

A Brief History of the Baguio *Sine*

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The establishment, growth and death of the stand-alone movie theaters (*sine*) in Baguio City is narrated from the 1900s to the beginning of the 2000s, noting the context for their establishment and the reasons for their rise and decline. Using Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, the Baguio *sine* is then analyzed: first, as a social space initially reflecting the Baguio locals' resistance and accommodation of the American colonizer who developed the city as a resort town; and second, as a site of negotiation where the colonized developed their own hybrid identity and culture. This study on the independent movie theaters in Baguio is circumscribed in a domestic setting, allowing for the inclusion of vernacular memory in the construction of history.

Keywords: Baguio City, movie theaters, history

As America's only hill station in the 1900s, Baguio reflected the air of the typical American town. The Americans fashioned their resort town in the image of home, creating spaces that provided the comforts and entertainment to which they were accustomed. Among these were a rest and recreation facility for the military, a polo field, a racetrack, a country club, and movie houses or *sines*. These spaces increased twofold the attraction of Baguio as a leisure place, and more importantly, became spheres where people moved and socialized. It is important to note that the colonizer shared this leisure space with the Baguio locals, called *Igorots*, and the lowlanders who had settled in the area.

As modernity set in, the city's business and recreational hub widened considerably, deviating from the plan that architect Daniel Burnham drew up, which meant to serve only a population of 25,000. The Baguio *sines* remained venues of entertainment and social interaction, but the face of these theaters and the practice of movie going also evolved. This essay foregrounds the active role played by the *sines* and their patrons in representations of modernity, and its significance in framing the culture of Baguio City.

The Peacetime Sines

Peacetime sines is the term given by Baguio old-timers to the first movie houses established in the city. The term refers to the relatively blissful period in Baguio before the Second World War.



Figure 1. Garden Theatre, 1920s. This photo was taken after the sine had become the Whitmarsh home. In the foreground is Session Road. The Baguio City Hall is on the upper left. (Photo from the collection of E. R. Alcantara.)

The first of these peacetime sines was the Garden Theatre, an outdoor cinema established by a Canadian named Hubert Phelps Whitmarsh, who arrived in Baguio at the turn of the 20th century as a correspondent for Outlook magazine (Halsema, 1991). After a brief stint in politics, he engaged in the mining business and in time was able to amass enough money to buy land near the City Hall (“Mrs. Whitmarsh,” 1940). He built Garden Theatre on part of this land.

Little is known of the Garden Theatre, except that it was an open-air cinema (Afable, 2004; E. R. Alcantara, personal communication, July 31, 2009; Halsema, 1991), and that it existed roughly between 1907 and 1909. Whitmarsh converted the failed sine into his own home, which also served as a museum of Igorot carvings (Halsema, 1991; E. R. Alcantara, personal communication, July 31, 2009). In a 1920s photograph, the name Garden Theatre appears prominently on one side of the Whitmarsh house. The sign, according to Baguio historian Eryln Ruth Alcantara, was not taken down for a long time, even after there was no longer any Garden Theatre (E. R. Alcantara, personal communication, July 31, 2009).

Old Baguio residents are more familiar with what they consider the first sine in the city put up by an Irish American from Detroit, John Joseph Murphy. Murphy came to Baguio in 1900 and worked as a disbursing officer during the construction of the Benguet Road. During this period, he came across a gold deposit on which he staked a claim (Gutierrez, 1964). This was just one of his

business endeavors. He later established a cinematograph in a tent, calling it the Baguio Cine. Less than a year later, in 1924, he moved his trade to a wooden structure along the city's main road, Session Road, and called it the Alhamar-Chainus.

