can approach the Government with a guarantee of audiences and a guarantee of effective liaison service in the district. Films have no assurance of being adequately presented or promoted, from an educational and national point of view. Film sources in other countries, which might be willing to send in at no cost to you films to meet your requirements, have no assurance that the films they might send would be effectively and economically circulated.\textsuperscript{83}

Grierson’s proposal was to have the Council of Adult Education establish an Advisory Film Committee to oversee the task with an executive officer to put the plan into operation. His suggestion of the best person to take on the role was Stanhope Andrews (later to become the first Producer of the National Film Unit).\textsuperscript{84} For initial funding, Grierson proposed to the IRT that £1,250 Sterling be devoted to setting up a non-theatrical distribution organisation in New Zealand, distributed as follows:

£500 will be spent on copies of films for educational circulation; £250 will be held in reserve, to purchase prints found specially useful in New Zealand; and £500 will be put at the disposal of the appropriate organisation when it is formed. In my letter to Sir Thomas Hunter I have intimated that this last sum of £500 could be used to subsidise any special course of training the executive officers of the Committee might require – if other funds are not available – or to support the development of local film organisations affiliated to the central body, or, indeed for any other film activity which will help to give an effective start to non-theatrical activity under consideration.\textsuperscript{85}

The Film Committee of the IRT in its July 9\textsuperscript{th} meeting approved the funding for New Zealand, with an amendment from the allocation Grierson outlined to Fraser in his earlier letter. Instead of £250 for additional prints of popular films, £150 was to be held for that purpose, with £100 to be used for the purchase of films from Canada.\textsuperscript{86} Janet Jackson, Secretary of the IRT, reported that she had heard that the setting up of the Advisory Committee was in abeyance.\textsuperscript{87} There is no further information in the archival records to support the purchase of the films for New Zealand or payment of the monies approved, although there is nothing to suggest it wasn’t. The fruit of the discussions resulted in the later formation of the National Film Library in New Zealand, although again in a slightly different guise from that originally conceptualised by Grierson.

Grierson and his wife left for Australia on the 16\textsuperscript{th} March 1940, with only a very brief stopover in Auckland at the end of April en route back to North America. Though he
did not return to New Zealand, he left behind a number of disciples who enthusiastically followed his ideas on the production of documentary film. Later, one of the staff members from the Realist Film Unit in London, Margaret Thomson, returned to New Zealand (she was a New Zealander) and joined the National Film Unit as a senior unit director. She only stayed a couple of years, however, due to the stifling environment for women in the workplace, before returning to London. Grierson’s impact on the direction of government involvement in film in New Zealand was tangible, though not in the original forms he envisaged. He inspired a number of government officials and film production personnel in the ideals of the documentary movement, while providing ideas for institutions that would later take shape in a more appropriate scale and form for the local conditions.

**Establishment of the National Film Unit**

Between the receipt of Grierson’s report in April 1940 and establishment of the National Film Unit in August 1941, government filmmaking continued with the resources of the Government Film Studios in Miramar under guidance of a committee. Grierson’s report was circulated within government circles, but as noted earlier, his proposal was considered too “top heavy” and influenced by his Canadian experience. Sutch also saw a problem in having someone sufficiently independent. As a result, the recommendations within the report were not followed up on, at least not immediately nor in the form originally proposed by Grierson. Stanhope Andrews is likely to have been privileged with a reading of the report, or at least privy to some of the discussions regarding the report. Reading the mood of the government, he put together an alternative report that, with the assistance of Frank Combs, was presented to Walter Nash, the Finance Minister. Although this report also was not acted upon, it raised the profile of Andrews, who later was appointed chair of the Film Production Subcommittee, a committee advising on the production of government film and ultimately reporting to the War Publicity Committee (via the Film Production Committee).

The Film Production Committee, chaired by J.T. Paul, Director of Publicity, was originally established as the Film Production Sub-Committee of the War Publicity Committee in August 1940, and did not include Andrews in its membership. Its mandate appears to have been to provide oversight regarding priorities and subjects for the
production of films, and make recommendations to the War Publicity Committee. Subsequently, a sub-committee was formed to oversee the actual production of films, and the original Film Production Sub-committee began to refer to itself as the Film Production Committee. Stanhope Andrews was appointed Chair of the Film Production Sub-committee, though exactly when this happened is unclear. While the Film Production Sub-Committee focused on overseeing the production of the films themselves, the (renamed) Film Production Committee focused on subject selection and priorities for production resources. Oversight of production by committee (members of whom were part-time) proved to be a very inefficient and cumbersome, and resulted in calls over a number of months for a full-time person to oversee production. These two committees were part of the network of committees formed to oversee the control of and distribution of war related information and propaganda.

Figure 9.1: Committee structure overseeing wartime use of films in New Zealand

At the top of the structure was the War Publicity Committee convened by the Hon. D. Wilson, (Minister of National Service and Immigration) with J.T. Paul (Director of Publicity), B. Sheil (Deputy Controller of the National Commercial Broadcasting Service), and A.D. McIntosh (Prime Minister’s Department) sitting on the committee, joined later by the Hon. J. Robertson. A number of subcommittees reported to the War Publicity
Committee including the Film Production Subcommittee and the Film Distribution Subcommittee. The committee structure was somewhat cumbersome as an oversight mechanism, however a small flow of films using the Government Film Studio facilities began to be produced. Stanhope Andrews was still employed by the New Zealand Educational Institute at this stage as Assistant Secretary and Editor of National Education, but appears to have been spending increasing amounts of time at the Miramar Film Studios in his capacity as Chair of the Film Production Subcommittee.

A number of films were initiated by the Film Production Subcommittee and put into production with subjects primarily focused on reducing waste. Andrews noted in an article in December 1940 that fourteen “poster” films had been produced since the beginning of the war.98 The government was focused on attracting volunteers for the 2nd Echelon they were forming to send overseas [the 1st Echelon having been sent overseas during the First World War] and as a result the Government Film Studios lost a number of their staff. Andrews later noted that the Department of Industries and Commerce had refused to appeal against the balloting of men from the studios for military service, and as a result the decrease in manpower affected the ability of the studios to maintain the level of production.99

Discussion of the reorganisation of the Government’s war publicity efforts began in February 1941 with the Hon. D. Wilson suggesting that a Director of Information should be appointed to develop and run publicity programmes for the government.100 This proposal Paul strongly objected to, as it was taking on a portion of his role and making the question of who was responsible for what unclear.101 The operation of the film studios was unsatisfactory and Paul had Andrews write him a confidential analysis of the situation in November 1940. Andrews responded with a blunt appraisal of the situation noting that they were undermanned, and although competent in their duties, none of the existing staff were capable of leading the organisation.102 In his view, the studios needed:

. . . a man ‘out in front’ who has some coherent philosophy of films, who can’t be scared by officials high or low, who knows how to get in with men who, in fact, knows how to give the studios the prestige and importance that is due to them as a major arm in the publicity war.103

Andrews then set out his plan for the reorganisation for the studios and the necessary staffing to bring it up to proper operational level. Nowhere in the document did Andrews
suggest that he would be the best person to lead the studios, although his actions to date and in ensuing months suggest that was his aim.

By April 1941, the conflict between Paul and Wilson had been resolved with Wilson announcing that all publicity efforts would be reorganised under Paul. The establishment of the National Film Unit (NFU) wasn’t, however, immediate. It would be another few months before Andrews would be appointed as Producer. It was during this period that Andrews produced the film *Country Lads* (1941). Using newsreel footage shot of parades of soldiers marching through the streets and preparing for embarkation shot by Bert Bridgeman, along with a script he co-wrote with his wife, Isobel Andrews (a noted playwright), Andrews edited together a film that illustrated his approach to film-making, a style heavily influenced by Griersonian documentary. The film was released in New Zealand cinemas, and was received with a highly positive response from audiences. A special screening was held for the Cabinet in early July 1940, and following that, the Cabinet offered Andrews the position of Producer of the NFU.

The National Film Unit name appears to have been under discussion internally very early. A memorandum from Morton to H. Bridgeman dated 19th March 1940, sets out a standard opening title for films that includes the words “New Zealand National Film Unit presents.” Later, *Country Lads* (1941) was billed as having being made by the “New Zealand National Film Unit,” although official reference to the Miramar Studios was as the Government Film Studios.

Although the National Film Unit became fully operational with the appointment of Andrews in August 1941, it was without the independence that Grierson had envisaged. Control of the studio was embedded in the office of the Prime Minister, with priorities set from within that office and focused on the wartime needs of the country. The control wasn’t onerous, however, as Paul exercised a light touch in his oversight.

**Social Control and Development**

**Precursor to the National Film Library**

Most of the attention surrounding Grierson’s visit to New Zealand has been focused on the production side and eventual formation of the National Film Unit. For Grierson,
more important component of his visit was the development of the distribution infrastructure for non-theatrical films, linking in with similar organisations elsewhere in the British Commonwealth. This has been overlooked by scholars, largely due to most of the original documentation being non-existent, with the primary narrative of its formation coming from an interview in 1979 with Walter Harris, the first person to head up the library.\textsuperscript{110} His recollection of the events make no mention of Grierson, nor is it clear how much he knew about Grierson's recommendations. Harris also makes no mention of initial support coming from the Imperial Relations Trust, although this may have been because the expenditure had been approved approximately ten months before his appointment with the purchase of films happening from outside of New Zealand.

Prior to delivering his final report to the Prime Minister and leaving New Zealand, Grierson wrote a letter to Sir Thomas Hunter giving his view of the situation and making a proposal (see Appendix 9.1). Grierson was blunt regarding the current situation noting that “. . . there is at present neither machinery for articulating their demands nor for securing in an orderly way the supply needed.”\textsuperscript{111} Grierson was referring to the infrastructure for the distribution of non-theatrical films. He went on to suggest there was no coordination of efforts or organisation that would ensure that any films sent would actually receive a screening.\textsuperscript{112} Having set out the extent of the problem as he saw it, Grierson then proposed a solution, with the formation of an Advisory Committee made up of a number of senior officials interested in educational film, and suggested that there should be a full-time executive officer in charge of the operations. Stanhope Andrews was his suggested candidate for the position.\textsuperscript{113} Through the IRT, Grierson would provide £500 seed money to enable its initiation, although this was going to be indirect with the Department of Education actually providing the sum in exchange for Grierson making a similar sum available in London for the Department of Education to spend (as there were strict foreign exchange controls in place).\textsuperscript{114} In subsequent discussions, Grierson also offered £750 for subsistence and travelling expenses to enable training of the officer appointed to coordinate government film activities.\textsuperscript{115} The government had declined this offer, and so Grierson proposed to have this sum instead allocated for the purchase of films for New Zealand, thus offering a total of £1,250 from the Imperial Relations Trust.
Following the IRT meeting where funding was approved for New Zealand, there is no evidence of anything happening over the next few months to suggest Grierson’s proposal was under consideration or moving forward. The next hint that something was underway comes from the Andrews Papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library, where there is a reference letter from A.E. Campbell, Director of the NZ Council of Educational Research dated 19th November 1940 in support of an application by Andrews for the position of Supervisor of Teaching Aids. Based on the recollections of Walter Harris, this was some months before the position was ever advertised in the Education Gazette, however, Andrews may have been acting on inside information. Whether Andrews was considered for the job or not is unclear; however, Walter Harris took up the position at the beginning of May 1941, having responded to a job advertisement earlier in the year. The position was under the Department of Education, but within a short time housed with the National Film Unit. Although Grierson had envisaged Andrews for the position, Harris had experience using films as a school teacher and lecturer at Christchurch Teachers’ College, and thus got the position. A few months later, Andrews was appointed as Producer of the National Film Unit.

Later in the year (1941), an announcement appeared in the Education Gazette that the films available through Sir Harry Batterbee, the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, would form the basis of a library of films within the Education Department. The library began operation the following April, with 111 sound films and twenty-nine silent films. It would be another year before the library took on the name “National Film Library,” an organisation that continued to exist until its incorporation into the National Library of New Zealand in 1990. Whether the collection that Sir Harry Batterbee provided included films purchased from IRT funds is unknown. Nor is there any mention of films from the National Film Board in Canada in the initial collection, but irrespective of this, it is likely that the discussions that Grierson had during his time in New Zealand set the foundations for the establishment of the National Film Library.

