



LEGAL POLITICS OF FILM CENSORSHIP IN INDONESIA: FROM THE DUTCH EAST INDIES COLONIAL ERA TO THE NEW ORDER*

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[10.15408/sjsbs.v13i1.53208](https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v13i1.53208)

Abstract

Film censorship in Indonesia has a long historical trajectory, reflecting the intricate relationship between political power and legal frameworks governing public entertainment. This study examines how ruling governments across different historical periods employed legal politics to control film content, and how political determination shaped censorship law. Utilizing a normative juridical methodology with statutory and historical approaches, the research analyzes primary legal materials—including the Film Ordonantie of 1916 with its seven amendments, Japanese military regulations, and national legislation up to Law No. 8/1992 on Film. The theoretical framework integrates Lawrence Friedman's legal system theory and Mahfud MD's political determination thesis. Findings reveal that film was consistently perceived as a strategic propaganda instrument rather than merely a cultural product, leading to policies designed to protect ruling interests. The Dutch East Indies prioritized maintaining white prestige, the Japanese military served war objectives, the Old Order witnessed ideological contestation, and the New Order enforced development narratives alongside anti-communism campaigns. Throughout these periods, political configurations significantly determined the substance, structure, and legal culture of censorship institutions, confirming the determinative influence of politics on law. Ultimately, this study contributes to legal history scholarship by providing a comprehensive analysis of film censorship evolution in Indonesia.

Keywords: Film Censorship; Legal Politics; Colonial Law; New Order; Propaganda; Legal History; Indonesian Cinema

* Received: January 07, 2026, Revision: January 15, 2026, Published: January 31, 2026.

A. INTRODUCTION

Law cannot be separated from the existence of society. The Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero articulated the foundational principle that law originates from the growth and development of society, encapsulated in the maxim *Ubi Societas Ibi Ius*. In simple rural communities, law may be constructed simply and straightforwardly, whereas in urban societies, law tends toward greater complexity. This demonstrates that law develops in tandem with the advancement of human civilization. Transformation and development of law occur in terms of form, substance, and methods of application (Darmodihardjo & Sidharta, 1995). Civilizational change driven by technological advancement generates new relational interactions within society, among which is the emergence of entertainment through film media.

Film as an entertainment spectacle and industry has developed in Indonesia since the Dutch East Indies colonial era. This development is inseparable from Thomas Alfa Edison's invention of the moving media rotating device called the "Kinetoscope," which was subsequently developed by the two brothers August and Louis Lumière from France. In December 1895, film was played in public for the first time with the imposition of tariffs, marking the birth of the cinema era (Biran, 2008). The entry of film into public space has had impacts not only from a socio-cultural perspective but also generated consequences in the dimension of political issues. Consequently, it is unsurprising that from the Dutch East Indies Government era through the independence era, the Old Order, the New Order, and even into the reform era, the state, represented by the ruling government, has viewed film not through the lens of cultural product but rather as strategic propaganda (Jauhari et al., 1992).

Film censorship in Indonesia possesses very deep historical roots, nearly as old as the presence of film itself in Indonesia, which began in the early 1900s. The entry of cinema technology into the Dutch East Indies territory at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century became the initial departure point for film censorship policy implementation in the archipelago. Film screenings in the Dutch East Indies brought new consequences for the colonial government, namely the emergence of concerns regarding film content deemed inappropriate for exhibition to indigenous communities (PaEni et al., 2011). These concerns were grounded in the potential of film as a medium capable of influencing the views, attitudes, and behaviors of society, which in turn could endanger colonial government interests. The colonial administration recognized early on that cinema represented a powerful medium of mass communication that could potentially disrupt the carefully maintained racial and social

hierarchies of colonial society (Barker, 2019). Similarly, during the Japanese era, film was utilized as a propaganda tool to support Japan's political position in the Pacific War, demonstrating the continuity of perception regarding cinema's political utility across different occupying powers (Kemendikbud, 2019).

The function of film as an instrument of propaganda, diplomacy, and even as a weapon of ideological warfare capable of destroying a nation's generation raises concerns about the impacts generated when films are freely released to society without filtering processes by ruling authorities. Frank Caso stated that since its initial emergence, censorship has been defined very broadly, including censorship of letters, newspapers, magazines, books, stage arts, and eventually film, generating various debates (PaEni, 2009). The historical development of censorship demonstrates how controlling visual culture became an essential component of modern statecraft, particularly in colonial contexts where maintaining authority required careful management of representations and information flows (Müller, 2020). In authoritarian eras, both government rulers and religious leaders frequently abused their power by imposing prohibitions on speech, writing, and images considered threats to authority or deemed contrary to divine will. The arguments used by proponents of restriction were essentially sound: although limitations existed across various media for conveying information in public spaces, these were implemented for beneficial purposes. Caso noted that restrictions existing in law essentially also constitute censorship, approaching the definition of censorship even when not labeled as such. Many people assess that pornography is dangerous, thus providing sufficient justification for restriction. The suppression of forms of expression considered harmful to society was formalized in the form of "law" (PaEni et al., 2011).

Law represents the will or command of the ruler. This will or command of the ruler constitutes part of the legal politics exercised by those in power. According to Mahfud MD, law is a product of political configuration, where the character of legal products is significantly influenced by the political configuration of particular regimes. In countries with democratic political configurations, legal products tend to be responsive and populist in character, whereas in countries with authoritarian political configurations, legal products tend to be orthodox in character (Syaukani & Thohari, 2019). Law and politics, although possessing different characteristics and objectives, mutually influence each other in practice. Law is a domain oriented toward norms with coercive characteristics, where wrong must be punished and right must be protected or even rewarded. Law demands certainty and justice based on black and white distinctions, separating right and wrong actions based on clear rules. On the

other hand, politics is an arena of interests that is dynamic in nature, where objectives are paramount. In politics, various means are frequently employed, whether legal or illegal, as long as they achieve desired objectives (Sauri et al., 2019).