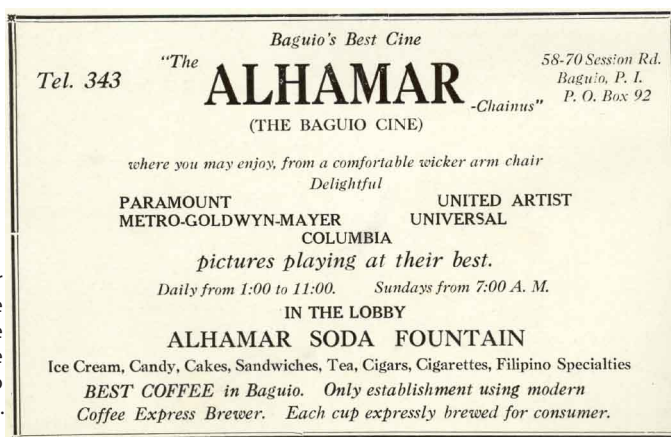


Figure 2. A 1930s ad for Alhamar-Chainus. The theater also introduced the soda fountain experience to the Baguio locals. (Photo from the collection of E. R. Alcantara.)

Murphy probably derived the first name of his theater from the founder of the Nasrid dynasty, Mohammed Ibn-al-Ahmar. Legend has it that Al-Ahmar, through magic or science, discovered a secret chemical process to produce gold used to build the Alhambra, the famous citadel of the Moors in Granada, Spain (Irving, 1850). The second name belonged to Baguio's first carnival queen, Eveline Chainus Guirey, an icon in Baguio's history.

An unknown tourist in 1924 wrote of the movie experience in Alhamar, describing the place as a "native cinema." The tourist said he was the only European present in a hall where there were "some fifty Filipinos and tribesmen." The narrative further distinguishes the "Filipinos" from "Igorots" and comments on the "crude pictures" chosen to suit the "native taste." The distinction between Filipinos and Igorots is glaring, especially in light of the fact that the tourist's picture of his visit to Baguio is entitled "In the Land of the Headhunters: Being an Account of a Summer Holiday in Baguio, 1924" (Anonymous, 1991).

In 1930, a dealer of Ford automobiles named Emmanuel Bachrach opened a new movie house, naming it the Baguio Theatre.¹ The cinema exhibited American movies and in fact tagged itself as Baguio's Metropolitan Playhouse. While closer to the City Hall than to the commercial district, Baguio Theatre was popular because it had a 10-lane bowling alley beside it, which was also owned by Bachrach (J. Alabanza, personal communication, January 31, 2011; L. Mendoza, personal communication, November 27, 2010).

Baguio Theatre exhibited movies only on Mondays to Thursdays, and reserved Fridays for the local stage shows called the *sarswelas*. A stage was used for these *sarswelas*, where movie stars made ‘guest appearances,’ singing and dancing and offering live slapstick shows. Weekends were boxing days when the stage became the ring for local pugilists (J. Alabanza, personal communication, January 31, 2011; G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010).

In 1938, a third movie house, Pines Theatre, opened at the foot of Session Road. Pines was the first movie house in the city put up by a Filipino, Esteban Medina. Session Road was still full of pine trees and Medina thought Pines would be a nice name for his sine that could seat 600 to 800 viewers (F. Manzano, personal communication, January 22, 2011). The building’s design is an example of Philippine art deco architecture. This was the architectural trend from the 1920s to the 1930s, heavily influenced by Burnham’s “White City” concept. Pines Theatre billed itself as “Baguio’s Best and Finest,” exhibiting first-run, single-feature Hollywood films which many of its still-living patrons remember (J. Alabanza, personal communication, January 31, 2011; G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010).

The Baguio Sines During World War II

In a matter of hours after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941, Japanese warplanes flying over Baguio dropped bombs on the city. The bombings continued in the days that followed, and Japanese troops marched into Baguio just after Christmas. The Americans, no longer able to defend their vacation resort, declared Baguio an open city. In formal rites at the City Hall, the Filipino and American flags were lowered and the Japanese flag hoisted (Alcantara, 2000; Halsema, 1991).