**Economic imperatives**

The licensing of cinemas and Board of Trade Regulations originally introduced in 1932, and subsequently reintroduced introduced in 1934 after having been declared *ultra*
vires in 1933, continued to be problematic. The introduction of the Industrial Efficiency Act in 1936 provided another possible mechanism for the government to intervene. The Crown Law Office found that some of the powers for licensing cinemas probably exceeded the authority permissible under the Board of Trade Act, 1919, but could be made legal if the motion picture industry was brought under the Industrial Efficiency Act, 1936. This option was undesirable to both the distributors and the exhibitors, and so new regulations were issued under the joint auspices of the Board of Trade and the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928.¹²²

The Licensing Authority was provided with quasi-judicial powers allowing it, when considering license applications, to take into account a range of factors, including the quality of films to be exhibited (relating to a multi-tier system of release), the standard of seating and amenities, admission prices, site of proposed cinema in relation to its competitors, the number of days that exhibitions would be held, and other cinemas controlled by the applicant. This gave the Licensing Authority considerable power over the eventual success and operation of the cinema. Although the initial intervention was to protect independent cinemas from the predatory operations of the larger chains, it also moved to protect local investors from investing in buildings that would be uneconomic. This then developed into the government, also trying to stabilise the first-run exhibition portion of the business, which resulted in conflict with both the distributors and the major exhibition chains.¹²³

From the 1934 Committee of Inquiry, the structure of the screen industry continued to evolve in New Zealand. The beginnings of the major exhibition chains, which would continue for nearly fifty years following the war, were apparent in this period. The government institutions and regulatory structure were established, and relative calm returned to the industry by the end of the period studied here. Further restrictions were imposed on the building of new cinemas to maintain the viability of existing cinemas. The visit of John Grierson was significant, as it assisted in the development of a dedicated government film unit, whose films would have prominence on New Zealand screens for the next fifty years, as well as the groundwork for the National Film Library, which would become an important institution in the education system.
Endnotes


3 Supplement to the New Zealand Gazette, Thursday, August 15, 1935, 2263-2268; Foster, Part II, 109-112.

4 Cinematograph Films Amendment Act, 1934, No. 36, Section 10(2); Walter Orebaugh, “Material for Film Year Book,” November 12, 1934, 2. USNA, RG 84 Consular Posts, Wellington, New Zealand, 840.6, Vol. 153.

5 Cinematograph Films Amendment Act, 1934, No. 36, Section 12.

6 Ibid., Section 6.

7 NZNA, AAAC Acc W4442 11 3/17/1/5 Film Censorship reports 1933-1949;

8 Cinematograph Films Amendment Act, 1934 No. 36, Section 2; Walter Orebaugh, “Material for Film Year Book,” November 12, 1934, 2. USNA, RG 84 Consular Posts, Wellington, New Zealand, 840.6, Vol. 153.

9 ibid., 65.

10 ibid., 65-66. If the majority of the industrial units concerned approved the plans, they could then be embodied in regulations and applied throughout the industry.


12 Foster, Part II, 66. The Committee was different from the one appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs under Section 41 of the Cinematograph Films Act, 1928.

13 Foster, Part II, 130.

14 ibid., 130-131.

15 ibid., 72, 131.

16 ibid., 66.

17 ibid., 66.

18 ibid., 67.

19 ibid. The companies participating in those agreements were Amalgamated Theatres, Fuller Theatre Corporation, John Fuller and Sons, JC Williamson Picture Corporation, New Zealand Theatres, Christchurch Theaters, Kerridge Theatres and Paramount Cinema in Wellington.

20 Foster Part II, 67-68.


23 ibid., 3.

24 Foster Part II, 131.

25 ibid., 132.

26 ibid., 133.

27 ibid., 134.


Tangential to this, but interesting none-the-less, Peter Jackson would later buy the assets of the National Film Unit when it was privatised, and establish his studio facilities (where the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit trilogies were based) in Miramar, where Filmcraft and the National Film Unit were originally situated.


The donor was later identified by the Evening Standard as Sir Henry Strakosch, a financier who had made his fortune in South African gold. Although this is quite possible, there isn’t any evidence from other sources to support their claims. See Andrew Rodger, “Some factors contributing to the formation of the National Film Board of Canada,” Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 9(3) (1989), 264, cited in Zoë Druick, Projecting Canada (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007) 37,192;

Druick, Projecting Canada, 38.

Minutes of meeting of Imperial Relations Trust Films Committee, 28th March, 1939, 3. John Grierson Archives (JGA), G3/5/2 Memoranda, minutes and other official papers of the IRT.


Letter to Tallents from Jordan, 14th June, 1939. JGA G3/15/24 Correspondence.


Letter from Langstone to McAlistier, June 1, 1939, 6, quoted in New Zealand Public Relations Council, Memorandum on Film. JGA G4/5/8 Memoranda on the use of films in New Zealand.

Letter to Tallents from Jordan, 14th June, 1939. JGA G3/15/24 Correspondence.
Although it appears that Grierson did receive some form of official invitation from the Australian government, he was unable to meet with the Prime Minister and gain any traction at the Federal level until the end of his trip there. In Australia there was considerable official suspicion of Grierson and the objectives of his visit.

Walter Wanger was a prominent and noted US film producer, who was also President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at the time of Grierson’s visit to Los Angeles.

Cable from Grierson to Lord Lothian, 19th September, 1939. JGA G3/15/96 Correspondence.

Telegram from Lothian to Grierson, Sept. 23, 1939 JGA, G3/15/10 Correspondence.

Telegram from Janet Fraser to Margaret Grierson, 15 March, 1939. JGA, G4/24/55 Correspondence. Margaret Grierson accompanied her husband and acted has his typist.

Letter to Grierson (sic) from Stalsted, 16th February, 1940, JGA G4/24/23 Correspondence; Letter to Grierson from Neill, February 16, 1940, JGA G4/24/24 Correspondence; Telegram from Langstone to Grierson, 16 Feb, 1940, JGA 4/24/25 Correspondence.


Driving straight from Auckland to Wellington would still have given him a scenic tour, albeit without the inclusion of the packaged Maori tourist experience.

“Agenda: Meeting with Mr. Grierson.” NZNA, AAPG 6025 3i C.J. Morton Papers, letters – miscellaneous 1939-42; “Agenda: Meeting with Mr. Grierson.” JGA G4/7/32 Miscellaneous papers.

JGA G4/N8 Black Government of Canada ledger. This 200+ page notebook contains Grierson’s notes from his visit to New Zealand. Although his writing is largely unintelligible and difficult to interpret, initial review of the notebook hasn’t revealed anything related to meetings with production personnel at the Government Film Studio. Most of the notes and writing in the notebook appears to come from the latter part of his visit to New Zealand.


JGA, G4/5 Memoranda on the use of films in New Zealand.; NZNA, AAOJ 7811 Acc W5077 24 John Grierson Report 1939-40; NZNA, Walter Nash papers, bundle 244, folio 690. Portions of the report appear to be missing in the Grierson Archives. Recipients included: Schmitt (Department of Tourist and Health Resorts and Publicity), Fraser (Acting Prime Minister), Langstone (Minister in charge of Tourist and Health Resorts), and Nash (Minister of Finance).


ibid., 4.

ibid., 5-6, 12-13.

ibid., 8-9.

ibid., 10.


His predecessor, Michael Savage, died on 27th March, 1940, and so while Fraser had been Acting Prime Minister during Grierson’s visit, he was confirmed in the position of Prime Minister by the time Grierson stopped over in New Zealand en route back to Canada.

Minutes of the 13th Meeting of the Film Committee of the IRT, July 9th, 1940, included as an attachment of Jackson to Grierson, 15th July, 1940. JGA 4/24/146 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.


This was an advisory committee headed by Andrews, who made recommendations to the War Publicity Committee of topics for films that should be produced (paid for from the War Expenses budget), and then oversaw their production.

Letter from Grierson to Prime Minister, undated. JGA G4/30/2 Correspondence.

Letter from Grierson to Prime Minister, undated. JGA G4/30/2 Correspondence.

Letter from Grierson to Nash, 12th March 1940. NZNA, Walter Nash Papers, Bundle 244, 0483-519 Films 1940.


HL, J.T. Paul Collection, MS 982-484 Letters and notes from Stanhope Andrews relating to the reorganization of the Miramar Studios, 1940.

Letter from Combs to Nash, 31st May, 1940; E.S. Andrews, “National Publicity and Adult Education in War Time. Practical Suggestions for Integrating New Zealand’s War Effort Through Radio, Films, Press, etc. on a Democratic Basis,” May 20th, 1940. HL, J.T. Paul Collection, MS-982/501 Papers relating to War publicity and Information Services including minutes of the War Publicity Committee.


Letter from Grierson to Paul, 10th March, 1940. JGA G4/24/44 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.

ibid., 4.
For a specific example, compare this from Grierson’s letter to Paul in his discussion regarding setting up a distribution committee:

“It might therefore not seem proper for the Government – and particularly as a matter of cooperation for national war purposes – to choose any particular sectional interest of the film trade as its executive co-operative instrument. It would, in fact, be more valuable, and less inducive of disappointment, jealousy, and criticism, for the Government to regard all sections of the film trade as willingly available for war information purposes; and the Government should mobilise the trade as a whole to these ends.”

See Letter from Grierson to Paul, 10th March, 1940. JGA, G4/24/44 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940. The exact same paragraph is used in Appendix 3 of the Grierson report to the New Zealand Government.

Letter from Sutch to Grierson, 10th April, 1940. JGA, G4/24/95 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.

Transcript of discussion between George Peart, Manager, National Film Library and Walter Harris, First Manager, National Film Library, 21st March, 1979, 3. NZNA, AAOJ 7810 Acc W5077 22 National Film Library Managers. In Harris’s recollection, the development of the National Film Library was his own idea, and there was no mention of any funding from the IRT. He did mention (4) that there were already many films from Sir Harry Batterbee and Britain, which formed the basis for the library. It is likely the IRT-funded films were included in this although Harris may not have been aware of their source.

Undated handwritten notes. ATL: Ernest Stanhope Andrews Papers 93-320 – 1/03 NFU Correspondence, articles, reports 1939-1986

Letter to Hunter from Grierson, 10th March, 1940. JGA G4/24/25 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.

ibid.

ibid., 2.

Letter from Grierson to Fraser, undated (March 1940), 4. JGA, G4/30/2 Correspondence, n.d.

Minutes of the IRT Film Committee, July 9th, 1940, 4. JGA G4/24/146 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.

ibid.

Peters, 115-116.

Although the establishment of a special film unit to create film for the government’s war needs was announced on May 28, 1941 as part of a reorganisation of all government war publicity under J.T. Paul, the Director of Publicity in the Prime Minister’s Office, it was not until the appointment of Stanhope Andrews as Producer of the National Film Unit, that the National Film Unit formally began operations. Andrews’ appointment letter as “Producer of the Miramar Studios” did not include the “National Film Unit” name. See Minutes of the War Publicity Committee, 10 April, 1941. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-455; “The National Film Unit,” Te Rua Mahaira o te Kawanatanga, Archives New Zealand, Audio Visual Archives, accessed 9th March, 2012, http://audiovisual.archives.govt.nz/nationalfilmunit; Jonathan Dennis (ed) (“The Tin Shed”: The Origins of the National Film Unit, Wellington: The New Zealand Film Archive, 1981), 9; Letter of appointment for E.S. Andrews, 16th July, 1941. ATL: Andrews, Ernest Stanhope Papers 93-320 – 1/03 NFU Correspondence, articles, reports 1939-1986.
Sutch to Grierson, 10th April, 1940. JGA: G4/24/95 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.

ibid.


Initial members were J.T. Paul (Director of Publicity), A.A. McKenzie (Advertising Manager, GFS), C.J. Morton (Film Supervisor, GFS), J. Harris (Photographer, GFS), J. Robertson, MP, A.T.F. Chorlton (Publicity Officer, Transport Department), O.N. Gillespie (a journalist/lawyer with close connections with the government). By early 1941, Andrews was a member of the Film Production Committee. See: Notes of Meeting of Publicity Committee, Tuesday, 13th August, 1940. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-501; Minutes of Film Production Committee, 26th February, 1941. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-168.

There is a copy of a letter to Andrews from C.J. Morton in early October 1940, which suggests that Andrews was beginning to have some suggestions for, and input into films at that stage, although the (new) Film Production Sub-committee may not have been established at that stage. See: C.J. Morton to E.S. Andrews, 8 October, 1940. NZNA: AAPG 6025 3i C.J. Morton Papers.

Other committees established initially were the Film Distribution Sub-committee, Newspaper Advertising Sub-committee and Radio Sub-Committee. See: Notes of Meeting of Publicity Committee, Tuesday, 13th August, 1940. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-501.

J Robertson, MP, was also Secretary of the New Zealand Motion Picture Exhibitors’ Association, and had been heavily involved in both the 1928 Select Committee Hearings and 1934 Commission of Inquiry into the Film Industry.


Notes of Meeting of War Publicity Committee, 21st January, 1942. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-501; Notes of Meeting of War Publicity Committee, 2nd March, 1942. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-501.

Minutes of War Publicity Committee Meeting, February 24th, 1941. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-501.

J.T. Paul to Hon. D. Wilson, 22nd February, 1941. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-501.

E.S. Andrews to J.T. Paul, November 11, 1940. HL: JL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-484.

ibid.

Notes of Meeting of War Publicity Committee, 10th April, 1941. HL: J.T. Paul Papers, MS 982-455.


Peters, 105. The short time period between the screening of the film to Cabinet, and Andrews’ resignation from the New Zealand Institute of Education (July 9, 1941, see: ATL: Andrews, Ernest Stanhope Papers 93-320-1/07 Education – Correspondence, articles) suggests that the Cabinet extended an offer to Andrews almost immediately following the screening.

109 “Country Lads”: Commentary for a Film.” New Zealand Listener, July 11, 1941, 7.

110 Transcript of interview of Walter Harris conducted by George Peart, 1979. NZNA: AAOJ 7810 Acc W5077 22 National Film Library

111 Grierson to Hunter, 10th March, 1940, 1. JGA: G4/24/45 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.

112 ibid.

113 ibid., 2.

114 ibid., 3.

115 Grierson to Hunter, 14th March, 1940. JGA: G4/24/50 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.


117 Harris interview, 3.

118 ibid.

119 ibid., 1-2.


121 ibid.