Politics frequently influences the process of lawmaking, application, and even enforcement. For instance, legislation is often drafted to accommodate particular political interests. Conversely, law can also provide limitations and control over the space for political movement by establishing rules that must be followed in democratic and governmental processes. In Indonesia, legal development has been ongoing for a considerable period, yet many circles assess that existing law is frequently ineffective because it does not yet fully reflect societal aspirations. The lack of comprehensive evaluation of legal models used as instruments of social reform and justice causes law to tend toward powerlessness in confronting political and social dynamics (Mahfuz, 2019). This results in law appearing to operate independently without the capacity to fulfill societal expectations in creating justice and legal certainty. The relationship between political power and legal frameworks becomes particularly visible in the domain of media regulation, where the tension between freedom of expression and state control manifests in institutional arrangements for content oversight (Simbolon et al., 2019).

The significance of examining film censorship through the lens of legal politics lies in understanding how ruling powers across different historical periods utilized law as an instrument to control narrative, information, and public opinion. Film, as a mass medium with powerful affective capacity, represents a strategic site for observing the intersection of law, politics, and culture. The censorship apparatus, including its legal substance, institutional structure, and operational culture, reflects broader patterns of governance and state-society relations characteristic of each historical period (Riany & Nugroho, 2022). Understanding these historical patterns provides essential context for analyzing contemporary media regulation and the enduring influence of colonial and authoritarian legal paradigms on Indonesian cultural policy.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of historical analysis in understanding media regulation. Studies of colonial-era censorship have revealed how racial hierarchies and maintenance of colonial authority shaped regulatory frameworks (Lim, 2021). Research on Japanese occupation media policy has demonstrated the instrumentalization of film for wartime propaganda objectives (Kurasawa, 2019). Analyses of post-colonial Indonesian film policy have examined the persistence of authoritarian regulatory

paradigms despite formal democratization (Heryanto, 2018). However, comprehensive longitudinal analysis examining the legal politics of film censorship across multiple historical periods from colonial through New Order eras remains limited in Indonesian legal scholarship. This study addresses this gap by providing integrated analysis of how political determination shaped censorship law across distinct political regimes, employing Friedman's legal system theory to examine transformations in substance, structure, and culture.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive historical scope spanning from 1916 to 1992, its application of the legal politics framework to the specific domain of film censorship, and its systematic analysis of the relationship between regime type and censorship law character across colonial, occupation, and post-independence periods. This study aims to examine how the direction of censorship policy during the Dutch East Indies colonial era and the Post-Independence era through the New Order addressed two primary research questions. First, how did ruling governments during the Dutch East Indies colonial era and the Post-Independence era through the New Order exercise legal politics in the field of film censorship? Second, did political determination influence legal policy in the field of censorship? The theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating the applicability of Friedman's legal system theory and Mahfud MD's political determination thesis to the domain of media regulation across regime changes, while the practical contribution extends to informing contemporary policy debates regarding the appropriate balance between freedom of expression and regulatory oversight in Indonesian film governance.

B. METHODS

This study employs normative juridical research methodology, conducted through examination and analysis of statutory regulations and other legal materials related to film censorship across historical periods. Normative legal research conceptualizes law as that which is written in statutory regulations (law in books) or as rules and norms serving as benchmarks for appropriate human behavior, involving a process of discovering legal rules, legal principles, and legal doctrines to address legal issues under examination (Marzuki, 2010). The normative approach is particularly appropriate for investigating the legal dimensions of film censorship, as it enables systematic analysis of statutory frameworks, identification of legal boundaries, evaluation of regulatory coherence across historical periods, and examination of doctrinal principles governing state authority over cultural expression.

The research utilizes a statutory approach, examining regulations and historical literature relevant to the research inquiry. This approach enables systematic analysis of the legal frameworks governing film censorship across different historical periods, from colonial ordinances through national legislation. The research also employs a historical approach, situating legal developments within their political, social, and cultural contexts to understand the forces shaping legal change. The combination of statutory and historical approaches enables comprehensive analysis of both the normative content of censorship law and the political dynamics that produced it.

The research data sources rely on secondary data obtained through library research, with data collection methods implemented by searching for relevant literature related to the research topic, both through physical libraries and books and journals collected online. Secondary data collection focused on two categories: primary legal materials, comprising statutory regulations related to the research theme including Film Ordinances from 1916 through 1940, Japanese military government regulations, post-independence regulations establishing censorship bodies, and New Order legislation including Presidential Decrees, Ministerial Decisions, and Law No. 8 of 1992 on Film; and secondary legal materials, comprising books, journal articles, theses, and other academic works addressing film history, censorship studies, legal politics, colonial law, and Indonesian political history. Primary legal materials examined include the complete series of Film Ordonantie amendments from 1916 to 1940, Japanese military government ordinances, and Indonesian national legislation governing film and censorship.

The theoretical framework integrates two complementary analytical perspectives. Lawrence Friedman's legal system theory, which divides the legal system into three components—legal substance, legal structure, and legal culture—provides the framework for analyzing transformations in censorship regimes across historical periods. Legal substance encompasses the content of legal rules and regulations governing film censorship, including prohibited content categories, classification systems, and sanction provisions. Legal structure refers to the institutions and actors responsible for implementing censorship, including their organizational placement, composition, authority, and interrelationships with other state institutions. Legal culture encompasses the attitudes, values, and expectations regarding censorship held by both officials and the public, including prevailing assumptions about the relationship between state power, cultural production, and public morality. Mahfud MD's theory of political determination of law provides the framework for analyzing how political configurations shaped the character of censorship law in each historical

period, examining the relationship between regime type—colonial authoritarian, military occupation, parliamentary democracy, developmental authoritarian—and legal product character—orthodox or responsive.