Alhamar, Baguio Theatre and Pines Theatre were kept open during the Japanese occupation of Baguio. The Japanese initially banned American movies and had the sines show Japanese propaganda films dubbed in Filipino. They later tolerated the showing of American pre-war films reruns. The movie fare at that time was described by a Baguio local as “nothing but American movies and one Japanese propaganda movie made in the Philippines” (“Mr. James Brett,” 1998, p. 9). The *Kempeitai* also allowed Baguio Theatre to have its *sarswelas* and regular weekend boxing matches. (G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010). In depicting the stage shows during the Japanese period, Eliseo Quirino (1961) said these were subject to strict censorship rules, which performers tried to thwart, usually by deviating from prepared scripts.

Setting aside problems with Japanese censorship, it was business as usual in the sines until the first month of 1945, when American forces tried to regain

control of Baguio. On January 8, U.S. warplanes flew over the city and dropped bombs. From January through March, air strikes pummeled Baguio daily. On March 15, 170 U.S. planes dropped bombs on Baguio in what was called the carpet bombing of the city (Alcantara, 2000). A U.S. military operations report described what had become of the Americans' only colonial hill station: "The heap of rubble which represented Baguio, the famous resort town, was no longer the beautiful, healthy, peaceful, or the gay rendezvous of the Philippines" (Halsema, 1991, p. 321). The carpet bombing did not spare the city's movie houses. Alhamar, in the middle of Session Road, was razed. Pines Theatre, farther down the same road, was reduced to a shell, as was Baguio Theatre. Whitmarsh's house, which had been the Garden Theatre, was also destroyed.

The Post-war Sines

Reconstruction started immediately. The troops of the U.S. Army's 33rd Division stationed in the Pacific swiftly rebuilt quarters for the war-weary soldiers at

Camp John Hay, turning the place into "a sumptuous rest center where tired infantry forces could relax in the tingling, rarefied climate" (The 33rd Infantry Division Historical Committee [The 33rd], 1948). The soldiers established a recreation facility on the spot where the base Post Exchange once stood. Aside from the recreation center was the Division Special Services Center that "offered a continual round of dances, movies and USO shows" (The 33rd, 1948). The soldiers also went to town for other forms of entertainment, mainly drinking. In the city, the soldiers sought company among the locals, but in the movie house inside Camp John Hay, socialization was limited to fellow Americans.

Soldiers repaired the partially-ruined Pines Theatre, "once the most lavishly decorated movie



Figure 3. Plaza Theatre Souvenir Program. Plaza was the second sine built after World War II. In the program, the owners say Plaza is their contribution to the "speedy rehabilitation of Baguio." (From the collection of B. de la Rosa.)

house in the Philippines” (The 33rd, 1948). The “pockmarked” building, in an old-timer’s words, was “patched up” and the theater immediately “operated for the American servicemen” (G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010).

In January 1947, a new sine opened beside the spot on which the pre-war Alhamar stood. The day Session Theatre opened, it showed the Paramount film *So Proudly We Hail* (“Session Theatre,” 1947). *So Proudly We Hail* was actually one of the many post-war movies shown in the country, which depicted the cruelty suffered by the Americans and Filipinos alike in the hands of the Japanese.

Eight months later, another theater opened at the foot of Session Road, across the city market. Plaza Theatre showed the musical-western Judy Garland film *The Harvey Girls* the first day it opened its doors to moviegoers (Plaza Theatre Souvenir Program, Inaugural Opening [Plaza Theater], 1947). Aside from showing films from Warner Bros. and Universal, Plaza also carried movies from Philippine production outfits.

By the 1960s, lowland rice trader Luis Tanjanco opened a movie house a little bit off Session, along Mabini Street. Aurora Theatre and Olympian Bowling, named after his mother, was ranked a second-class theater because it exhibited double features, usually second runs (T.M. Pearson, personal communication, January 18, 2011). The establishment of Aurora brought the number of movie houses in Baguio to four. The four theaters came to be known as the Big 4.