122 Foster, Part III, 22; Cinematograph Films (Issue of Exhibitors Licences) Regulations, 1937.

123 Foster, Part II, 234.
Part IV:

Conclusion
Chapter 10: Conclusion

This study set out to answer two underlying research questions: why do governments become involved in the screen industry? And what is it that motivates their actions? Three cases from the British Imperial Pacific were investigated, and a narrative of their evolving policy towards the motion picture industry was laid out. The cases illustrate some aspects of how imperialism was operated during this period, while the Policy Imperatives Model provides a framework for understanding and comparing their motivations. This chapter will compare some of the similarities and differences, pull together some findings from those cases, and provide responses to the questions raised in the introduction.

Imperialism as a theory explains the dominance and unequal relationships among countries, whether in terms of formal political relationships or informal ‘soft power’ relationships. As a theory, it has a natural fit with this study, with the formal political relationships that Great Britain had with New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore; and at the same time, the growing cultural influence and domination of US Hollywood-produced films were evident. However, this theory is operating at a macro structural level, and closer analysis is needed at the local or micro level to understand better the realities and nuances of what was actually happening. This is where new cinema history as an approach has considerable value, with policy analysis specifically providing some context.

The Policy Imperatives Model used as the basis of comparison proved useful in perceiving similarities and differences between the cases, as well as indicating that at the colonial level governments enjoyed a relative level of autonomy from the Colonial Office. Local exigencies, often not apparent to the Colonial Office, played an important role in government policy formation and decision-making at the micro level.

**Imperial level: USA v. Great Britain**

Underlying the government intervention in the screen industry during the period in the three cases was the battle between the US and Great Britain for political influence in
the world and subsequent economic gain. This can be seen as a battle between two forms of empire. On the one hand, there was colonial empire of Great Britain dominating territories through formal occupation and political administration, or in the case of the self-governing Dominions, legal and constitutional seniority and control over their foreign policy. On the other hand, there was the rising, soft or informal, empire of the United States trying to gain influence through various means, specifically films in the context of this study, as their vehicle to acquire dominance and control.

Although the three polities were part of the British Empire, US films dominated their screens; and there was a fear among the elite in the imperial centre that the loyalty of the subjects of the Empire might shift to a new imperial power, the US. This can be seen in the *Daily Express* comment about the cinema creating “temporary American citizens.”¹ For the US, the battle was about trade and gaining influence over the minds of the people around the world. Once these audiences were influenced by the lavish American lifestyle portrayed in the films, the goal was that those markets would be opened up to absorb products produced by the US. Although for Hollywood the battle was for profits, for the US Government it was about developing markets to utilise excess manufacturing capacity, to inculcate US values, and/or to ‘Americanise’ their foreign audiences. Films provided a superb vehicle for the US to sell the ideology of consumerism and desirability of US products to create demand. Hollywood became master storytellers, creating fantasies and desires for US goods.

Great Britain, having four times the population base in its wider Empire (400 million) than the US population (100 million), attempted to persuade governments throughout the Empire to support British films with similar measures to those introduced in the imperial centre. For a variety of reasons, the measures suggested by the imperial centre were not implemented or were unworkable, and they were ineffective in developing an Empire-wide market. The imperial markets were much more diverse than found in the US, with a multitude of languages other than English spoken. British distribution companies did not have the scale or distribution network that the Hollywood distributors did, and thus were not able to guarantee a continuous flow of high-quality British films. As a result, quotas to support films were not introduced in most localities. Audience tastes differed as well, frequently with a preference towards the action and values of the Hollywood film.
The Imperial 1927 Cinematograph Films Act was an economic measure justified with the language of culture and nationalism. The focus was the development of the industry in Great Britain, with the hope that the British Empire would provide the audience scale necessary to compete with Hollywood. However, as many scholars and commentators have pointed out from very early on, Hollywood had the strong advantage of a very large domestic market. Without the scale of exhibition possessed by Hollywood, nor with the ability to compete with Hollywood films effectively in their home market, British producers had to operate with smaller budgets to be viable. To use the arguments put forward by Jarvie and Thompson, the structure and business practices of the US industry provided them with a very strong advantage, diminished only marginally with the banning of blind booking and limits placed on block building in the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act in Great Britain. Those provisions could not be as easily enacted elsewhere, however, as exhibitors preferred to have a guaranteed source of supply, and trade showings (for instance) were not viable in the way that they were in Great Britain. Distributors and exhibitors depended on the reviews in the trade media in Great Britain and the US to inform them of the nature of forthcoming releases; however, because of block booking of films, their programme was often already locked in.

Another issue was that although many parts of the Empire were sympathetic to the concept of providing a market for British films, audiences preferred US films with their action and higher production values to many of the British-produced films. In the battle to produce the most entertaining films, Hollywood usually won.

Extension of the Policy Imperatives Model to the imperial level

Although the Policy Imperatives Model wasn’t applied at the imperial level in this study, it could certainly have been extended to the US and Great Britain. What is notable at the imperial level is that safety was no longer the concern of the national government. Local building codes and fire regulations were the jurisdiction of local governments, while censorship (or moral safety) was self-regulated by industry, but with the cognisance that the government could step in if the industry-level regulation was perceived to be inadequate.

At the Social Control and Development level, there was considerable discussion, though not as much action, regarding the use of film as an educational tool, as well as a
propaganda tool within the British Empire. The Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, later part of the General Post Office, played an important role in developing non-fiction and documentary films, which formed the basis of the British documentary movement.

Economic imperatives took a much higher importance at the imperial level. In Great Britain, the introduction of quotas was important to ensure space on British screens for locally produced screens. Government funding for such bodies as the British Film Institute, the Empire Film Library enabled their establishment and operation. Later (outside the timeframe of this study), government support extended to production funding through the establishment of a film bank, and direct subsidies and grants. In the US, the support at the economic level was focused on ensuring open markets for US films, along with the provision of extensive commercial intelligence collected at the taxpayers’ expense to give the industry a competitive edge.

Similarities and differences at the colonial level: Hong Kong v. Singapore

At the colonial level, Hong Kong and Singapore provide an interesting contrast. In many respects they were similar, coming from similar roots. Both had a very small European population (mainly British), with the proportion in the Singapore ranging between 1.3% and 1.9% during the period, while in Hong Kong the proportion ranged between 1.5% and 2.5%. Chinese were overwhelmingly dominant in Hong Kong (>95%) and in Singapore, with approximately 75%. Trade was the raison d’être of both places, as they were established in locations suitable for deep-sea ports, and maintained free-port status to facilitate the flow of trade through the Asia-Pacific. Both places became film distribution hubs for their immediate regions. And when local film production began in each of the colonies in the local language, the respective governments provided no support. Yet, with all these similarities, both places developed their motion picture policy, particularly censorship, in quite different directions. As their colonial societies evolved, their governance and character diverged. Hong Kong developed the character of a much more free-wheeling, entrepreneurial centre, while Singapore was more subdued and rule-bound, characteristics that have continued to the present day. Differences are evident when comparing film censorship regimes, the major area of screen policy and government intervention in the two localities.
Safety

Given the many similarities between the two places, the question can be raised as to why there was the perception of a significant difference in regards to censorship. Based on the restrictions outlined in various pieces of correspondence, it appears that the censorship frameworks in both Hong Kong and Singapore (Appendix 5.5) were loosely modelled after the guidelines for the British Board of Censors (Appendix 2.1). For instance, in both Hong Kong and Singapore the restrictions included anything that would lower the prestige of the Europeans, particularly European women, or would show Europeans suffering a loss of prestige in some ways. These restrictions weren’t incorporated into specific regulations, but seemed to be lists or understandings internal to the censorship apparatus that the censors would follow. In Hong Kong, the restrictions also included the portrayal of natives of India, as a significant portion of the police force was East Indian (although the proportion was not nearly as high as claimed in some US consulate reports). In Singapore, the restrictions were broader, given that the censorship was covering British Malaya, and thus overall a more multi-racial society.

The fear of white women being contaminated by the native is very clear, and was usually referred to as ‘the racial question’. These restrictions were targeted at maintaining the colonial social order and prestige of the colonial elite, reflecting the widespread mentality found both among the colonial governments and within the elite in Britain itself. Anything detrimental to maintaining the colonial social order needed to be banned. In Hong Kong, this went further to include scenes of ‘imperialist behaviour’ that may offend the Chinese. This would include such things as showing any scenes of Europeans in armed conflict with the Chinese (as the Chinese were usually shown as losing). Possible communist insurgencies or unrest incited by communists were also an issue, with incidents recorded in both places.

The evolution of censorship in the Straits Settlements set it out internationally as a location with strict censorship. This was noted in the British Parliament, where questions were raised in 1926 regarding the strict censorship of British films. Hong Kong, on the other hand, was considered to have a very fair censorship system (meaning, there weren’t many cuts made). Although both Hong Kong and Singapore loosely followed the guidelines developed by the British Board of Censors, the outcomes were quite different.
There were suggestions that many of films entering the Straits Settlements and other parts of British Malaya were cut in some way (estimates were for anywhere from 65-90%), while an estimated 20% of films entering Hong Kong were cut, and most of those were minor in nature. In the case of Hong Kong, it is likely a significant proportion of films entered via Shanghai first (until Shanghai was cut off due to war) and by the early 1930s were being censored in Nanking to meet Chinese government requirements; however, the evidence remaining suggests that this didn’t have any significant impact on the difference or level of censorship.

One possible explanation for the differences can be found in the different structures adopted for their censorship machinery. In Singapore (indeed, British Malaya), Captain Hussey as the Official Censor of Cinematograph Films wielded considerable power. He was responsible for the interpretation of censorship requirements and application of censorship as he saw fit. Although correspondence in the archives suggests that the British Board of Film Censorship guidelines were used as the base for censorship decisions in Singapore, it was evident that films that had been passed in Great Britain were being banned or cut in Singapore, suggesting that there was considerable variation in the interpretation and implementation of the guidelines. Ultimately, it was Captain Hussey who set the local standards and enforced them (unless overruled by the Censorship Appeals Board); and aside from the periods he was away on leave, he was the censor in Singapore throughout the interwar period. With someone different in the role (as was the case when he was on leave), then the interpretation of what was acceptable could also be different.

Michael Walsh has suggested that in the Australian context, British films often received stricter censorship, and this may have been a result of some censors placing higher standards or expectations on how the British were portrayed. This suggestion has some validity, and may provide a partial explanation in the case of Singapore, but doesn’t appear to be universally applicable if we look at censorship in New Zealand and Singapore. This would be an interesting area for further study, however.

The structure of the censorship apparatus in Hong Kong was quite different from Singapore (and many other countries during the period). In Hong Kong, the government made no financial investment in developing a censorship structure, or providing facilities
for film censorship. A decentralised structure was developed by assigning censorship duties to a number of government employees as an additional component to their role (they appear to have been paid extra for this from the censorship fees). Teams of censors were allocated to specific cinemas or distribution companies across the colony. The censorship took place within the cinemas themselves or, after 1932, in the Hong Kong Preview Studio, a privately owned editing facility rented out to exhibitors and distributors. The censorship seemed to have been undertaken with a much lighter touch than was the case in Singapore. At least, there weren’t the complaints regarding the number of cuts or films banned, as there was in Singapore.

The public face of the Hong Kong censorate, Edward Hamilton, seemed to have been a very convivial gentleman with interests in a number of areas. The correspondence and file notes suggest that his approach was to work with distributors or exhibitors where possible to come to a mutually agreeable decision. Censorship requirements in Hong Kong did tighten during the 1930s, but that was a result of the increasing conflict in China itself (resistance against the Japanese) as well as a desire to maintain neutral, if not friendly, terms with the Japanese. Even allowing for this, individual personalities and prejudices seemed to have influenced the form and extent of censorship.

The differences in censorship machinery between the colonies raise some questions as to whether corruption played a part in the different rejection rates. This is a difficult area to penetrate as bureaucratic corruption tended not to be an issue openly discussed. Where there were blatant cases of corrupt behaviour, the official in question would be asked to resign or quietly transferred back to Britain to maintain the image of the incorruptible civil service. The definition of what was considered corruption is also murky, particularly with the span of time. There certainly was corruption in both colonies, with some departments more susceptible to it than others. However, the likelihood of corruption having had any significant influence in the film censorship in either Singapore or Hong Kong was probably relatively low.

In the case of Singapore, most of the censorship was handled by one man who had a high profile and whose decisions were subject to relatively high scrutiny. Hussey was reasonably well paid by local standards, and the high level of rejections suggests that he probably was not engaged in any corrupt activities. He was also on leave for extended
periods throughout his tenure as censor (as it was normal for Europeans in the civil service in tropical areas), and the level of strictness in censorship seemed to decline during his absences in the earlier part of the period. Unlike censors in Hong Kong, Hussey also appeared to censor films without the local distributors or exhibitors present. This would have decreased any likelihood of persuasive tactics being used to allow films through.

Hong Kong, on the other hand, had a system that may have being more susceptible to some form of corruption, although there is no evidence that this indeed happened. Both Hong Kong and British Malaya moved their senior administrative officials between posts frequently to inhibit the formation of close relationships and petty corruption (see the example of Eric Hamilton in Appendix 5.1). However, this practice did not carry over to film censorship. In Hong Kong, censors were appointed to specific cinemas, and even if they changed position, as the censorship role was outside of their primary duties, there is no evidence to suggest they also changed cinemas. This would have enabled local cinema owners/operators to develop a closer relationship with their designated censor, possibly opening up the opportunity for corruption. Although the possibility existed, it would be pure speculation to suggest this was even a partial reason for the lower level of rejection of films in Hong Kong.