Data analysis employed qualitative interpretive methods, involving systematic examination of legal texts within their historical contexts, identification of patterns and transformations across periods, and synthesis of findings within the theoretical framework. The historical scope encompasses four distinct periods: the Dutch East Indies colonial era (1916-1942), the Japanese occupation period (1942-1945), the independence and Old Order era (1945-1966), and the New Order period (1966-1992). This periodization enables comparative analysis of how different political regimes approached film censorship and how political changes produced corresponding legal transformations. As a normative legal study relying exclusively on publicly available documentary sources, this research maintains academic integrity through accurate representation of legal sources, appropriate citation of scholarly work, and transparent analytical reasoning throughout the study.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Legal Politics of Censorship During the Dutch East Indies Colonial Era

The policy of implementing censorship activities against films during the Dutch East Indies government period from 1916 to 1942 began with the enactment of legislation called the Film Ordinance of 1916 (Film Ordonantie 1916), *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 276 dated March 18, 1916. This ordinance provided for the establishment of a film examination commission in the Dutch East Indies, stipulating that the Governor-General may designate locations in the Dutch East Indies for the establishment of Film Censorship Commissions and film censorship commission institutions, with each commission consisting of five members including a chairperson (PaEni et al., 2011). The issuance of this film ordinance cannot be separated from the demographic structure of colonial society, which the colonial government stratified into population classifications: European, Foreign Eastern, and Indigenous communities. Legal governance was based on the policy of legal dualism that characterized colonial administration (Wignjosoebroto, 2014).

The Film Ordinance was initially issued by the Dutch East Indies government to avoid negative impressions among indigenous people regarding the lifestyle of white people as displayed in American-produced films. The view of white people as a superior race or first-class society generated concerns about

the degradation of their dignity before indigenous communities. At that time, American films featured scenes displaying forms of Western life far from the impression of a dignified nation, including depictions of crime, moral laxity, and social disorder that contradicted the civilizational superiority narrative underpinning colonial legitimacy (Barker, 2019). Another concern underlying the legal politics of censorship during the Dutch East Indies colonial era was actually the fear of the emergence of educated indigenous circles increasingly aware of information. Film was considered to carry influence in fostering awareness and national spirit among indigenous communities, including concerns about the entry of democratic ideas making freedom and equality primary pillars that would awaken indigenous resistance (Kurnia et al., 2004). Indigenous communities were feared to potentially learn and understand the meaning of equal rights, including sovereign rights, that all nations possess sovereignty to achieve independence free from colonization. The colonial administration understood that visual media could communicate ideas of modernity and political consciousness that transcended literacy barriers, making film a particularly threatening medium in the context of maintaining control over a largely non-literate population (Lim, 2021).

The Film Ordinance of 1916 was enacted in Batavia and entered into two *Staatsbladen*. The first was *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 276 dated March 18, 1916, signed by Governor-General Idenburg. The enactment of this ordinance became the first milestone for film censorship activities conducted in the Dutch East Indies territory. This ordinance contained restrictions and supervision of scenes contrary to public order and decency or considered capable of exerting negative influence, meaning capable of inciting indigenous people to undertake undesirable actions. Other scene restrictions regulated in the 1916 ordinance related to visual depictions degrading the image of the white race as a dignified people (SM. Ardan, 1992). To conduct film supervision, the 1916 ordinance established an institution called the *Commissie voor de Keuring van Films* (Commission for Film Assessment), whose task was to cut circulating films inconsistent with colonial politics. When examined carefully, the primary part of the legal politics behind the formation of this ordinance was the power approach, resulting in law present in frozen justice, where legal institutions were directly provided for political power in efforts to protect the tranquility of white people, particularly the Dutch nation residing in the Dutch East Indies (Riany & Nugroho, 2022).

The second *Staatsblad* was *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 277 dated March 18, 1916, containing provisions regarding film exhibition supervision by the Film Assessment Commission in four cities: Batavia,

Semarang, Surabaya, and Medan. This establishment aligned with demands for decentralization of authority that emerged in the early 1900s, subsequently producing the Decentralization Law of 1903, which provided significant expectations for establishing regions or parts of regions capable of independent management (PaEni et al., 2011). The primary basis for establishing Film Assessment Commissions in these four cities was presumably based on the existence of plantations established by the Dutch government. The presence of plantation centers in these four cities resulted in substantial population concentration. Besides employees of Dutch and indigenous nationality, there were also considerably large populations of Foreign Eastern citizens constituting second-class citizens in Dutch East Indies society. The large population resulted in entertainment business development in these four cities, one form being film entertainment, leading to the emergence of cinema buildings in these four regions.

The designation of these four areas cannot be separated from image politics, where white people constituted first-class citizens for the colonial government. Moreover, applicatively in the plantation world of East Sumatra, "plantation masters" and plantation assistants were portrayed as flawless deities. Even indigenous plantation foremen with sturdy bodies and imposing mustaches were greatly feared by contract coolies, because at that time in several plantations the "Poenale Sanctie" still applied—the authority of "plantation masters" to punish plantation coolies themselves without going through general courts, before eventually ceasing since the implementation of ethical politics by the Dutch East Indies government (PaEni, 2009). The image as "deities" was subsequently tarnished by the entry of foreign films from America into the Dutch East Indies colony, which depicted Westerners in morally compromised situations that undermined the racial prestige essential to colonial authority. The anxiety about cinematic representation of whiteness reflects broader colonial anxieties about maintaining the performance of racial superiority that was fundamental to the colonial project (Müller, 2020).

During its implementation, the Film Ordinance of 1916 underwent seven amendments and refinements over a 24-year period. This demonstrates the dynamism of thinking among Dutch East Indies policymakers regarding film exhibitions in the colony. Film was increasingly assessed as having potential to endanger the continuity of colonial life. Additionally, the implementation of film censorship policy had generated problems for importers, cinema building owners, and audiences, necessitating refinement and amendment. The frequency of amendment also reflects the rapid development of film as a medium and

industry, which continuously presented new regulatory challenges that existing frameworks struggled to address (Barker, 2019).