Soon, ‘lesser’ movie houses sprouted farther away from Session Road. These sines were considered second-rate as they were put up in areas far away from the city center or close to the market. The movies at these theaters were second runs that came in double programs, if not Tagalog films. One of these sines was New Baguio along T. Alonzo Street, which for a long time was known to charge the cheapest admission rates.

The sixth movie house in town opened in 1967. The Santiago brothers, well known in the Philippine movie industry, established a theater behind the city market. Director Pablo and his brother Generoso, a film booker, came up with a curious acronym for their theater. Maresciel was named after their mother, Marcelina, Generoso’s wife Ester, and Pablo’s wife, actress Cielito Legaspi (“Maresciel Theatre Opens Today,” 1967). The Santiagos promised to “present top first-class Filipino movies” (p. 3) and monthly stage shows at Maresciel .

In June of the following year, a group of Chinese-Filipino farmers who owned vegetable gardens in the Lucban and La Trinidad valleys put up the Garden Theater (Peter Uy, personal communication, March 22, 2006). The

movie house showed Philippine films, attracting market workers and the farmers who did not work on Sundays.

In 1970, a lowland family that had settled in Baguio years before opened a new sine a few steps away from the Plaza Theatre. Luna Theater offered double first run pictures (“Luna Theater Opens,” 1970).

In 1973, another transplanted family tried its hand in the theater business. The Munsayacs housed their Empire Cinema in an eight-story building that also had stores and offices. Empire announced that it would make the movie going experience a pleasant one for its viewers: “your comfort is our concern” (“New Landmark Rises,” 1973, p. 8).

There are no newspaper records pointing to the time when two other Baguio sines opened. The earliest reference to the First and Family movie houses was in January 19, 1975, when both were included in a local newspaper’s movie guide section. First Cinema was in General Luna Road, among the booteries and shoeshine shops. Chinese businessman Jimmy Yu ran the theater that showed second runs. Luna was popular because it was known as a *bomba* palace (F. Felizco, personal communication, March 30, 2011). Bomba literally means bomb, but in the seventies, the word was a euphemism for sex films.

Popular among a local university’s students was Family Cinema. A former manager of the theater recalls that the sine exhibited wholesome films, and this was the reason why it was called “Family.” It was a medium-sized theater that could fit about 500 viewers, most of them in the orchestra section (M. Felizco, personal communication, March 20, 2011).

The year 1976 saw the last of the independent movie houses that were built in Baguio. When Quirino Cinema opened in 1976, a lot of people thought it was named after former president Elpidio Quirino. The sine was actually named after Quirino Caguioa, the son of *Pangasinenses* who came up to Baguio in bull carts at the turn of the century (“Quirino Cinema to Open on Friday,” 1976). The sine, across one side of the market, is remembered as the last independent movie house that was built in Baguio.

Sine Stories

From the beginning, the Baguio locals were enamored by the entertainment medium brought in by the American colonizer. The early favorites were the silent films starring Pearl White and Charlie Chaplin (J. Alabanza, personal communication, February 7, 2011). When the talkies came, the audience grew. An Igorot mestizo’s recollection of the early movie years mentions Pines and Alhamar as the “first-class theatres where they showed single features” (“Mr. James Brett,” 1998, p. 9). Among the “regular American fare” he remembers

viewing were *Gone With the Wind*, *Northwest Passage*, *The Great Dictator* and *Son of the Sheik*, which starred Rudolph Valentino.

The pre-World War II movie fare was varied. The audience loved romance films, westerns and comedies. There were no x-rated films yet (L. Mendoza, personal communication, November 27, 2010). Most oral accounts point to vivid memories of Hollywood actors who starred in pre-war films. Among them were Errol Flynn, who is best remembered for his role as *Robin Hood*.² There was *Flash Gordon*, and another popular character, *Tarzan*, played by Johnny Weismuller (G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010).