A significant factor in the difference in censorship between Hong Kong and Singapore probably came down to one individual, the Official Censor of Cinematographs for the Straits Settlements and British Malaya, Captain Hussey, and his strict interpretation of the guidelines issued by the British Board of Film Censors. It was as if his approach was ‘if in doubt, cut it,’ while the censors in Hong Kong were more likely to let something pass, unless it showed the civil war in China or showed Japan in a negative light.11

Social control and development

Censorship was also an important policy tool for the social control and development imperative; however, as it was covered under safety, discussion won’t continue here. The other use of other policy tools under this imperative was at a relatively low level. In both places government film-making was minimal and at a very low level.

The other area was the use of film in education. In neither place did the government take the lead in introducing the technology into schools. Singapore was ahead
of Hong Kong in that three schools had film projectors by 1932, but the decision to purchase them appeared to have been made at the school level, possibly through private funding. In Hong Kong, it was the Teachers Association that took the initiative in 1938 to begin screening educational films in schools. Projectors were rented rather than purchased for this purpose.

**Economic dimensions**

Quotas, despite being a significant policy tool, was suggested, but never introduced in either locality. In Singapore, where quota legislation was introduced following the 1927 Colonial Conference, the bill was withdrawn after the 2nd reading. Although it was unlikely that there was awareness of the impact the introduction of sound technology would have on the industry, this would have had a significant impact in colonial countries where the majority of the population didn’t speak or understand English, nor was there recognition of Empire-produced films in other languages, which could have later mitigated the issue of quotas. However, the exhibitors in Singapore may well have lobbied for the bill to be dropped based on the exhibition conditions in the city, where it is likely that some cinemas catered to particular language groups (especially Mandarin and Hindi). A quota for British films would have forced those exhibitors to screen films that their audiences were not interested in.

In Hong Kong, although there appeared to be little interest in regulating or legislating content requirements for the local market, the matter was raised both in the local press, and in a report presented by Sir Shouson Chow to the Hong Kong Executive Council (ExCo). Unfortunately, no copies of the report appear to exist, but given that Sir Shouson was also the Chair of the Board of Directors for the premier cinema in the territory, it likely strongly favoured the interests of the exhibitors.12

Films in a language other than English were not perceived to be or considered ‘British’ films. Thus, although the legislation used production location and nationality of those producing the films as a marker of ‘British nationality’ of the films themselves, there was a third, unspoken marker implied that the language of British films needed to be English. As a result, the possibility of locally-produced films in Hong Kong in a language other than English meeting potential quota requirements was never considered.
Similarities and differences at the dominion v. colonial level

New Zealand, as a Dominion, had internal self-government and greater autonomy than was the case for either of Hong Kong or Singapore. The overwhelming majority of the population were also fluent in English, with a significant proportion having being born in Great Britain or had parents born in Great Britain. Maintaining a sense of British identity was seen as important. This all marked New Zealand as being quite different from Hong Kong and Singapore, though not unlike the other “white dominions.”

In comparing the screen policy and New Zealand government interventions with that of the two colonies, it is apparent that there are a number of significant differences, due in part to the very different nature of New Zealand. Both Hong Kong and Singapore were small island city-states with the majority of the population not speaking English. New Zealand was a pastoral country with the population spread out over a large distance. Most of the population considered themselves to be British or had a strong allegiance to the British crown. This meant that New Zealanders were much more likely as a whole to follow the lead of the imperial centre than was the case in either Hong Kong or Singapore.

The New Zealand government took a much more active and interventionist role in the industry than was seen in either Hong Kong or Singapore. It was involved in same way in all sectors. In the production sector, the government was the major producer of films during the period, and established what would be the only film studios in New Zealand for a considerable portion of the twentieth century. With the distribution sector, the government intervened with taxation measures to limit the ability of the US distributors to use transfer pricing to minimise their tax liability on funds expatriated out of New Zealand. Negotiations were also undertaken in the latter part of the period to nationalise the distribution of films in New Zealand, but this proposal was never implemented. On the exhibition side, the government introduced increasingly restrictive licensing measures for cinemas for economic reasons to limit excessive competition, to protect independent cinema owners, and to protect the interests of smaller investors. Two major investigations into the motion picture industry were also undertaken by the government, the first in the form of hearings into proposed legislation, and the second hearings on issues within the industry, which led to the introduction of legislation. Although many of these forms of
intervention were also seen in other dominions, most were not introduced into either Hong Kong or Singapore.

**Safety**

At the physical safety level, New Zealand had similar building codes and fire safety requirements to Hong Kong and Singapore. The measures in all three places to mitigate the risk of nitrate fires in either storage facilities, or projection booths, were similar to those that were introduced in Great Britain and many other countries. Although New Zealand did introduce a national building code in the early 1930s, the focus was on protection from earthquakes rather than fires.

Where New Zealand did depart from the colonies was in having the film censorate independent of the police. The office of the film censor was a branch of the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand, rather than a police responsibility. This was not unusual in the Dominions, nor was it unusual in the colonies for censorship to be part of the police department. In the colonies, maintaining social order was a responsibility of the police and they were felt to be in the best position to monitor local cinema performances. Although there appeared to be some minor concerns expressed publicly regarding the suitability of screening some images to the local Māori, there were never any debates within the government regarding the screening of unsuitable images to lesser-developed peoples in New Zealand. The issue did arise, however, in terms of New Zealand’s colonies, but in these instances it appears that the censorship may have also been handled outside of the office of the film censor.

**Social control and development**

When it came to social control and development, the New Zealand government was very active from early on commissioning films or producing films themselves. The Tourist Department had begun producing promotional film soon after the turn of the century. Later the Dominion Museum undertook a number of expeditions to gather anthropological and ethnographic material, including filmic records of some of the different Māori peoples. Those records would be seen as extremely valuable and significant some eighty years later. In the 1920s, the government became more active in the
production of films through the Government Publicity Office, with the production of weekly short films from 1926 onwards. Films were also used by the government for nation-building purposes, initially through creating awareness of the different parts and peoples in New Zealand, and then with the production of a centennial film illustrating the history of the country.

Although the production efforts of the Government Publicity Office would be curtailed during the Great Depression, the visit of John Grierson at the end of the period would refocus the government film production efforts and contribute to the formation of the National Film Unit under the Prime Minister’s Department in 1942, to enable the government more effectively produce propaganda to support the war effort. John Grierson was also instrumental in laying the groundwork for what would later become the National Film Library of New Zealand.

None of this was seen during the period in either of Hong Kong and Singapore. It would only be in the post-Second World War period that the government in Hong Kong would establish a government film unit, along with the Malayan Film Unit in what would later become Malaysia (Singapore was initially a part of Malaysia). 

**Economic dimensions**

New Zealand, as an English-speaking country with very close ties to Great Britain, was in a different situation to either Hong Kong or Singapore. In those colonies, the British, or even English-speaking population, was very much in the minority. In New Zealand, English was the official language (Māori wouldn’t be added as an official language until 1987), and the country had very close ties to Great Britain with the majority of the population either born there, or descended from immigrants from the United Kingdom in the previous two generations. It was seen as important that British films be screened in New Zealand theatres to help maintain the sense of British identity and culture.

The situation was very different at the colonial level in Hong Kong and Singapore, as the overwhelming majority didn’t have any family ties with Great Britain, nor spoke any English. Attempts to run cinemas screening programmes of British films only in both places failed. Thus, when the issue of quotas came up, it was only New Zealand that was able to successfully introduce the necessary legislation, although they capitulated on the coercive
nature of the quota at the last minute. This significantly weakened the legislation, with compliance becoming voluntary for exhibitors and distributors, providing a loophole whereby they could apply for an exemption each year if they were unable to meet the quota requirements. Ultimately, though, this did not prove to be a hindrance to an increasing share of British films on the New Zealand screens.

On a relative basis, New Zealand provided one of the best markets for British films, but given its size, the same wasn’t true on an absolute basis. It is difficult to gauge the true level of support for British films in New Zealand, although more intensive research at a micro-level drawing on cinema advertisements could provide some further insight. There are a number of possible explanations or hypotheses as to why New Zealand showed such a strong preference for British films. The first is that New Zealand cinemas showed a single-feature programme throughout the period compared to the double-feature programme in Great Britain (until the early part of World War II) and other places. As a result, New Zealand had a lower demand for the number of titles required to serve the local market. This meant the market could be served with fewer titles, and distributors didn’t need to use their lowest-quality pictures to fill the New Zealand programmes (including some of the quota quickies). Thus, it was possible that only the better quality British films were screened making it more likely that they would attract larger audiences.\(^\text{15}\)

Another possible reason was the greater loyalty of exhibitors, with a small number of distributors focusing predominantly on British rather than US films. Given the strong conscious desire in New Zealand to be ‘British,’ many exhibitors would have sought to programme good British films to reinforce that self-image. Once the 1928 Cinematograph Act came into force, there was a legislative requirement for the distributors to carry British films, although in reality there were a small number of distributors primarily distributing British films with several of the US distributors seeking exemptions from the quota requirements on an annual basis.\(^\text{16}\) It is here that we see the Hollywood hegemon thesis breaking down during this period. Governments could legislate to ensure alternatives to Hollywood films, and exhibitors and local audiences, given some real choice and alternatives to Hollywood, could choose the alternatives if they wished.

Quotas were the area where resistance was most likely to be seen, and clearly there wasn’t any resistance in this area from either Hong Kong or Singapore. Even in New
Zealand, the quotas were not so much resistance against Hollywood, but support for British films.

Implicit within imperialism with the domination of a region or peoples is the possibility of resistance against the imperialism. A component of imperialism is the exploitation of resources within the dominated country. The expatriation of revenues and profits from New Zealand by US distributors with payment of little or minimal taxes would be an example of that exploitation, and this was the battleground for successful resistance from the New Zealand government. Although the actual sums remitted appeared to be less than suggested initially, the perception that there was a significant level of funds being sent out of New Zealand provided an attractive target for the government at a time when they were looking for additional sources of revenue. The importance of revenues from New Zealand to Hollywood was insignificant (approximately one percent of world revenues), but there was a greater symbolic value involved. The MPDA wanted to minimise any tax burden on the industry, while the MPPDA in New York probably wanted the issue quietly resolved without too much adverse publicity. With the cinema owners appearing to be on the side of the government the MPPDA agreed to the proposals from the New Zealand government (circumventing their Australian arm in the process). In the end, Hollywood relented, as the taxation level was neither punitive nor out-of-line with that proposed in Australia. Beside, on an economic level New Zealand was not important.

The existence of 6 o’clock closing for all drinking establishments in New Zealand from 1917 may provide another reason why British films, and cinema in general, did better in New Zealand than many other places. With little else available as evening entertainment, the cinema became the main attraction for the wider population. Although not everyone of adult age attended the cinema, the fact that the average attendance rate for the total population was 18.5 times per year by 1939, supports the suggestion that it was a significant leisure activity within the country. Gordon Mirams writing a few years later noted that the average attendance for 1941-42 was nineteen times a year compared with the US, where the average was thirty-two times annually. The social institutional infrastructure in New Zealand was relatively underdeveloped compared to many Western countries, which meant that cinema as an evening leisure activity had few competitors, and in many towns, there was only one cinema.
Government control over the supply of cinemas in the latter part of the period is another significant difference between New Zealand and the two colonies, in fact, between New Zealand and many other countries. The intervention by the New Zealand government into the cinema market for economic reasons to limit excessive competition was unusual, as was the unsuccessful proposal to nationalise the distribution apparatus within the country. At the core of these discussions was the understanding that there were problems in allowing the forces of the free-market to decide the optimal supply of cinemas, and that ultimately small businesses and investors, along with individual audience members, would suffer if the government didn’t regulate the market in some way. The ratio of cinemas to population was indeed very high on a global basis. If we look at the figures presented to the 1934 Commission of Inquiry (figure 8.1), we see that at that point there was one cinema for every 4,577 persons (adults, children and babies) in New Zealand, with a potential for it to drop to one cinema for every 3,419 persons. By comparison, Hong Kong with an estimated population of 940,000 had twenty-three cinemas at the time or one cinema for every 40,869 persons. Granted, Hong Kong even then had a very high density in its urban areas, while a significant portion of New Zealanders lived in small towns; however, in the United States, which also had a significant portion of its audience in smaller towns along with a much higher level of cinema attendance, there was estimated to be one cinema for every 8,665 persons. Therefore, there was indeed reason for the New Zealand government to be increasingly concerned over the overbuilding of cinemas and to intervene in the market.

Economic concerns thus changed and evolved over the period. Again, as the largest and most developed market of the three cases here, the changes are the most apparent in New Zealand. Where the industry started at the beginning of the period as largely small, entrepreneurial companies, with one dominant local distributor, by the mid-twenties some conglomeration had occurred among exhibitors, along with the establishment of some foreign-owned distributors. From 1928, the government became more involved in establishing the business environment in which the industry operated, with increasing levels of regulation, including the decisions whether individual cinemas should be allowed to open. This was achieved through licensing, with a view to ensure the on-going viability of small business operations (independent exhibitors primarily). Token support was also provided to the minuscule production sector through the provision of a
concessional film hire tax. In reality, the concession had minimal impact on the business operations of film producers and was little more than symbolic.

