

Fabrications >

The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand  
Volume 28, 2018 - Issue 2

224 1 0  
Views CrossRef citations to date Altmetric

Articles

# The Coliseum Theatre, Kuala Lumpur: A Site for Collective Engagement, A Space of Urban Imagination


Simone Shu-Yeng Chung

Pages 212-234 | Published online: 18 Jun 2018

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2018.1446657>

Check for updates

Sample our  
Humanities  
Journals



>> [Sign in here](#) to start your access  
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

## We Care About Your Privacy

We and our 880 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting I Accept enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject All or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Show Purposes link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [Here](#)

We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device

I Accept

Reject All

Show Purpose

accommodation behind this façade of modernist consumption. At the same time, visual spatial analysis demonstrates how its iconic architecture continues to exert a presence beyond its immediate surroundings, serving as a landmark for wayfinding at street level. This case study adumbrates the heterogeneous layers of unspoken tensions and sensitive negotiations that enrich our understanding of a historic building such as the Coliseum and its sociocultural significance beyond the architectural fact.

## Acknowledgements

Research on the Coliseum cinema was conducted as part of the project Re-mappings, Re-constructions, Re-layering and Re-visits: Cinematic pasts as urban cultural resources at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. I wish to thank Khor Joo Saik Sdn. Bhd. and Coliseum Cinemas for furnishing me with vital information on the Coliseum, access to archival photographs and allowing me to conduct interviews with their staff, and Coliseum Lotus Five Star for permitting my team to survey the building. Fieldwork would be incomplete without consulting literature held in the Badan Warisan Negara's Chen Voon Fee Resource Centre.

## Notes


1. Cover  
the Britis  
consiste  
consolid  
colon  
Pahang  
Unfeder  
exceptio  
becomin  
Union in  
the Fede



ned part of  
y. It  
h were  
Crown  
r, Perak,  
46); and the  
he  
963 before  
e Malayan  
in 1957 as

2. Public disquiet that led to the founding of the Badan Warisan Malaysia emerged to raise public awareness about the irretrievable loss of many historic buildings as a consequence of unchecked urban development, spurred by the construction boom in Kuala Lumpur during the late 1970s and peaked in 1983. Zuraini Md. Ali, Mubin Sheppard: *Pioneering Works in Architectural Conservation in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2016), 206–207.
3. J.M. Gullick, *A History of Kuala Lumpur 1857–1939* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2000), 190.
4. Andrew Barber, *Kuala Lumpur at War 1939–1945* (Kuala Lumpur: Karamoja Press, 2012), 122.
5. Barber, *Kuala Lumpur at War*, 214–215.
6. An article in the *Malay Mail* from 1913 notes, “At the commencement of Batu Road, the rickshaw puller had his residence. Here, while waiting for fares, he could be seen having a little smoke and doze ...” Penerbitan Puteries, *Album 100 Tahun Kuala Lumpur Menjadi Penguasa Tempatan (Album of Kuala Lumpur: 100 Years as a Local Authority)* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Puteries, 1990), 71.
7. *Times of Malaya*, November 19, 1929. Cited in Penerbitan Puteries, *Album 100 Tahun Kuala Lumpur*, 122.
8. Gullick
9. Kuala Lumpur and its Populatio
10. Ken (1992), 267.
11. N (Planning District in the Research 8, no. 1 (20
12. Nors
13. Lisa (se of Civil Society i John Wiley, 1998), 2



14. In 1975, there were 368 cinemas operating throughout Malaysia, with at least one in every urban area. Nick Grenfell, *Switch On Switch Off: Mass Media Audience in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Oxford University Press, 1979), 152.
15. Shanika Abdullatib, "Coliseum Tidak Pernah Mati," *Kosmo*, February 25, 2007, 12.
16. Chandran Jeshurun, *Kuala Lumpur: Corporate Capital, Cultural Cornucopia* (Kuala Lumpur: Arus Intelek, 2004), 291.
17. Per. comm., K. Velu, who has worked as a projectionist for thirty-four years of which the last twelve have been at the Coliseum, to the author, September 5, 2016.
18. Mahen Bala, "KL's Old Cinemas: A Long Goodbye," *TimeOut Kuala Lumpur*, March 30, 2015, accessed September 25 2017, <https://www.timeout.com/kuala-lumpur/things-to-do/kls-old-cinemas-a-long-goodbye>.
19. Bill Hillier, *Space is the Machine: A Configurational Theory of Architecture* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996), 188.
20. "Kuala Lumpur Coliseum," *Malay Weekly Mail*, July 14, 1921.
21. Believed to have been inspired by Bombay-based Parsi theatre that was popular in Malaya in the 1880s, the *Bangsawan* is an entertainment-oriented opera performance constituted by a mixture of Western, Indian, Chinese, and Malay. See Tan Sooi Beng, *Malay Opera* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 10.
22. Rahr, *Malaysia: Love and Nationalism* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 22.
23.  *Cinema in Malaysia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 22.
24. In the *Cinema in Malaysia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 22.
25. *Cinema in Malaysia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 22.