When Pines Theatre showed John Wayne and Gene Autry westerns, it would be fully packed. The male viewers, especially, loved Wayne and Autry (G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010). A son of a sine owner described the westerns as influencing the Baguio locals in those days because “then a lot of people learned about accents and western drawls and western accents” (J. Nassr, personal communication, December 14, 2010).

Watching movies became a favorite pastime among the Igorots, a phenomenon pervading the backdrop for writer Sinai Hamada’s well-known short story, *Tanabata’s Wife*. The Japanese man Tanabata thinks that all is well in his family, not realizing that his wife pines for home. One day the wife discovers the movies, and then she returns, and returns to the theater, sometimes taking her baby along with her. Tanabata’s wife becomes a movie fanatic and eventually runs off with a townmate she met in the movie house (Hamada, 2008).

To Tanabata’s wife, the theater was not merely a feast for the senses where one sat transfixed, viewing what was shown onscreen. It was much more than that—a space where one could escape and where desires could be met. Like Tanabata’s wife, the Baguio audience went to the theaters to immerse in their longings. The movie was the medium, an immensely popular form of entertainment that allowed people to socialize and share a collective sight and sound experience.

Going to the movies was a popular pastime through the years, and westerns were always the rage. Some Igorots literally went to the theaters in their cowboy best: checkered shirts, boots and Stetsons. When Clint Eastwood appeared in Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns, they flocked to the sines. They also welcomed the Filipino version of the American cowboy in films starring local actors such as Jess Lapid and Jun Aristorenas (A. Felizco, personal communication, March 30, 2011).

The influence of the westerns extended beyond the movie house. Outside the sines, “standing rooms” became a trend. Standing rooms, in this case,

did not mean full theaters that left no place for patrons to sit on. “Standing rooms” was a generic term for bars located in areas outside the city center (G. Evangelista, personal communication, December 3, 2010). The standing rooms were the locals’ version of the American cowboy saloon. Unlike the original cowboy saloon, however, whiskey was hard to come by. The local substitute was the more affordable gin.³

The Baguio locals also brought to the movie theater their own influence. In one sine, a viewer suffered a heart attack. Management accommodated his family’s request to hold an Igorot ritual offering inside the theater—the killing of a chicken—before the theater opened for the day. In memory of two viewers who died while watching films, the same theater had the seats on which they last sat removed (B. de la Rosa, personal communication, May 11, 2009).

One of the most memorable films was Cecil DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, which was practically shown every Holy Week season since it was first released in 1956. Movie houses then had an option to exhibit religious films or close for the Holy Week. When the movie was first released, a group of Igorots who could not wait for it to reach Baguio chartered a bus to view *The Ten Commandments* in Manila. It was not so much as to catch the movie while it was still fresh, but to see Charlton Heston part the Red Sea, a cinematic marvel of sorts that won an Oscar for special effects (A. Tibaldo, personal communication, March 25, 2006).⁴

It was not, however, *The Ten Commandments* that garnered the box office hit title in Baguio City. That title belonged to a Swedish film, *The Language of Love*. The owner of the Plaza had to close his theater’s gates because the crowd was about three meters deep. He had people blocking the theater’s entrance and patrons who could not get out of the theater. To resolve the gridlock, he had to have the crowd inside the theater leave through the building’s third floor, which happened to be his family’s kitchen (B. de la Rosa, personal communication, May 11, 2009).

Republic Act No. 3060, also known as the National Censorship Law, required the creation of a local censors board in cities, whose members were appointed by the mayor (Fe & Cora, 1971; A. Felizco, personal communication, March 20, 2011). The local censors fined the Plaza for exhibiting *The Language of Love*, which the theater owner described as a “documentary thing” (B. de la Rosa, personal communication, May 11, 2009). Despite government efforts to put an end to the screening of adult films, there were other ways by which the people could get to view these. The more fortunate locals who had access to the American military rest and recreation facility, Camp John Hay, enjoyed uncut versions of films at the base theater. But the good times did not last long. After

a meeting between the city prosecutor and the base commander, all Filipinos, “Baguio residents included,” were banned from viewing R-rated movies at John Hay. Then base commander Major John Hightower was profusely apologetic, saying if he allowed “general patronage in the theater, he did it in good faith in his earnest desire to strengthen the Filipino-American relationship in the community” (“No More,” 1979, p. 1).