Hong Kong was the only polity with a substantial production industry during the period, and interestingly enough, whereas Britain, New Zealand (and other countries within the Empire) made at least token efforts to privilege indigenous production, Hong Kong did not. There weren’t any quotas or premium customs duties on imports of film levied. Instead, the production industry was left to operate on its own within the dictates and discipline of the market. Nor is there evidence of the local industry seeking any government support. Their negotiations were with the Nanking regime over language and access, suggesting they may have identified themselves more as the offshore operation of the Shanghai film industry (which, to a degree they were) than part of the British Empire industry. Although there was evidence of a brief discussion in Singapore of government support of some production activities, those there is no evidence that those suggestions were developed into any serious proposals.

**Ineffective development of Empire market: Great Britain v. Empire**

In its efforts to compete against Hollywood and the dominance of US films in its domestic market, Great Britain sought to harness the significant population of the British Empire (four times the size of the US domestic market). Although Great Britain had the advantage of legal and political dominance as the imperial power in the British Empire, the US used its dominance in the production and distribution of film to continue to influence and ‘Americanise’ their audiences. Great Britain’s ineffectiveness to successfully counter Hollywood and the US film industry is attributable to a number of factors.

At the government policy level, there was reluctance by most polities within the Empire to legislate a British film quota similar to that imposed in the imperial centre. Initially, there was scepticism about whether the British film industry would be able to produce sufficient quality films to sustain a quota. Local exhibitors resisted having limitations placed on their ability to programme the films they felt would best meet audiences’ needs and be profitable. Language barriers were a part of this, particularly in colonies, such as Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements, where the majority of the population didn’t speak English. The more visual and action-oriented productions
produced by Hollywood provided more entertainment value to an audience who initially may have been illiterate, and later (when the talkies emerged) didn’t understand English. Hollywood films also tended to have much larger budgets (thus had higher production values) and widely recognisable stars. This led to an audience preference towards Hollywood films.

The US industry also had much better distribution channels for their films, in part due to the organisation of their industry and the much larger volume of films produced. The viability and profitability of distribution channels are normally dependent on the volume of products or content available to fill the distribution channel, and the US industry had a considerable advantage in this regard.

There were attempts in both Hong Kong and Singapore to operate British-film only cinemas, but these quickly resulted in failure for the reasons surrounding audience preferences noted previously. It was only in New Zealand, where a conscious effort to maintain a British identity was engrained into the population, that a proportion of British films were viable and accepted by audiences. But even there, the majority of the films screened were still from the US. The higher proportion of British films screened was possibly facilitated by the single-feature programming standard, rather than the double-feature programme normal in other countries. The efforts to challenge the US hegemony in the British Empire film market were largely ineffective, and this was not simply due to a failure on the part of the British elites. These three cases show that there were other institutional factors at the local level that limited the efforts by the imperial centre to provide effective resistance against Hollywood elsewhere in the Empire. Local colonial governments appear to have enjoyed a greater level of autonomy than one would expect in an imperial system. And both Hong Kong and Singapore were pluralist societies, which brought into focus a range of sensitivities not apparent in Great Britain. However, this also set the basis for the development of local or regional cinemas, something not exploited or recognised by the imperial elites.

**Resisting Hollywood?**

The presence of the question mark in the title opens up questions regarding the nature and degree of resistance, if any, expressed in the three cases. The initial research
began with the assumption that there was resistance against Hollywood in each of the polities in this study, and sought to find the forms and results of that resistance. However, the evidence suggests the initial assumption was largely incorrect, and that a much more complex and nuanced situation existed.

The resistance against Hollywood was ambiguous at best, and arguably didn’t exist at the government level in either Hong Kong or Singapore. Local entrepreneurs and business people relied on Hollywood films for the profitability of their businesses. Any suggestion of government restrictions that would impact their businesses resulted in resistance towards the proposals. This was seen in both Hong Kong and Singapore when the idea of quotas was discussed. Public expressions of resistance were more frequently exhibited by individuals in letters published in the local press, rather than explicitly through government policy or regulation. Resistance at the level of censorship was raised on occasion in the press, and indeed it could have been an avenue for resistance; however, the censors in both Hong Kong and Singapore appeared to be reasonably neutral. It was the content itself that was targeted rather than the nationality of the films. The censors who cut content from US films showed similar resistance (if not more on occasion) against British films. The suggestion noted earlier by Michael Walsh that British films may have been held to a higher standard carries some weight in these cases and is worthy of further investigation. There was no evidence, however, of government policy mobilised in either of Hong Kong or Singapore to specifically restrict Hollywood films. The films were too important to local businessmen.

The case regarding resistance is stronger in the case of New Zealand, although there is still considerable ambiguity. Resistance by the censors was clearer in this case, with such infelicities as the excessive display of the US flag or the rewriting of history to promote the US, resulting in the cutting of or rejection of films. This resistance was also evident in other parts of the Empire, such as Australia and Canada.

Quotas provided another area of possible resistance. In Great Britain, quotas had been mobilised as one of the responses against Hollywood to ensure British films had screen time. Following the 1926 Imperial Conference, New Zealand quickly proposed similar quotas, although following extensive consultations and hearings, were moderated somewhat with the coercive nature of the regulations reduced. In Britain, there was a
significant increase in the production of British films to meet the quota requirements. These films enabled distributors and exhibitors in New Zealand to meet their obligations under the legislation. But this was not in itself resistance against Hollywood films. As noted earlier, this was a pro-British rather than anti-Hollywood measure. Whereas quotas were able to be introduced in New Zealand, this was not true in Hong Kong or most other colonies. In the colonies, quotas were generally seen as unworkable, as there were both questions (initially) regarding the ability of the British film industry to deliver sufficient films, and the impact that mandated exhibition of a greater number of British films may have had on exhibition interests and their profits. The business interests of the local elites were concentrated in the exhibition side of the business, not the production side.

The other sector that potentially could have drawn on government support and provided a form of resistance, was the production sector. In Singapore and New Zealand, the local production sector was almost non-existent, though there was a government presence in production in New Zealand; however, this was outside of the market. Only in Hong Kong was there potential for the production sector to provide an economic bloc to pressure the local government, but that did not happen. Discussions the local production industry had was with the Chinese government in Nanking regarding the use of language within films, not with the Hong Kong government regarding support for their activities. In reality, they did not need it as they had good access to local screens. The language barrier provided a natural form of protection for local language films. There was no discussion at the colonial level regarding local storytelling, though clearly that was happening with the reestablishment of a Hong Kong production sector. The output of films also indicated that they identified with China more closely than with British Hong Kong. There was no real discussion of self-determination. The development of the production sector in Hong Kong was ultimately trade-led without any involvement of the colonial government.

So, in Hong Kong and Singapore, the exhibition interests had considerably more influence with the local governments than production interests, as illustrated by the presence of Sir Shouson Chow, Chair of the Board of Directors of the premier cinema in Hong Kong, as a member of the Hong Kong Executive Council. Production interests did not have the political influence that was seen in Great Britain. As a result, government
policy in the motion picture industry in all three cases had the greatest on the exhibition sector.

**Implications**

Investigating and understanding the past is important, as although there may not be a direct repeat of past events, patterns and processes may carry forward over time. Events of the past have a specific social, political and economic context, but they also provide the roots and basis for current events, as well as insight into the present and future. To understand the present and project towards the future, we need to understand where we have come from and why we are where we are now. Much of British imperial history has been from the viewpoint of the imperial elite or of Britain; history is frequently written from the viewpoint of the dominant power. This leaves many silences and gaps in the historical record, to allude to Trouillot mentioned early on in this study. This research has explored some of the histories of the periphery in the British Empire during an important transitional period, histories of screen media and policies that influenced its development in those smaller polities. Although still from the viewpoint of the colonial elite, light has been shed on the relationships between the periphery and the imperial centre. And interestingly, two of those polities (Hong Kong and New Zealand) developed to have very vibrant film production industries of their own, with influence in the global film industry disproportionate to their size.

These cases demonstrate that, within the British Empire at least, legal and political dominance was insufficient to guarantee a market for films or media products. Audience preferences, combined with such things as the business model for the distribution channels (use of blind and block booking, for instance) and much greater volume of films produced, meant that US films could dominate despite the cultural differences.

This could have implication and application in the future with the rise of China as a potential imperial power, or at a regional level with potential local hegemons. Although China is possibly a century behind the US in terms of their global standing in the international film market, this study may give indications to some of the strategies and problems that they may encounter, as they attempt to use communication and entertainment media to gain influence over other countries. As contemporary China looks
for markets to consumer the products from excess factory capacity, it may look to Chinese movies showing Chinese products to non-Chinese audiences, as a means to create a desire for Chinese goods. This would be similar to what Hollywood did from the early years of the twentieth century. China has been taking steps to upgrade its film industry by encouraging Western producers to shoot their movies in China or undertake post-production work there, and thus facilitating a knowledge transfer. These efforts to build its screen production industry to compete on an international level are still at a relatively early stage. Although it has released big budget films, utilising Western stars to compete with Hollywood on the global stage (*The Flowers of War* (2011), Yimou Zhang, dir.; *Back to 1942* (2012), Feng Xiaogang, dir.), it has yet to achieve global success on the level of Hollywood blockbusters. Other efforts include the developing visual effects industry in China, and the 2013 Chinese script-writing competition targeted at US screenwriters, to further develop scriptwriting for English-language Chinese films.

However, soft or cultural imperialism is not restricted to superpowers, or nascent superpowers. These efforts can also happen at a lower level, such as the efforts from South Korea. K-Pop has become a hit in the west, but before it reached the shores of North America, Korean popular culture was gaining considerable prominence and influence elsewhere in Asia, driving sales of Korean goods in other Asian countries. What is different in these cases is that these industries have not reached the level of influence or dominance anywhere near the level of hegemony that Hollywood achieved in the post-WWI period (and continues to enjoy). Turning back to exhibition itself.

Very little is known about the micro-level histories of exhibition in either of the colonies studied here, with New Zealand being not much better. In Hong Kong, it was certainly apparent that many of the cinemas focused on the Chinese audience, which made up over 95% of the population. Little has also been published on the history of exhibition in Singapore during the period, which had a greater diversity in ethnic groups and some evidence of more diverse programming (Hindi films were also banned by the censor). It is dangerous to assume that Hollywood films had the same dominance in the cinemas in Hong Kong and Singapore as suggested by their proportion of total films passing through the censor, particularly once Cantonese and Mandarin language films became available.
This study points to areas of rich research for media historians and scholars, and a number of further questions and avenues for future investigation. Government policy and regulation is an important component of “new cinema history,” as it can influence the production or importation of films, the choice of films available to audiences, and the conditions under which they are able to experience them. In these three cases, we saw that the choice of films available for audiences were largely in the hands of the distributors and exhibitors. Suggestions that measures be put in place to ensure the screening of a certain proportion of British films were rejected in Hong Kong and Singapore and only received acceptance in New Zealand. However, this acceptance was supported by audience support and a desire for British films, at least in the urban areas, where there was a choice of viewing possibilities available. In smaller, one-cinema towns, audiences had to accept whatever was programmed (so the quota would have had an impact on their viewing), and the choice would have been whether to visit the cinema that night or not.

The use of the Policy Imperatives Model proved useful in delineating the similarities and differences between the cases. Its wider application would need further consideration and development, as the application here was limited to the three cases during this time period. In these cases, it was apparent that local exigencies mattered, as did key individuals in interpreting their role. For instance, the decentralised approach to censorship in Hong Kong was unusual, but may have been a pragmatic response by a government’s intent on maintaining low taxes and a small government.

We can see from the three cases that each exercised a degree of autonomy from the imperial centre. Although Great Britain was looking for support from across the Empire in its effort to push back against the Hollywood hegemony, their prescription of introducing quotas for British films was largely rejected. New Zealand, the land of those who aspired to be ‘more British than the British,’ got close, but even here, last minute capitulation provided loopholes removing a mandatory requirement from the legislation. However, this wasn’t necessary as the number of British films passing through the censor in following years exceeded the minimum levels set out in the legislation, although this is drawing on the questionable assumption that the British films did indeed achieve similar audience levels to the Hollywood fare.
There are suggestions here too, that the true situation regarding market dominance by Hollywood may be hidden through inadequate data and the questionable assumption that all films passing through the film censor had equal audiences. It is only through the aggregation of micro-histories, that this assumption can be tested.

Whereas political economy provides us with an understanding of the institutional structures that resulted in market dominance by Hollywood, it fails to account at the local level for such things as taste, censorship restrictions and patriotism. This is where new cinema history has a valuable contribution to enable a more nuanced understanding of the local experience and socio-cultural role of cinema. We can see in this period regional Chinese cinemas rising in Asia to counter both the dominance or hegemony of Hollywood, and the imperialism of Great Britain. Although Japan has only being referred to in passing in this work, Japanese imperial cinema became a dominant force in the northern parts of China (as well as in their colonies of Chosen [Korea] and Formosa [Taiwan]).

The period was one of transition and change. The seeds of the post-colonial era are evident in the colonial societies studied here. The so-called colonised peoples of Hong Kong and Singapore, if they can even be called that, given that they also were economic migrants, had a degree of influence in local business and government affairs. The rejection of quota legislation in both places speaks to the recognition of local exigencies and importance of local priorities. Imperial histories are rarely written from the perspective of the colonised (Trouillot provides an exception), and as a result a portion of the total picture is missed. The narratives here add to both the local histories of each of the polities, and to the history of the British imperium, with the battle between the cinema industries of Great Britain and Hollywood in the periphery of the British Empire.
Endnotes


2 The lists in this dissertation are drawn from the regular correspondence the US Consulates had with the local Police as to the current restrictions.