The Film Ordinance of 1919 (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 377) was established to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Film Assessment Commission. This ordinance created sub-commissions from the Film Assessment Commissions in the four provinces. The duties and authorities of the established sub-commissions included granting film exhibition permits in cinemas, authorizing sub-commission members to inspect cinemas, and imposing sanctions in the form of eight days imprisonment or fines of 100 gulden for those violating film censorship provisions. Punishment was imposed on those who intentionally substituted films that passed censorship with those that did not. Film cutting by the Film Assessment Commission and punishment provisions for violators constituted the Dutch colonial government's particular method for impeding the widespread entry of American-produced films. This method was adopted because it was extremely difficult to restrict American films directly through quota systems, given American dominance in global film markets and the limited availability of alternative film sources (Jauhari et al., 1992). The reliance on post-hoc censorship rather than import restrictions reveals the pragmatic adaptation of regulatory strategy to market realities that constrained colonial administrative options.

The Film Ordinance of 1920 (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 356) resulted from the 1919 Ordinance having a relatively short lifespan. The background causing the birth of the 1920 ordinance was pressure from capitalist circles who protested and criticized, including importers, distributors, and cinema entrepreneurs who felt disadvantaged by the 1919 ordinance provisions. Operationally, the 1919 ordinance had actually provided a clearer tactical foundation for the Film Assessment Commission in executing its duties and functions. The push and pull of capitalist interests was quite strong in the birth of the 1920 ordinance, visible in the display of American film posters containing images of actors who frequently appeared nude, then labeled "Sex Education," so audiences need not feel embarrassed because they were watching educational films. Regarding this, the government turned a blind eye, and ultimately economic activity grew larger with the proliferation of cinema buildings (PaEni et al., 2011). This episode illustrates the tension between moral regulation and commercial interests that characterized colonial film governance, with economic considerations often prevailing over censorship strictness.

The Film Ordinance of 1922 (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 668) represented further refinement addressing old problems impeding

commission work. The new ordinance included provisions requiring film assessment fees, which was important because the number of films at that time was increasing, while commission members needed additional incentives due to the increasing weight of duties performed. The introduction of fee provisions reflects the bureaucratization and routinization of censorship as it transformed from an ad hoc response to perceived threats into an established administrative function requiring sustainable resourcing.

The Dutch East Indies government again refined the existing film ordinance through the Film Ordinance of 1925 (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 477). The changes were quite fundamental, eliminating sub-commissions existing in four cities and subsequently designating the Film Assessment Commission in Batavia as the sole Film Assessment Commission in the Dutch East Indies. This centralization represented a significant shift in institutional design, concentrating censorship authority in the colonial capital and reducing the autonomy of regional commissions (Lim, 2021). Additionally, through the 1925 ordinance, the Dutch East Indies government improved the institutional structure of the Film Assessment Commission, placing the Film Commission under the Director of Internal Governance. With the Film Assessment Commission's position under the Director of Internal Governance, the process of appointing and dismissing the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Commission Members fell under his authority. In 1925, the budget for the film assessment commission also began to be established, marking the full institutionalization of censorship as a permanent governmental function.

The Film Ordinance of 1926 (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* Number 478) involved changes only concerning additional supporting budgets for implementing censorship duties. However, in this year, the Film Assessment Commission received sharp criticism from newspapers published in Batavia, by two people's council members, Dr. Schmutzer and de Queljoe. De Queljoe harshly stated that the Film Assessment Commission must be the biggest blockhead, and considered the film assessment fee of 10 gulden very high. Dr. Schmutzer proposed establishing a new commission with attention to better composition and completeness, shortening the time from film arrival at Tanjung Priok to delivery to importers, improving internal working methods, and enhancing performance by complying with existing regulations (PaEni et al., 2011). These criticisms reveal ongoing tensions between censorship objectives and commercial imperatives, as delays and costs associated with censorship created friction with film industry stakeholders.

The Film Ordinance of 1930 (Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië Number 477) was the next amendment occurring within a four-year span after 1926. The Dutch East Indies government regulated provisions regarding the right of film owners to obtain information about the reasons why their films were prohibited from circulation. Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië 448 contained provisions for perfecting the 1925 Film Ordinance, particularly regarding the use of the word "film," with all uses changed to "silent film and talking film" to accommodate technological developments in cinema.

The Film Ordinance of 1940 (Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië Number 507) demonstrated that the formulation of institutional form and authority, including the working mechanisms of the Film Assessment Commission, still appeared subject to continuous changes. Refinements included making the Film Commission an institution tasked with conducting film censorship, with the Film Commission no longer responsible to the Director of Internal Affairs but rather directly responsible to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies Government. The Commission Chairperson was appointed and dismissed by the Governor-General, while commission members were appointed and dismissed by the Director of Internal Governance. The ordinance also introduced age classification for film audiences: films for all ages, films for ages 13 and above, and films for ages 17 and above. Finally, the ordinance provided space for the Governor-General to annul the decisions and results of the Film Commission (PaEni et al., 2011). This direct subordination of the censorship body to the highest colonial authority and the provision for unilateral annulment of its decisions reflects the ultimate political character of censorship, with the Governor-General retaining supreme authority over what colonial subjects could view.

The rapid development of ordinances combined with the strategies used by the Dutch East Indies government in regulating film circulation constituted part of the government's legal politics in controlling opinion and information that might be formed from messages carried by films. The Film Assessment Commission was present as the ruler's instrument in restricting screenings contrary to the very subjective definitions of decency and order according to the political interests of the ruler. The establishment of the Film Assessment Commission in Semarang, for instance, was politically undertaken to limit the role of Chinese-descended communities, who since the 16th century upon entering the archipelago had been active in trade politics (Suryadinata, 1986). The Chinese community was viewed as both an asset and a threat simultaneously, positioned as second-class citizens below Dutch society as part of divide et

impera politics while also serving to improve economic relations between the Netherlands and China (Heryanto, 2018).