26. Sound was successfully incorporated into film with the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 and rapidly became the norm by the 1930s. Prior to this, dialogues in silent films were visually supplied as intertitles, and a film screening was usually accompanied by live music from an orchestra or gramophone track, and in situ dubbing of dialogues were not uncommon.

27. "Kuala Lumpur Coliseum", *Malay Weekly Mail*, July 14, 1921.

28. The moniker comes from the monograph authored by Jeffery Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in 1930s Britain* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2009).

29. Siegfried Kracauer, *Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323–328.

30. Andrea Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 2002), 121.

31. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995), 221.

32. Giuliana Bruno, "Motion and Emotion: Film and the Urban Fabric," in *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, eds. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (London: Wallflower Pres, 2007), 17.

33. William... s and  
National

34. Ham... eka (Bangi:  
Penerbit

35. The... y. Having  
open... under  
Colis... s shrewd  
enough... hilst the  
original... capital.  
Pers. cor... ompany  
secretar... nber 6,  
2017.



36. Pers. comm., Yapp Hock Hoe, to the author, July 18, 2016, substantiated by copies of transfer of land title certificates supplied by the current owner.
37. Pers. comm., Yapp Hock Hoe, to the author, December 6, 2017.
38. Thean Lee Cheng, "Mistress of the Coliseum," *The Star: Section Two*, May 25, 1989, S1.
39. Pers. comm., Yapp Hock Hoe, to the author, December 6, 2017.
40. For more on the evolution of cinemas and genesis of their designs based on their itinerant and vaudevillian predecessors in the United States, see Charlotte Herzog, "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," *Cinema Journal* 20, no. 2 (1981): 15–37.
41. Edwin Heathcote, *Cinema Builders* (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2001), 10.
42. The Coliseum Theatre is categorised as a commercial property in the British colonial style in Ghafar Ahmad's survey. A. Ghafar Ahmad, *British Colonial Architecture in Malaysia 1800–1930* (Kuala Lumpur: Museums Association of Malaysia, 1997), 4 and 65.
43. M. Krishnamoorthy, "Why Acquire the Coliseum Cinema?" *The Star*, August 6, 2006, accessed 25 September 2017, <http://soc.culture.malaysia.narkive.com/xRUONAsb/star-why-acq>
44. M. K. ..., 2006, accessed ..., <http://soc.culture.malaysia.narkive.com/xRUONAsb/star-why-acq>
45. Nuru ..., *Journal of Cultural Heritage* ... Buildings of ... (2013), 407.
46. The ..., August 10, 2009, accessed ..., <http://www. ... or-its- ... memories>



47. Azrul Affendi Sobry, "Kacang Vijaya: Sinonim Kaki Wayang," *Berita Harian*, March 10, 2009, 17.
48. Per. comm., Sofie bin Babu, last manager of the Coliseum when it still operated as an independent cinema, to the author, July 18, 2016.
49. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-24.
50. Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (November, 1999): 333-348.
51. The Star, "Government Won't Be Acquiring Coliseum as a Heritage Building," August 16, 2009, accessed 25 September 2017, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2006/08/16/government-wont-be-acquiring-coliseum-as-a-heritage-building/>.
52. Per. comm., Yapp Hock Hoe, to the author, July 18, 2016.
53. Mahen Bala, "KL Cinemas."
54. Pers. comm., Yapp Hock Hoe, to the author, December 6, 2017.
55. Trianna Leong, "Kuala Lumpur's Heritage Buildings under Threat." *The Straits Times*, August 8, 2006, accessed 25 September 2017, <http://www.sph.com.sg/asia/ku>
56. M. K. ... 2006, SP23.

Relat



Information for

- Authors
- R&D professionals
- Editors
- Librarians
- Societies

Opportunities

- Reprints and e-prints
- Advertising solutions
- Accelerated publication
- Corporate access solutions

Open access

- Overview
- Open journals
- Open Select
- Dove Medical Press
- F1000Research

Help and information

- Help and contact
- Newsroom
- All journals
- Books

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email

 Sign me up



Copyright

Accessib

Registered  
5 Howick Pl

or & Francis Group  
orma business