3 United Kingdom, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series, June 17th, 1927, Vol. 207, cc1364-6W.


6 E.W. Hamilton to J.W. Hayes, August 1st, 1958. HKPRO, HM 83 Letters of E.W. Hamilton, W. Schofield and N.L. Smith containing their reminiscences of the N.T. Southern District. In his letters we see a picture of a man with many interests including cricket and provision of film reviews to a local paper under a pseudonym.

7 My thanks to Gabriel Didham for reminding me of the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in Hong Kong in 1974 to fight against the endemic level of corruption that was ingrained in the local culture. This was not just a post-World War II phenomenon, but dated back to the earliest days of the colony.


10 Hussey’s salary was $6,300 in 1921 (Straits Settlements dollars) and rose to $9,600 in 1938. The Assistant Censor, Walter Lamb, was paid $4,400 in 1921. In comparison, the position of Director of the Criminal Intelligence Department in Singapore in 1922 was on $10,20. See: “Singapore Establishments,” *Straits Settlements Blue Books* of Statistics, TNA: PRO, CO 277 Colonial Office: Straits Settlements Miscellanea. There was an ongoing problem of salary levels in the Malay Civil Service being inadequate for the high cost of maintaining a European standard of living, however, in the context of that, the Official Censor was adequately (though not generously) compensated. See John G. Butcher, “European Society in the Inter-war Years,” in *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), 126-166.

11 While the author was living in Hong Kong, he came across in saying comparing the two former colonies that went something along the lines of: “In Hong Kong, if it isn’t specifically disallowed, then it is allowed; in Singapore, if it isn’t specifically allowed, then it is forbidden.” This could also sum up the approach to film censorship some seventy years earlier.

12 Sir Shousan Chow was Chair of the Board of King’s Cinema. See Victor Zheng and Charles Chow, *Sir Shouson Chow: Grand Old Man of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Centre of Asia Studies Occasional Papers and Monographs, No. 163, 2010), 284.

14 In the May 1934 report from Henry Day to the US State Department, he detailed the arrangement that the British Film Distribution Company had to take over the Queen’s Theatre at the conclusion of the lease held by Hong Kong Amusement Company, and to use it to show primarily British films with a few American films when required. The January 1935 report from John Pool reported that the “Queen’s Theatre . . . is reported to be in a bad position” (1). On the next page he notes that the British Film Distribution Company failed during the year (information based on a conversation with Proulx of Paramount Films on January 9, 1935, a summary of which included as an appendix to the report). See: Henry B. Day, “Motion Picture Industry in Hong Kong,” May 1, 1934. USNA, RG 59 US State Department Decimal Files, 1930-39, Box 6256, 846g.4061 Motion Pictures/5 ; John C. Pool, “The Motion Picture Industry of Hong Kong,” January 24, 1935. USNA, RG 84 Hong Kong Correspondence, Vol. 495, 840.6.

15 This is assuming that there was real choice for audiences (in many smaller centres this was less likely to be the case). However, Robert Allen has suggested that it was the social experience of cinema-going that was probably the more important factor during the period rather than a conscious choice to see a specific film .See Robert Allen, “Reimagining the History of the Experience of Cinema in a Post-Moviegoing Age.” In Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (eds), Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies (Malden, MA, Oxford and Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 54-56. There were also fewer competing leisure options available during this period that is the case in contemporary society.

16 These exemptions were publicly announced in the New Zealand Government Gazette.

17 James Belich, Paradise Reforged: A History of New Zealanders. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 171. Restrictions on drinking hours and prohibition existed in various forms in places other than New Zealand. Australia probably had the form most similar to New Zealand, and Belich notes that in the British version drinking establishments were closed in the afternoon and open in the evening, to encourage greater productivity in the workplace, while in Australia and New Zealand the bars closed at 6pm to encourage a stronger home and domestic life. The author was unable to undertake a comparison of the impact of this in terms of cinema viewership in Australia.


20 Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), dir. Ang Lee, is not included on this list, as it didn’t include any Western film stars, with the exception of Michelle Yeoh (who is Malaysian).

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Appendices
Appendix 1.1: Methodological approach and archival records

This project is grounded in archival research, and the narratives constructed dependent on the archival evidence available. All three cases were based on original research into archival records deposited in a number of archives. Initially, a narrative had to be constructed outlining the history of government involvement in the motion picture industry in each of the three locations. For Hong Kong and Singapore, this involved creating a historical narrative where none existed previously, while for New Zealand the published narrative was fragmentary and partial. During the process of research, two unpublished reports containing the chronology of government regulation and legislation of the motion picture industry in New Zealand, along with accompanying notes and papers, were uncovered. These provided a road map for the development of the narrative, as well as some insight into government documents subsequently destroyed.

Interpretations were also drawn from the incomplete, and in some cases, inaccurate records. As a result, interpretations and conclusions are at best an approximation of what happened, and on occasion, may be totally wrong. Misinterpretations may be found in historical narratives that fulfil specific ideological purposes – governments constructing narratives to support specific mythologies for instance. Generally, though, misinterpretations are more likely as a result of silences or omissions in the archival records, along with biases in the interpretative frames used by the researchers (based on their personal background, education, and so on).

A comparative approach is taken in the description and analysis of these cases. Comparative research methods are used in a number of disciplines and fields to analyse and explain similarities and differences between two or more cases. An important and influential work in this area is *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini. They suggest that comparative analysis makes it possible to notice or perceive things that we may not otherwise see or conceptualise. In their research they developed a framework for the comparison of media systems over four dimensions: the development of media markets with an emphasis on mass circulation press, political parallelism, the development of journalistic professionalism, and the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system. Their research was more focused on the news media, while this research primarily focuses on
entertainment media, the film industry, and only part of their fourth dimension-- the degree and nature of state intervention.

Hallin and Mancini are not the only ones who have been undertaking comparative studies in media policy. With increasing globalisation and the rapid changes taking place in the global political environment, comparative studies have become increasingly popular. Livingstone notes that comparative research is no longer a choice but a necessity, because it has become fashionable to ask the same question about other countries while studying a phenomenon in one country.

Des Freedman refers to media policy as “... the development of goals and norms leading to the creation of instruments that are designed to shape the structure and behaviour of media systems.” Where this work differs from many other comparative policy studies is the investigation of government policies toward, and interventions in, the screen media industry in three British colonial territories prior to the Second World War. A comparative approach is appropriate as, following the suggestion of Hallin and Mancini, it enables a deeper understanding of the issues while shedding light on what would not otherwise be visible or conceptualised. Thus, we can learn of the similarities and differences in film censorship, support for British films, and use of film by governments in each of the localities. Historic analysis is important to understand the origins of present day situations, institutions and phenomena.

A policy imperatives model is used to provide a framework to categorise the different policies used by the governments and to facilitate the comparative analysis. The analysis happens on two dimensions. As well as a comparison between the three cases, there is also a comparison between two levels of polity: the colonial state, represented by Hong Kong and Singapore, and the largely self-governed dominion-level state, represented by New Zealand. The study is primarily based on data drawn from government and industry archival documents from a number of countries, as will be laid out in more detail in the next section.

Data Collection and Analysis

Records from several different archives were consulted and used in this study, with the copies from another archive available (MPPDA), but containing little of core relevance.
to this study. Copies of a number of trade periodicals were also collected or consulted, but rarely used given the enormous volume of primary archival material collected.

The Public Records Office at the National Archives in Kew Gardens, London provided a rich source of documentation on Imperial film policy throughout the period, particularly important for Hong Kong and Singapore, as many of the original records had been destroyed at the time of the Japanese invasion of the two colonies in 1941/42. What was left, in many cases, were copies of papers sent to the Colonial Office in London. Across the Atlantic, the US National Archives in College Park, Maryland, provided the richest source of records for the two colonies, as well as an important source for New Zealand. Extensive intelligence reports from US Consulates provided the raw material for the Department of Commerce publications from the period, and whereas Thompson used those publications for her 1985 volume, this study has gone back to the source material. Although the records are not always accurate and sometimes show some bias, they were an important source of information, particularly in providing commentary (some of it confidential) on events of the time.

The Public Records Office in Hong Kong along with the National Archives of Singapore provided some government records from the period, mainly on microfilms from records held in London. There were some paper records existing in Hong Kong, though generally fragmentary. In these cases, many of the pre-WWII documents had been destroyed as a result of the Japanese invasion and no longer exist. In Singapore, only microfilms are available for public use, but in the more restrictive environment; it was unclear as to whether there were also additional records unavailable to the public (i.e., not in microfilm form).

In New Zealand, considerable records still exist in Archives New Zealand – Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga. These were supplemented with records from Ngā Kaitaki o Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua – The New Zealand Film Archive, The Alexander Turnbull Library, Uare Taoka Hākena – The Hocken Collections at University of Otago Library and Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa – The National Library of New Zealand.

During the process of research in Archives New Zealand, two collections of papers proved particularly useful. The first were the papers of R. Girling-Butcher, the Chief Inspector of Explosives who later became the Chief Inspector of Films. He participated in
three important government hearings into the motion picture industry in New Zealand, in 1928, 1934 and 1948, providing comprehensive briefing papers for the members of each committee, as well as proposing the inclusion of the Film Hire Tax in the 1930 budget that led to the trade war between Hollywood and the New Zealand government. The papers in the archives were not specifically identified as his papers; however, they became evident going through papers for each of the hearings that they were Girling-Butcher’s own papers with his comments and notes written on them. Girling-Butcher was probably the most influential government official dealing with the motion picture industry in the period covered, having a part in, if not influencing most of the major decisions of the period.

The second collection of papers was the research notes for the Foster Report, as well as the Foster Report itself, a confidential 600-page government report produced in 1969 detailing all of the government regulation of, and interventions into, the motion picture industry in New Zealand up to that date. Accompanying this was a much shorter report looking specifically at film censorship in New Zealand. As well as laying out in some detail the chronology and development of government policy towards the motion picture industry in New Zealand were notes from government files, many of which have subsequently been destroyed. These notes, many of which had also been incorporated into the Foster report, provided insight into the content of the destroyed records.

The narrative of the John Grierson visit to New Zealand was pieced together primarily from records housed in the Grierson Archives at Stirling University in Scotland, along with records in the Archives New Zealand, Alexander Turnbull Library and the Hocken Library at the University of Otago. Further work has yet to be done on Grierson’s papers, as his handwriting is particularly challenging to decipher.

Analysing the breadth and quantity of material sourced from the archives proved a major challenge, beginning with the management and indexing. Excel spreadsheets in a standardised format proved to be the easiest approach to building the indexes for material from each of the archives, with top-level information entered at the time of sourcing, and detail added later as the documents were viewed in more detail. Most of the archives outside of Asia allow researchers to photograph archival papers, albeit with some restrictions. As a result, most of the archival material was photographed and stored in
digital form, which simplified the storage process and made it possible to collect considerably more material than was needed.

Where possible (and frequently it wasn’t), the principle of triangulation was used: using different primary sources to corroborate events and the interpretations of historical evidence. Although in the collection process a substantial body of articles from trade journals and newspapers were gathered (particularly from the holdings of the Australian/New Zealand trade journal *Everyones* held at Flinders University in Adelaide), with a few exceptions, these were not used, both because of the possible lower reliability (though the reliability of government records is also questionable) and the quantity of other materials, generally closer to the original source. Drawing on original material wherever possible decreased the level of possible interpretation error. The end result is a historical narrative built largely from government records with some industry material supporting it. The research is qualitative with some empirical and statistical data to support it. It is at best a partial interpretation of events, but a starting point for future scholars to extend further.
Appendix 2.1: British Board of Film Censorship Guidelines
(prohibitions excerpted from British Board of Film Censors, Censorship in Great Britain, 1926)

RELIGIOUS
The materialised figure of Christ.
Religious rites and ceremonies treated with irreverence, or in a way calculated to bring religion into contempt, and even when the treatment is reverent, exception is taken if the ceremony is of such a sacred character as to be unsuitable for dramatic treatment.
Irreverent introduction of quotations from the Bible or Church Services to produce comic effects, and equally the comic introduction of Biblical characters, Angels, Gates of Heaven, etc., etc., which is extremely offensive to a large majority of audiences in this country.

POLITICAL
Subjects which are calculated to wound the susceptibilities of foreign peoples, and especially of our fellow-subjects of the British Empire.
Stories and scenes which are calculated and possibly intended to foment social unrest and discontent.

SOCIAL
The nude, both in actuality and shadowgraph.
Swearing, or language in the nature of swearing, in titles or sub-titles.
“Orgy” scenes and similar incidents oft-times incongruous and generally superfluous.
Incidents which bring into contempt public characters acting in their capacity as such, i.e., officers and men wearing His Majesty’s uniform, Ministers of Religion, Ministers of the Crown, Ambassadors and Representatives of Foreign Nations, Administrators of the Law, Medical Men, etc.
Embraces which over-step the limits of affection or even passion, and become lascivious.
Impropriety of dress and department, including suggestive and indecorous dancing.
Offensive vulgarity and excessive drunkenness, even when treated in a comic vein.
Scenes connected with child-birth, such as puerperal pains, which are considered too intimate for public exhibition.
Subjects dealing with venereal disease, or any other matters suitable only for the Hospital or Medical Lecture Theatre.
Stories showing any antagonistic or strained relations between white men and the coloured populations of the British Empire, especially with regard to the question of sexual intercourse, moral or immoral, between individuals of different races.