2. Legal Politics of Censorship During the Japanese Occupation Era

The outbreak of the Pacific War from 1937 to 1945 resulted in Allied defeat, with the Netherlands becoming one of the defeated parties. Once Japan occupied the archipelago and expelled the colonial power that had established its influence over many decades, the Japanese military government divided the occupied territory into three command regions: Java and Madura, Sumatra controlled from Singapore as center, and Eastern Indonesia. Based on the Japanese Army Law Osamu Siret Year 1942 No. 1 applicable to Java and Madura, it was proclaimed that all authority of government bodies and all laws and regulations previously in force remained declared applicable except where contrary to Japanese military regulations (Kemendikbud, 2019). This approach of maintaining existing legal frameworks while subordinating them to military authority reflected pragmatic governance strategy aimed at ensuring administrative continuity while establishing supreme military control.

The Japanese military government in the Archipelago was actually only temporary, as evident in Law Number 1 of 1942 issued by the Commander of the Sixteenth Japanese Army, which stated that the Japanese army conducts military government temporarily in occupied areas in order to bring about lasting security swiftly. To run the new governmental machinery, the Japanese government established policies including endeavoring to obtain popular support and maintain order, utilizing many existing government structures, and laying foundations so that occupied territories could fulfill their own needs and strengthen war-fighting capability in the southern regions (Kurasawa, 2019). On March 8, 1942, it was announced that the Japanese military government (Gunseikanbu) established seven departments including Sendebu, the department handling propaganda affairs, which from its establishment immediately conducted propaganda programs as efforts to attract indigenous sympathy (Kemendikbud, 2019).

The Japanese government proclaimed that Japan was the "older brother" who would improve the fate of the Indonesian nation and liberate it from Dutch colonization. This propaganda was also conducted through speeches delivered via radio broadcast channels. The Japanese government's approach in attracting sympathy was actually almost identical to the Dutch East Indies government's approach of recruiting indigenous figures into government circles, although the Dutch only permitted indigenous people to enter mid-level government positions. The Japanese side realized that if they wanted to mobilize the

Indonesian people, they needed the charisma of national figures already prominent since before Japan arrived in the Archipelago, leading to the release of figures such as Mohammad Hatta and Sutan Syahrir from Dutch detention in Boven Digul (Kemendikbud, 2019).

Censorship policy during the military government era centered in the Sendebu department handling Japanese military government propaganda. This policy demonstrates that the direction of the Japanese military government's legal politics regarding film viewed film as part of Japan's propaganda strategy during the Pacific War. In April 1943, Sendebu established the Keimin Bunka Shidoso office, a Cultural Center under Sendebu operating in five fields: literature, painting, music, theater, and film. This Cultural Center was built as a forum to develop and lead culture in Java, with Usmar Ismail as Chair of the Film and Drama Section (SM. Ardan, 1992). During the Japanese military government's rule, production of documentary films, cultural films depicting Japanese culture, and news films became priorities. Films were made based on concepts containing the same ideology as films produced in Japan, with adjustments incorporating film content of a national policy propaganda nature. This instrumentalization of film for total war objectives represented the most extreme form of cinema's subordination to political imperatives, with all film production and exhibition directed toward supporting Japanese war aims (Kurasawa, 2019).

Film received strict supervision from the beginning of the occupation, with military units accompanying military operations confiscating all production goods from film companies. Various restrictions and prohibitions were directly issued by Sendebu, including making all films a strategy of the occupation government to obtain the hearts and support of the Indonesian people. During the Japanese military government era, all Hollywood films were prohibited from entering and being screened in occupied territories, declared as examples of bad and misleading models (PaEni et al., 2011). This complete prohibition contrasted with the Dutch East Indies approach of selective censorship, reflecting the total war context in which ideological control was considered essential to military success.

The determination of law relating to film censorship in the Japanese Military Government occupation era was actually not very different from policy during the Dutch East Indies government era. The relationship between law and politics in these two eras can be viewed from three relational aspects identified by Mahfud MD: law as determinant of politics where political activities must submit to law, politics as determinant of law because law is essentially a political

product laden with interests and political configuration, and law and politics as two balanced societal subsystem elements (Syaukani & Thohari, 2019). It appears that the Japanese era still employed politics as a tool, resulting in law submitting to the interests of the ruler. The continuity in the instrumentalization of film censorship across colonial and occupation regimes, despite their antagonistic relationship, reveals the common authoritarian logic underlying both administrations' approach to media control.

3. Legal Politics of Censorship in the Post-Independence Era

Following the Proclamation of Independence in 1945, the Indonesian nation was in a period of transition. The attention of Republic leaders at that time was largely consumed by political efforts to realize national unity and integrity, frequently forced to neglect institutional and societal innovations. When confronted with existing problems and realities, these republican elites tended to seek solutions by referring to old guidelines they had known in the past, reflecting Soepomo's preference for state institutional models already well-known by Indonesian legal experts (Wignjosoebroto, 2014). This institutional continuity meant that colonial-era legal frameworks, including those governing film censorship, continued to influence post-independence regulatory approaches.

One year after the proclamation of independence, precisely on September 10, 1946, the Government established the Film Examination Commission, whose members were national figures of the time: Ali Sastroamidjojo, Ki Hajar Dewantara, Mr. Soebagio, Mr. Soetarto, Usmar Ismail, Soemardjo, Anjar Asmara, Djajeng Asmara, and Rooseno. One month after the Film Examination Commission was established, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono, who at that time served as State Minister, immediately formed the Film Examination Commission. The ministerial proclamation stated that the Censorship Body has the obligation to censor all forms of publications, broadcasts, printing, postal materials, placards, slogans, portraits, clichés, theater, letters and telegrams, and telephone-mediated conversations (PaEni et al., 2011). This action was not to weaken people's freedom but rather to ensure that all these forms did not cause misunderstanding, chaos, provocation, and did not weaken the Indonesian nation's struggle to demand recognition of independence.