QUESTIONS OF SEX
Cases in which the imminent intention to rape is so clearly shown as to be unmistakeable; also stories depicting the lives of immoral women, and scenes of street soliciting, “White Slave” traffic, and procuration.
Themes which are in violation of good taste, such as a father making love to his unknown daughter, or brother to his unknown sister. Such situations are repugnant, and in every case, the Board has insisted that the sub-titles should be altered so as to remove the unwholesome complications.
**CRIME**

Scenes demonstrating the methods of crime which might lend themselves to imitation.

Subjects dealing with the “drug” habit, the Board believing that the exhibition of this vice with its insidious allurements involves the danger of spreading the pernicious habit.

Prolonge scenes of extreme violence and brutality.

Hanging scenes, and the depiction of actual executions, treated seriously or in a comic spirit.

Stories of which the sole or main interest is that of crime and of the criminal life, without any counterbalancing element of love or adventure.

Themes calculated to give an air of romance and heroism to criminal characters, the story being told in such a way as to enlist the sympathies of the audience with the criminals, whilst the constituted Authorities and Administrators of the Law are held up to contempt as being either unjust or harsh, incompetent or ridiculous.

Organised knuckle fights.

**CUALITY**

Scenes of cruelty to children, and incidents which appear to involve the infliction of cruelty on animals.
### Appendix 4.1. Film distributors and office localities in China, 1932

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<td>International Films (China)</td>
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<td>Krisel &amp; Krisel</td>
<td>United Artists</td>
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<td>Peacock Motion Picture Corp.*</td>
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<td>Puma Films</td>
<td>RKO-Radio, First National</td>
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<td>United Photoplay Service *</td>
<td>Chinese Productions</td>
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<td>Universal Pictures Corp. of China</td>
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<td>American-China Export-Import Co.</td>
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<td>Chi Nan Motion Picture Co.</td>
<td>Own Productions</td>
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<td>Chinese Kinotone Sound Picture Co.</td>
<td>Own Productions</td>
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<td>Diana Film Co.</td>
<td>Own Productions</td>
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<td>Filmos Company *</td>
<td>European Pictures</td>
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<td>Handsome Motion Picture Co.</td>
<td>Own Productions</td>
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<td>Hertzberg Peacock Enterprises</td>
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<td>Hong Kong Amusements *</td>
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<td>Hwa Wei Trading Co.</td>
<td>Chinese Productions</td>
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<td>Independent Film Exchange of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Picture Co.</td>
<td>American Independents</td>
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<td>Lauro Film Co.</td>
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<td>Odeon Theatre Company *</td>
<td>American Silents</td>
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<td>Red Seal Film Co. (China)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Star Motion Picture Co.</td>
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<td>Sun King Hai</td>
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<td>Sun Rise Film Co.</td>
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<td>Tien Sing Motion Picture Co.</td>
<td>Own Productions</td>
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<td>Yih Ming Sound Picture Co.</td>
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* Also operated cinemas

**Source:** Richard Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China,” October 4, 1932, 156-158, USNA, RG 59 Shanghai, Box 7221, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/69.
Appendix 5.1. Career path of Eric W. Hamilton (Hong Kong Cadet Officer)

1911 First appointment of E.W. Hamilton, 17th Nov. 1911 at annual salary of £225 sterling.

1914 Eric William Hamilton (EWH) to act as Secretary to the Sanitary Board during the absence on leave of Mr. Cyril Francis Wogan Bowen-Rowlands with effect from 27th February 1914.

EWH to be a Justice of the Peace with effect from 1st March, 1914

1915 EWH, Cadet, passed his final examination in Cantonese on 25th June, 1915. Considered a ‘Passed Cadet’ at this stage.

EWH to act as Assistant District Officer with effect from 25th September, 1915

EWH appointed Third Assistant to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs and Deputy Registrar of Marriages, with effect from 14th October, 1915

1916 EWH to act as Secretary to the Sanitary Board during the absence on leave of Mr. Cyril Francis Wogan Bowen-Rowlands with effect from 8th March 1916

EWH to act as Assistant Postmaster General with effect from 13th Nov, 1916

1917 EWH to act as Postmaster General in addition to his other duties during the temporary absence of Mr. Edward Dudley Corscaden Wolfe or until further notice, with effect from the 23rd March, 1917

EWH to act as Assistant District Officer, New Territories, with effect from 16th April, 1917

Receives censorship fees. Probably wire or postal censorship rather than film.

EWH appointed a Magistrate with effect from 16th April, 1917. Also authorized to hold a Small Debts Court in the New Territories at the following places: the charge rooms of the Police Stations at Tsun Wan, Tai O, Tung Chung, Cheung Chau and Yeung Shu Wan.

1918 EWH attached to the Sanitary Department for special duty, with effect from the 26th August, 1918 and until further notice.

1918 EWH to act as Assistant District Officer in the New Territories, in addition to his other duties, in succession to Mr. Frederick Peel Eldon Leonard Potter, resigned, with effect from the 27th November, 1918

EWH appointed a Magistrate with effect from 27th November, 1918. Also authorized to hold a Small Debts Court in the New Territories at the following places: the charge rooms of the Police Stations at Tsun Wan, Tai O, Tung Chung, Cheung Chau and Yeung Shu Wan

1920 EWH to act as Assistant District Officer in the Southern District of the New Territories with effect from 10th February, 1920

EWH appointed a Magistrate with effect from 10th February, 1920. Also authorized to hold a Small Debts Court in the New Territories at the following places: the charge rooms of the Police Stations at Tsun Wan, Tai O, Tung Chung, Cheung Chau and Yeung Shu Wan
1921 E.W. Hamilton District Officer (South) to 31st March and then District Officer (North).

1922 EWH to be Second Police Magistrate until further notice with effect from 15th June, 1922

EWH to be District Officer in the Southern District of the New Territories, with effect from the 15th November, 1922.

EWH appointed a Magistrate with effect from 15th November, 1922. Also authorized to hold a Small Debts Court in the New Territories at the following places: the charge rooms of the Police Stations at Tsun Wan, Tai O, and Cheung Chau

1923 EWH appointed as Second Police Magistrate with effect from the 20th November, 1923

*Appears to have been appointed a film censor sometime during late 1923 or early 1924*

1924 EWH becomes Acting Police Magistrate in Kowloon (14th April 1924)

1926 EWH, Police Magistrate, Kowloon, to be a Commissioner to administer oaths and take declarations, affirmations and attestations of honour in the Court, so long as he shall hold the said office of Police Magistrate, Kowloon. 27th February, 1926.

1927 EWH to be Deputy Clerk of Councils with effect from 11th May, 1927

1928 EWH Police Magistrate, Kowloon

1929 EWH to act as First Police Magistrate and Coroner, with effect from 16th February, 1929. Transferred from Kowloon to Victoria.

1930 EWH to be Extra Assistant Colonial Secretary from 3rd March, 1930

EWH to act as Deputy Clerk of Councils with effect from 9th October, 1930

Makes a comment on 31-10-30 on file for New World Theatre and Hong Kong Amusements suggesting their rent for the theatre shouldn’t be increased to $3,000 per month (from $2,500) as they are no longer “making money hand over fist.”

1931 EWH to act as District Officer in the Southern District of the New Territories in addition to his other duties, with effect from 13th February 1931.

EWH authorized to hold a Small Debts Court in the New Territories at the following places: the charge rooms of the Police Stations at Tsun Wan, Tai O (Lantao), Tung Chung (Lantao), Cheung Chau and Yeung Shu Wan in Lamma Island and the office of the District Officer, South, situate in the building known as ‘The Government Officers” situate in Pedder Street, Victoria, Hong Kong, over the General Post Office.

EWH to be Police Magistrate, Kowloon, with effect from 25th February, 1931

EWH appointed Postmaster General with effect from the 18th July, 1931

Also Extra Assistant Colonial Secretary.

1932 EWH Postmaster General to 22nd April, 1932.

EWH to act as Superintendent of Imports and Exports during the absence on leave of Mr. John Daniel Lloyd with effect from the 23rd April, 1932.
1933   EWH Acting Superintendent of Imports and Exports until 24th February, and then on leave until 3rd November when he took up the position of First Magistrate, Victoria.

1934   EWH appointed to be Police Magistrate with effect from 15th November, 1934

1935   EWH to be Superintendent of Imports and Exports with effect from 16th February, 1935

Under instructions from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, EWH appointed to be a Cadet Officer Class I, with effect from 25th January 1935

1936   EWH resumes duty as Superintendent of Imports and Exports on 13th June, 1936

1937   EWH to be Superintendent of Imports and Exports with effect from 28th October 1937.

1939   EWH continues as Superintendent of Imports and Exports and in addition, becomes Controller of Trade from 4th September (Wartime appointment).

Eric Hamilton was interned in the Stanley Prison Camp during the Japanese Occupation and returned to England at the end of the war in 1945.13

Sources: Hong Kong Government Gazette; Hong Kong Blue Book of Statistics, 1911-1939.
### Appendix 5.2. Hong Kong cinemas, 1920-1935

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*Sources:* US Consular reports in USNA, Record Groups 59 and 84 over the indicated timeframe; TNA: PRO, CO 323/1122/3 Colonial Film Committee.

1st = exhibited films in their first-run; 1st+ = exhibited both first and second-run films.

( x ) = cinemas listed in TNA: PRO, CO 323/1122/3, but not the US Consulate reports.

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Appendix 5.3:  Censors report of The Vanishing Race (1925)

I thought I was wise to everything an American Producer would put off on the world but the ten reels which go to make up the “Vanishing Race” are the most revolting production I have ever seen. It is not in the very slightest indecent. It plays about two hours and I cannot do better than outline the plot to start with.

I would premise my remarks by saying that the film is excellently acted by Wallace Beary, Lois Wilson and others and that the photography was good so far as could be seen with the abominable lights in the machines.

Plot. First two reels unobjectionable. Show the Grand Canyon Country – Stone age men – Cave dwellers, then the Indians ousting these and then the Spaniards coming along in 1540.

Then the scene changes to 1914-15. The Americans have pushed the Indians on to narrow and bad reservations. The Agent is a fool – his assistant (Beary) Booker a rogue – (for a long time I thought the scene was dated about 1830 – the “bad man” touch to the life). A particularly dirty theft of horses by Booker and his pals is then shown. This alone seems a libel on Americans.

Booker, hereinafter called the villain, takes a fancy to the pretty schoolmistress (Lois Wilson) (= heroine) who speaks Indian and is “interested” in the Indian chief (= hero). Villain proceeds to kiss her violently in the village school after hours. Hero intervenes and a tremendous fight against odds ensures. Hero eventually escapes and gallops off while heroine has called the Agent. (Who reminds one very strongly of an American Mr. Pickwick). Then comes a “Susannah and the Elders” scene where villain accuses heroine of being caught with hero – hence the fight. Agent believes him and orders arrest of hero. Byplay suggests he is to be shot rather than arrested.

The War now breaks in and 2nd hero, United States officer, comes to collect horses. Indians won’t bring them in and heroine elicits the fact that its owning to villain’s previous dirty trick. Agent begins to see light. heroine negotiates and Indians not only bring in horses but enlist (Much markish “national” stuff – [handwritten note] The girl says ‘You are AMERICAN and privileged to fight for justice. He has just had a horse stolen! ‘American – “War to bring justice to all”, etc.). Villain discredited and sacked.

Interval of war scenes – no objection but not very good I think.

Indians return post-war, and broken up. No welcome – villain back as agent. It transpires he has stolen their lands and the final touch is given by the death of an Indian girl he has seduced and turned out. The whole of this part seems to me a gross libel on America.

Indians revolt except hero who tries to stop them. Raid town (this is 1920!). Heroine turns up as all refuge in loopholed block house – (anachronism!). It then appears she (white) is hopelessly in love with hero (Indian). Villain killed. Hero also killed, trying to call off tribes, and dies in heroine’s arms. Good agent appointed – suggestion heroine will marry second hero – (the American officer) in the end.