The Indonesian government's view of film actually did not change much from what was understood by the colonial and occupation governments. The

government still considered film as a political tool that must be properly maintained so as not to contradict the people's understanding at that time. The Film Examination Commission was guided by the understanding that film should be educational and entertaining, yet in practice the operational definition of entertaining and educational remained very vague (PaEni, 2009). Another problem emerging after the Linggarjati Agreement was the establishment of the imaginary Van Mook line as the boundary between NICA power and its puppet states with the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. Anomalies in the two governmental territories also impacted regulation, with the Film Ordinance Number 507 of 1940 becoming the precursor to film regulations used by NICA in constituent states including the State of East Sumatra, the State of East Indonesia, and the State of Pasundan. Indeed, this 1940 ordinance was subsequently adopted as film regulation in the United Republic of Indonesia in 1951 (PaEni et al., 2011).

Dualism of government brought the reality that people were confronted with two equally difficult choices: between returning to accept the presence of the Colonial Government, which in the past at least proved its capability to bring prosperity, or remaining loyal to Indonesian independence, which elevated the dignity and self-respect of the nation but in reality was full of suffering at that time. Generally, this dualism demonstrated the attitudes of both parties in managing films screened to the public. In the Republic of Indonesia territory, the Film Examination Committee thoroughly avoided negative film influence on audiences, particularly concerning morals and values. In NICA territory, the Film Commission merely avoided all types of scenes that could ignite the people's spirit to resist with violence. Observing the journey of censorship law during the independence era, substantively and structurally it was not very different from what had been implemented during the Dutch East Indies era, with the addition that the return of the Dutch in new NICA guise merely continued old regulations that had existed in the Dutch East Indies era.

4. Legal Politics of Censorship in the Old Order Era

Whereas during the Dutch East Indies colonial period film affairs were within the scope of the Department of Internal Affairs, at the beginning of the transition from the United Republic of Indonesia back to the Republic of Indonesia, film affairs including censorship were placed within the scope of the Department of Education, Teaching, and Culture, by establishing the Film Supervisory Committee. Although at that time film censorship provisions still adopted the 1940 ordinance, the Minister of Education, Teaching, and Culture,

Prof. Bahder Djohan, instructed the Film Supervisory Committee to add film provisions existing in the 1940 ordinance, so film content prohibitions were supplemented: content advocating war, content bringing negative influence on morality and soldier values, content violating the officer codex, content showing efforts to overthrow the government, and content showing that good objectives and intentions could be achieved through violent means (PaEni et al., 2011). These additions reflected the security concerns of a newly independent nation facing internal and external threats, with censorship serving nation-building and state consolidation objectives rather than colonial preservation.

The existence of the Film Supervisory Committee in the Old Order era was largely drawn into political turmoil rather than strengthening its role as a supervisory institution. The push and pull of political interests began when Maria Ulfah Santoso, Secretary to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, was also entrusted as Chair of the Film Supervisory Committee from the Indonesian Socialist Party, entering political contestation in 1955. The surge in votes for the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) influenced Maria Ulfah's position, eventually resulting in 1961 in PKI, through the People's Cultural Institute (LEKRA), succeeding in removing Maria Ulfa from her position as Chair of the Film Supervisory Committee. This episode illustrates how censorship institutions became sites of political contestation, with control over film assessment representing broader struggles for ideological dominance in Indonesian society (Heryanto, 2018).

The Nasakomization politics proclaimed by President Soekarno also impacted the Film Supervisory Committee institution. The pull of ideology within the film body at that time was very strong in assessing films. Religious figures from Nahdlatul Ulama, PSII, and Parkindo were not revolutionary figures, resulting in film assessment tending more toward LEKRA's views partnering with some socialist elements within the film supervisory committee (PaEni et al., 2011). The application of law in the Old Order era could not be based on considerations limited to socio-juridical considerations alone but could also be suspected of expanding toward serious political-ideological considerations. Differences in perspectives in assessing films frequently led some Film Supervisory Committee members to be labeled as "Manikebuists" considered American imperialist stooges. During the Old Order period, the Film Supervisory Committee greatly complicated American films passing to be screened in Republic territory, especially since the Film Supervisory Committee chair was Ny. Utami Suryadharma, Chair of the Action Committee for Crushing American Imperialist Films. Ultimately, political configuration influenced by views toward foreign ideology greatly affected how legal structure worked

during the Old Order period, with anti-imperialist ideology shaping censorship decisions as much as, if not more than, moral or cultural considerations.

5. Legal Politics of Censorship in the New Order Era

Film development during the Old Order era, in the view of film activists in the New Order era, was a dark period, at least because film was drawn into political turmoil. When President Soekarno fell and was replaced by President Suharto, it was considered a new dawn in the film world, with society desiring that film functions be returned to their essence as cultural products, not as products of power politics (Biran, 2008). However, as subsequent developments demonstrated, the New Order's approach to film would prove equally instrumental, merely substituting development and anti-communism for the Old Order's anti-imperialism as the dominant ideological framework.

The New Order government, through Minister of Information B.M. Diah, issued Decree Number 34 of 1968 establishing the National Film Production Council, with membership from government elements and film practitioners. It also established the Film Censorship Body tasked with conducting film assessment. Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism were no longer specifically proclaimed as part of national strategy. Issues of poverty and economic hardship were foregrounded as the most urgent problems to be resolved (Kurnia et al., 2004). Thus, in the early period of government, imported films were permitted to freely enter the country, closely related to the desire to revive Indonesian film growth financed by obligations to purchase national film shares. However, the wide opening of the imported film tap apparently brought negative impacts for Indonesian audiences because they were saturated with screenings inconsistent with the noble cultural character of the nation.

The New Order government placed the censorship function under the Department of Information, differing from the colonial era experience that placed the censorship function as part of internal affairs, or the post-independence era that placed film under the educational function. The existence of the Department of Information was very important in constructing political jargon in the New Order era, particularly development jargon that gave self-imaging to President Soeharto, identified through the designation Father of Development (Riany & Nugroho, 2022). This imaging was chosen because of Soeharto's success in conducting development programs, and the Department of Information served as the primary apparatus for disseminating and maintaining this legitimating narrative.

The pioneering of efforts to functionalize law for economic development entered as government policy by making law a means of social engineering, an understanding introduced by Mochtar Kusumaatmadja. In the context of legal development in film and censorship, the New Order government still used the 1940 ordinance inherited from the Dutch with various regulatory strengthening through decrees issued by the President and Minister of Information. Presidential Decree Number 13 of 1983 enriched the norms existing in the 1940 ordinance, requiring imported films, before being duplicated, circulated, and broadcast, to be declared passed by censorship by the Film Censorship Body. Following up on this Presidential Decree, the Minister of Information of the Republic of Indonesia again issued Ministerial Decree Number 194/Kep/Menpen/1984 strengthening the duties and functions of the Film Censorship Body, mandating it to conduct censorship of films and video recordings in accordance with the state philosophy of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Broad Outlines of State Policy, statutory provisions, government policy, national personality values, and national interests (M. Sarief Arief, 1997). The enumeration of these multiple legal and ideological foundations for censorship reflects the New Order's characteristic fusion of legal, political, and ideological rationales for state action.

The New Order government, through the National Film Production Public Corporation led by Brigadier General Dwipayana since 1983, produced the film G30S/PKI. This film was clearly propaganda film used by the New Order Government to prevent the revival of communist thinking in the country. The film G30S/PKI was first screened on open-air screens in DKI Jakarta in 1984, only later broadcast on Television of the Republic of Indonesia in September 1985. Brigadier General Gufran Dwipayana explained that the purpose of this film was to educate the younger generation to distance themselves from communism (Ramadhani Imam, 2024). One year later, this film became mandatory viewing for students every September 30. The Film Censorship Body at that time conducted assessment of the film G30S/PKI, but on its censorship clearance letter merely stated that the film was declared passed by censorship without mentioning for what age classification, even though the Director General of Radio, Television, and Film had issued Director General Decree Number 05/Kep/Dirjen/RTF/1984 determining age classifications. The Film Censorship Body's failure to apply age classification to this particular film, when such classification was required by existing regulations, reveals the subordination of legal procedure to political imperative when the film in question served regime propaganda interests.

The New Order government viewed that efforts to realize the development order would be difficult to implement if not supported by economic activities backed by investment in the business world. Therefore, the trust of economic actors went hand in hand with commitment to legal development and legal certainty, including in the film world, which was growing well in that era. The 1940 Ordinance, which had operated for more than 50 years, was finally replaced with Law Number 8 of 1992 on Film, followed by Government Regulation Number 6 of 1994 on the Implementation of Film Business and Government Regulation Number 7 of 1994 on the Film Censorship Institute (PaEni et al., 2011). The membership of the Film Censorship Institute was quite large at 45 people, incorporating various elements and fields. Although in Law Number 8 of 1992 film was defined as a cultural work, in reality film was still viewed as a propaganda tool that could threaten political stability. For the New Order, order and political stability constituted primary capital in development, as evident from the many defense, security, and intelligence elements present within the Film Censorship Body, such as ABRI (TNI/POLRI), BAIN, BAIS, and the Prosecution Service. The presence of these security apparatus within a body ostensibly regulating cultural products reveals the persistent securitization of film under the New Order, belying the formal definition of film as cultural work.

6. Theoretical Analysis: The Political Determination of Censorship Law

The historical trajectory of film censorship in Indonesia from the Dutch East Indies colonial era through the New Order demonstrates the validity of Lawrence Friedman's legal system theory across multiple regime types and historical periods. The legal system comprises three interconnected components—legal substance, legal structure, and legal culture—and transformations in the political regime produced corresponding transformations in each of these components, revealing the fundamentally political character of censorship law (Riany & Nugroho, 2022).

Legal substance, encompassing the content of rules and regulations governing film censorship, underwent continuous modification reflecting changing political priorities. The Dutch East Indies government's seven amendments to the Film Ordinance between 1916 and 1940 demonstrated the responsiveness of legal substance to evolving colonial concerns, from initial anxieties about white prestige to later preoccupations with nationalist consciousness and, eventually, the technical complexities of talking pictures. The Japanese occupation's complete prohibition of Western films and redirection of film production toward propaganda objectives represented a radical

transformation of legal substance aligned with wartime imperatives (Kurasawa, 2019). The Old Order's supplementation of colonial-era provisions with ideologically motivated content restrictions reflected the Nasakomization politics of the period. The New Order's eventual replacement of the 1940 Ordinance with Law No. 8 of 1992, while simultaneously maintaining substantial continuity in censorship rationale, demonstrated the adaptation of legal substance to development-era legitimating discourses.

Legal structure, encompassing the institutions and actors responsible for implementing censorship, similarly reflected political configuration. The Dutch East Indies Film Assessment Commission's composition, placement under the Director of Internal Governance, and ultimate subordination to the Governor-General demonstrated the centralization of censorship authority in colonial executive power. The Japanese placement of censorship functions within the propaganda department (Sendebu) revealed the instrumentalization of censorship structure for wartime objectives. The Old Order's Film Supervisory Committee became an arena of ideological contestation among political parties, with LEKRA's successful capture of the chairmanship demonstrating the penetration of political conflict into censorship institutions (Heryanto, 2018). The New Order's placement of censorship under the Department of Information, incorporation of security and intelligence apparatus, and large multi-element composition of the Film Censorship Body demonstrated the integration of censorship into the broader architecture of developmental authoritarianism.

Legal culture, encompassing attitudes, values, and expectations regarding censorship, exhibited both continuity and change across periods. The consistent perception of film as strategic propaganda rather than mere cultural product represented a deep-seated cultural assumption shared by colonial, occupation, and post-independence governments alike. However, the specific content of what was considered threatening varied with political context: white prestige under colonialism, anti-Japanese sentiment under occupation, imperialist ideology under the Old Order, and communist ideology under the New Order (Lim, 2021). The persistence of this security-oriented legal culture, despite transformations in political regime, suggests the deep institutionalization of censorship mentalities transcending particular historical periods.