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This is by an American Company – Metro-Goldwyn Mayer and presumably passed by an American Board of Review! If it dealt with English I would stop at once. As it is, it seems (a) insulting to America; (b) a gross travesty [sic] on [typescript in file ends]

Appendix 5.4: Censorship Guidelines for Hong Kong (1928) and the Straits Settlements (1925)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hong Kong (1928)</th>
<th>Straits Settlements (1925)</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) Any film showing indecency. This is extended to mean the depiction of white women in indecorous garb or positions or situations, which would tend to discredit our womenfolk with the Chinese.</td>
<td>1. Binding and gagging</td>
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<td>b) Any film showing the white man in a degrading or villainous light.</td>
<td>2. Murders of any description</td>
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<td>c) Any film denoting Bolshevist or mob violence. The Chinese are easily worked up and there is quite enough mob violence going on at present.</td>
<td>3. All scenes where women do not conduct themselves in a proper manner</td>
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<td>d) Pictures reflecting badly on the natives of India</td>
<td>4. All masked scenes</td>
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<td>e) Any film which depicts what the Chinese love to call “Imperialistic” behavior: i.e., armed conflict between the Chinese and the white man.</td>
<td>5. Scenes showing Europeans in the power of natives or persecuted in some shape or form.</td>
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<td>f) Any film which deals with racial questions, especially the intermarriage of white persons with those of other races.</td>
<td>6. Gruesome expressions</td>
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<td>7. Ill-treatment and persecution of women</td>
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<td>8. All &quot;holdups&quot;</td>
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<td>9. Immorality</td>
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<td>10. All scenes that are likely to mean loss of prestige</td>
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<td>11. House-breaking or any scene that shows entry in any but the correct manner</td>
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<td>13. Any scenes liable to suggest new ideas for the purpose of crime</td>
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<td>15. Scenes likely to provoke racial feeling or religious animosity</td>
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<td>16. Scenes likely to bring the laws or the administration of justice into contempt or ridicule</td>
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Source: USNA RG 59 Department of State Decimal Files, 1910-1929, Box 8931, 846d.4061 Motion Pictures/2. Dickins, G.F. (Sept. 5, 1925) Local Propaganda Against American Films, p. 6
## Appendix 7.1: Censorship of films in New Zealand, 1917-1943

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<td>7,857,000</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>7,857,000</td>
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### Notes
- *Source: NZNIA, IA 83 7 Annual Report - NZ Censor - 1917-49; Appendices to the House of the House of Representatives*
- *records were only kept from 1 August, so this represents 6 months for 1926-27*
- *1 Defined as a film over 4,000 feet in length (about 5 reels); this changed in 1929 to a film over 3,000 feet*
- *Quota registration began from January 1, 1929*

### Further Reading
- Figures 10.19 to 10.20 are films registered for Rentents' Quotas. As such they oversimulate the films actually exhibited in the cinema.
Appendix 8.1: Letter from Taranaki Amusements to Minister of Industries and Commerce, March 1932.

Dear Sir,

There is a movement taking place in the Dominion today which we suggest should have your immediate attention. It is that of certain big theatrical combination threatening owners of theatres in towns in which they have no previous interest with opposition and ruin unless they agree to accept the harsh and unconscionable terms laid down by them. To be explicit: In this town there are four theatres, all locally owned by public companies comprising some hundreds of local shareholders. These theatres have cost over £75,000, and are so far in excess of local needs that one of them has not been used for a considerable time. The three distinct companies work amicably by having one common general manager to control the showman portion of the business, each company otherwise being managed by its own directorate. In this way expenses are being kept down and reasonable profits earned, considerable Income Tax accruing to the Department.

Kemball Ltd. and J.C. Williamson Films Ltd., and their associates, the opposition referred to, threaten us with building another theatre in an already over-theatred town unless we agree to “pool” with them on a basis of 50%-50% afterwards reduced to 45%-55%. We have protested vigorously against such unfair and harsh treatment, pointing out that their attitude is simply brigandage, as they demand a share of profits of an established business without putting up and risking any of their own capital, on other words, securing something for nothing.

They reply that they have the “whip hand” over us, as with their large purchasing power (Mr. Kemball said it amounted to about 100 theatres) they could command whatever good film was on the market, leaving us second and third quality film. They say that they have used this power in other towns, specifically mentioning Lower Hutt, and would do the same in New Plymouth if we do not accept their terms and they build a theatre of their own. This is the sinister aspect of the position to which we would like you to pay special attention.

The average business man would not think it possible that another theatre being built would practically cut off the desirable film supplies from the existing theatres, yet this unfortunately is what can be done at present. The question as to whether Film Renters would sell to Kemball, Williamson & Co. in this manner and pass us by is a matter so serious to our interests that we have endeavoured to get some statement of fact on the matter, and Mr. G.H. Saunders, our General Manager, on February 9th interviewed in Wellington Mr. Maddock, the New Zealand Manager for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Ltd., the leading major Film Renter in New Zealand. On that occasion Mr. Saunders was arranging a contract with M.G.M. Ltd. for their 1932 product, and after completing the contract Mr. Maddock volunteered the information that Kemball had already tried to tie up the 1932 pictures of M.G.M., but was informed that they were already under offer to the existing theatre interests in New Plymouth, which had been regular clients for some years. Mr. Maddock then stated that whilst he had been able to sell to us this year because Messrs. Kemball and Co. so far had no theatre in New Plymouth, he could not give any undertaking as to what the position would be when the 1933 pictures came on the market. Indeed he added that if Mr. Kemball had a theatre completed by the end of 1932 he would no doubt include New Plymouth in his deal when buying for all his other towns, and if M.G.M. held out New Plymouth on the grounds that they wished to supply us, Mr. Kemball would refuse to book for his other towns, and of course M.G.M. could not risk losing the business of 50 or 60 other towns just to assist us. Mr. Maddock further stated that Mr. Kemball had previously taken this stand in other towns under similar conditions.

Any doubts on this aspect of the buying power and intentions of the Kemball-Williamson combination was set at rest last evening, when Mr. J. Mason, of Williamson Films, representing the combined interests discussed the matter with myself and Messrs. Saunders and McLeod at New Plymouth, and informed us that Kemball had no intention whatever of coming here. He said that they would not have been able to secure a contract for 1933 pictures, if at all, because of the competition in New Plymouth, and would only do this if they were sure that they had the contract in hand for the whole of 1934.

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Plymouth. Mr. Saunders ventured the opinion that with three theatres in the town we would be able to buy more programmes than the Kemball-Williams combination and thereby select programmes that would make one house sure of showing all first-class productions, and grade the lesser pictures at our other two theatres at lower admission prices. Mr. Mason definitely stated that was not possible. He claimed that this year, in similar conditions to those that might prevail in New Plymouth, the combination has been able to buy over local competitors the productions of the major Film Renters, securing and exercising a rejection up to fifty per cent of the year’s supply. He further claimed that their buying power over so many theatres made it better business for the Film Renters to sell to them under those conditions than to us even though we were willing to buy the 100% output.

The very serious point of the situation is that this method of buying would indeed give them the pick of all the good pictures, and we could not get patronage enough at our theatres to pay working expenses if forced to show the left-over pictures.

They freely admit we already have too many theatres in New Plymouth and that under ordinary business or trading conditions there would be not thought of building another theatre in this town, as it would be doomed to failure if buying conditions were equal for both parties.

It seems strangely fantastic, but is nevertheless true, that a combination can, owing to the peculiar conditions of film buying, arrange to build theatres in towns already over-theatred, with an almost certain prospect of success to themselves and an equally certain prospect of liquidation for the local companies.

We respectfully suggest that this power is inimical to the best interests of the country. We hold that no combination of the kind mentioned should be able to so tie up film supplies as to prevent others from making a living. To fair and reasonable competition we can have no objection. We submit that the competition with which we are threatened is neither fair nor reasonable and should be reviewed by your department and, if possible, means devised to prevent it. It seems to us to be a case of restraint of trade in a most insidious form, giving a combination of theatre interests power to lay tribute upon or squeeze out entirely those who have built up businesses over a long period of years. Did such a position arise in connection with ordinary trading, our companies would have their remedy at law. Under present conditions they have no redress: they have either to accept the unreasonable terms offered at the point of the pistol, or fight with one hand tied behind their backs, i.e., with inferior film supplies against the picked out pictures of all the supplies. [sic]

We make no apology for bring the matter to your attention: its bearing upon the public welfare, apart from the companies’ interests affected, is the justification offered.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd) THOMAS C. LIST
Chairman of Directors

(Sgd) GARNET H. SAUNDERS
General Manager

Dear Sir Thomas,

After discussion with representatives of the various national groups, in which you have joined, I have to suggest the following plans for co-ordinating demand and securing supply in the non-theatrical film field.

There is evidence of a wide and varied interest in the use of film in the many circles of educational and civic activity, but there is at present neither machinery for articulating their demands nor for securing in an orderly way the supply needed. At present efforts to meet the needs are made by the organisations representing the Government, the High Commissioner and Trade Commissioner for the United Kingdom, the Trade Commissioners of Australia and Canada, the Shell Industrial Group, and Educational Sound Films. The effort is piecemeal and scattered. There is no planning of the development of such film services from a national or educational point of view. There is no co-ordination of effort which promotes the economical service of machinery, films and audiences. At the same time, supply is positively prevented by the lack of an organisation of national status which can approach the Government with a guarantee of audiences and a guarantee of effective liaison service in the district. Films have no assurance of being adequately presented or promoted, from an educational and national point of view. Film sources in other countries, which might be willing to send in at no cost to you films to meet your requirements, have no assurance that the films they might send would be effectively and economically circulated.

I propose, therefore, that the Council of Adult Education set up an Advisory Film Committee to carry out this task. For executive purposes you might give it an easy title like New Zealand Film Centre. Membership would be honorary, and I suggest you consider people with something like the following representative capacities. I indicate the names only to be clear as to what I consider is required.

Yourself as Chairman, with Professor Gould as Deputy Chairman; Dr. Beeby to represent the educational machine; Mr. Shelley to represent radio educational experience and provide further contact with the public; Mr. Robertson, M.P. to represent – but not embarrassingly so – a contact with the film interests; Mr. Tennent to represent one already solid non-theatrical film service; Mrs Kelso to represent women’s interests. I should also like to see someone added who is not exclusively devoted to improving people. You may get that by bringing in Mr. O.N. Gillespie or, for that matter, by bringing in a representative of Trade Unions and workmen. You might consider also the virtue of having someone who would give you a contact with the press and its publicities.

There is some benefit in having a group you can easily call together in Wellington. You might, however, wish to secure the sense of local representation by setting up affiliated committees in the principal cities, with an annual conference to centre discussion of common problems.

I have already discussed sufficiently with you the general problem of co-ordination, and I am sure the problems involved will be very plain to the Committee when it meets. Co-ordinate demand and plan supply indicates the principal requirement. I envisage you having immediately an executive officer with secretarial help to work out the actual details of operation. The choice of a good man who already appreciates the possibilities in this filed of operation and is anxious to service them, would give you a good beginning. I am sure, too, after meeting the people here that you will be quick to determine an imaginative policy and give outline to what must be sooner or later a great national educational service, hardly less important than the normal education service, and with vitamins of its own to give.

I have met, I think, most of the bright young men in Wellington who have turned their minds to the wider problems of national education and the use of films, and feel sure in my own mind that Mr. Andrews would be your best bet. For secretarial and executive officer. He already knows what we are after in other countries, and it would, I feel, be the job of his life. It may be that he is short of administrative experience, but I cannot imagine his sitting under a better master than yourself. At a
later stage he could either with Carnegie or Rockefeller backing, secure further direct experience of complementary organisations and activities in other countries. I should be glad to map his path and give him the necessary entry.

I would be glad to be able to report that it is intended to set up such an organisation. The Imperial Relations Trust has instructed me, as its representative, to make what contribution I can to the development of your non-theatrical activities here, and I am asked to put £500 sterling at the disposition of a national organisation for this purpose. It has been the view of the Imperial Relations Trust that with the development of adequate co-ordinating machinery in the various Dominions an exchange of films might be progressively effected to the benefit of all. The Imperial Relations Trust has, moreover, expressed the hope that such machinery should be created on a national basis. Its view is that if the national organisations are strong and efficient, the flow of films will look after itself.

On word from you that your Council intends to set up such an advisory committee, I should accordingly put £500 immediately at your disposal. This I propose to do in the following way. Dr. Beeby informs me that he has been desirous in this financial year of purchasing some films in England for the educational services, but that he has been prevented from doing so by sterling difficulties. Therefore I shall contribute the £500 to your educational film activities by placing £500 sterling at the disposition of Dr. Beeby in London, for the purchase of such films as you may together decide, and Dr. Beeby will in turn make a payment of £500 New Zealand currency for the promotion of the advisory Committee’s activities to the end of 1940. Thereafter, as I understand it, there is every probability of the Council of Adult Education financing the committee on a continuing basis.

I appreciate that you not be in a position immediately to set up the committee, but may be able to initiate the work in the interim. It would be satisfactory to me, therefore, if your officers was appointed in the interim under the University auspices, for transfer later to the Committee, and Dr. Beeby’s payment was made to you as Head of the University.

I should be glad to have your word that this arrangement is suitable, and that the £500 contribution is accepted in these terms.

Yours sincerely

10th March, 1940

Source: Letter from Grierson to Hunter, 10th March, 1940. JGA: G4/24/45 Correspondence, largely relating to work in New Zealand and Australia, 1940.
Endnotes for Appendices


4 ibid., 3.


8 Trade Information Bulletins; Motion Pictures Abroad; Commerce Reports

9 Thompson, 1985.

10 British Board of Film Censors, Censorship in Great Britain (London, 1926). TNA, PRO, HO 45/24084 ENTERTAINMENTS: British Board of Film Censors: Legal position and work of the board.

11 Letter from Sir Cecil Clementi, Hong Kong Governor to Lt. Col. L.C.M.S. Amery, Secretary of State, dated 14th March 1928. TNA: PRO, CO 323/990/1 Colonial Office enquiries – films. “I have instructed Mr. E.W. Hamilton, a Cadet Officer, who has for 4 years been a censor, to endeavour to obtain data on the subject, and to furnish me with a report. I should be much obliged if you could afford Mr. Hamilton facilities for getting into touch with the Agencies which prepare and distribute this type of films. He proceeds on leave on 17th March and will call at the Colonial Office for instructions.”


13 John Strickland (ed.), Southern District Officer Reports: Islands and Villages in Rural Hong Kong, 1910-60 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series, 2010), 2.