Mahfud MD's thesis regarding the political determination of law finds robust confirmation in the history of film censorship. In each historical period, the character of the political regime—colonial authoritarian, military occupation, parliamentary democracy with strong communist party influence, developmental authoritarian—produced corresponding character in censorship

law (Syaukani & Thohari, 2019). The Dutch East Indies and Japanese occupation periods exemplified orthodox legal products serving the interests of non-democratic rulers. The Old Order period demonstrated how political competition within a formally democratic framework could produce legal institutions captured by particular ideological interests. The New Order period illustrated how developmental authoritarianism generated legal frameworks that formally defined film as cultural product while substantively treating it as potential threat to stability requiring extensive security oversight.

The relationship between political determination and legal change was not simply unidirectional. Legal frameworks, once established, shaped the terrain of subsequent political contestation. The institutional structures and substantive provisions inherited from previous periods constrained the options available to successor regimes, creating path dependencies that shaped the evolution of censorship law (Müller, 2020). The persistence of the 1940 Ordinance for over five decades after independence, despite fundamental transformations in political context, illustrates how legal inheritances from previous periods can constrain and channel subsequent legal development. Legal change occurred incrementally, through modification of existing frameworks rather than their wholesale replacement, until political conditions permitted fundamental legislative reform.

D. CONCLUSION

The historical journey of film in Indonesia consistently demonstrates the role of the state, represented by ruling governments, as laden with political content reflected in legal products governing film censorship activities. This can be understood because film has played a highly strategic role in societal life from the Dutch East Indies colonial era through the post-independence era. Whether the Dutch East Indies colonial government, the independence era, the Old Order, or the New Order, ruling governments viewed film not only through the lens of artistic and cultural products but rather from the perspective of propaganda strategy and political diplomacy. Film was viewed as strategic by governments, leading them to exercise legal politics by imposing restrictions in the form of censorship on film products.

The continuous amendment of regulations and regulatory improvement efforts represented nothing other than the ruler's method of directing film according to desired policy directions. These regulatory and policy changes were closely related to the needs of rulers at particular times and under particular

conditions. The Dutch East Indies government directed its legal politics toward maintaining the dignity of the white race and preventing the emergence of national consciousness among indigenous communities. The Japanese Military Government occupation directed its legal politics so that film would become the primary mouthpiece of propaganda in winning public hearts during the ongoing Pacific War. The Old Order period witnessed ideological contestation within censorship bodies reflecting broader political struggles, while the New Order regime instrumentalized censorship to support development narratives and anti-communism campaigns.

The legal system as articulated by Lawrence Friedman—including substance, structure, and societal legal culture—developed in each period of film development in Indonesia. Similarly, the character of law produced aligned with Mahfud MD's view regarding the relationship between political determination and law. It is clearly evident that throughout the journey of film from the Colonial era to the New Order, political determination greatly influenced the character of law in the censorship field. The colonial period demonstrated how racial hierarchy and colonial preservation concerns shaped censorship substance, structure, and culture. The Japanese occupation revealed how wartime propaganda imperatives radically reoriented censorship apparatus. The Old Order period illustrated how ideological contestation among political forces penetrated and politicized censorship institutions. The New Order era showed how developmental authoritarianism integrated censorship into broader architectures of stability maintenance and legitimation.

This research acknowledges limitations in its reliance on secondary historical sources and normative analysis. The study does not examine audience reception of censored films, the economic dimensions of film import and distribution as they related to censorship decisions, or the specific content of films that were cut or prohibited in each period. The focus on legal frameworks and institutional arrangements provides structural analysis but does not capture the experiential dimensions of censorship from the perspectives of filmmakers, exhibitors, or audiences. Future research should incorporate archival research into specific censorship decisions, comparative analysis with censorship regimes in other colonial and post-colonial contexts, and examination of the reform era transformation of censorship law following the fall of the New Order. The transition from the New Order to the reform era, and the replacement of Law No. 8 of 1992 with subsequent legislation, represents a crucial next phase for understanding the continuing evolution of film censorship legal politics in democratic Indonesia. Additionally, oral history methods could capture the experiences of filmmakers and censors who operated within these legal

frameworks, providing richer understanding of how legal politics translated into practice.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

For Legislative Development: Contemporary film legislation should acknowledge and critically examine the historical legacy of censorship as an instrument of political control, ensuring that current regulatory frameworks genuinely serve cultural development objectives rather than reproducing authoritarian control mechanisms under different justifications. The formal definition of film as cultural work should be accompanied by institutional arrangements that prevent the securitization of film governance.

For the Film Censorship Institute: Institutional reform should continue toward transforming the censorship paradigm from content control toward audience classification and protection, consistent with democratic principles of freedom of expression while maintaining appropriate protections for vulnerable audiences. The composition of censorship bodies should prioritize cultural and educational expertise over security and intelligence representation.

For Historical Research: Further archival research should be conducted on specific censorship decisions, prohibited films, and cut scenes across different historical periods to provide more detailed understanding of the operational mechanisms through which political determination influenced concrete censorship outcomes. Digitization of colonial-era censorship archives would facilitate broader scholarly access.

For Comparative Studies: Comparative analysis with film censorship legal politics in other Southeast Asian countries with similar colonial experiences would provide valuable perspectives on the relationship between colonial legal inheritances, post-colonial state formation, and media regulation development. Such comparative work could inform regional approaches to balancing cultural protection with freedom of expression.

For Contemporary Policy: Current debates regarding film regulation and censorship should be informed by historical awareness of how censorship mechanisms have been instrumentalized for political purposes, ensuring that contemporary regulatory frameworks incorporate robust safeguards against political manipulation of censorship authority. Transparency in censorship

decisions and judicial review of censorship determinations would enhance accountability.

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