Mapping Sine Locations

Places that people inhabit are markers of social divisions and cultural distinctions. The official planning of early Baguio reserved places with slightly higher elevation for the Americans. The temperature in these places was chillier than in the rest of the city. Places such as vegetable garden valleys and housing areas for the transplanted lowlanders had relatively warmer temperatures (Abellera, 1965). The center of the city had an analogous layout. The bigger establishments patronized by the Americans were located atop Session Road. The market was at the foot of the street. Towards the bottom was Pines Theatre and across it, Plaza.

The geographic positioning and location of the Baguio movie houses followed a clear social hierarchy in terms of the moviegoers and a differentiation as to the quality of films. Along Session Road, it was, of course, Session Theater that topped the rankings. It was patronized by most of Baguio’s ‘English-speaking’ viewers. Movie houses outside the Session Road area usually showed films on their second runs. For instance, Aurora Theatre exhibited U.S.-produced movies, but only after these had already been shown by Session or Pines. A Baguio movie enthusiast remembers: “if Session had Universal bookings, these films were shown at Aurora about two months later” (A. Tibaldo, personal communication, March 25, 2006). He recalls that he watched the first of the James Bond movies, *Dr. No*, in Aurora after that same movie had been exhibited by Session about a month earlier. Plaza Theatre was the intermediary area bridging the distance between Session Road and the city market. It initially offered Hollywood films but later became better known as an exhibition house for English, Tagalog and cowboy films. Farther away from Session, movie fare consisted of Tagalog films, B movies and sex films. Location, according to one former Censors board member, was the most important factor that determined the survival of a movie house (A. Felizco, personal communication, March 30, 2011).

The only distinction between the patrons of the first run and the ‘lesser’ theaters was that those of the former did not have to watch an added program in which they were not interested. Other than that, all the movie houses were

the same venue beholden to the powers of the running celluloid film. Baguio was just another stop in a movie's release from Manila. If an audience could not wait, it could go to down to Manila to satisfy impatience, which is exactly what happened in *The Ten Commandments* story.

The Fading Silver Screen

When one walks around the city, traversing the movie house trail, one will see the shell of the Baguio Theatre building that still stands. In the 1990s, it was briefly transformed into a dancing hall-cum-pub called the Wild, Wild West. A small market now stands on the site of the old Aurora Theatre, which collapsed during the 1990 earthquake and was condemned as unsafe. New Baguio Theatre underwent a change of names from Cine Bayanihan to Baguio Cinema and then back to New Baguio. When viewership eventually declined, the movie house took to showing sex films. It would advertise double programs but usually would add a sex film as the last main feature for the night (A. Felizco, personal communication, March 20, 2011). Many times the police would conduct late night raids until the theater was caught red-handed and was forced to close down. The building that housed the theater was finally torn down in 2005, and put up for sale. The owner made arrangements for the contractor to cart away the demolished pieces of New Baguio.

Maresciel later came to earn a reputation of being a blue movie palace as it shifted its fare to sex movies. Penis ring vendors would discreetly sell their stuff to Maresciel clientele outside the movie house. Luna later changed its name to Cinestar and closed down in the 1990s; secondhand clothing stalls now inhabit the building. Quirino Cinema for a time became the home of Christian movies, before it became the Holiday Plaza movie house in 1980 and the Prince Albert Cinema in 1991. Prince Albert was eventually converted into a country music haven, which is now gone (A. Felizco, personal communication, March 30, 2011).

In the late 70s, Garden Theater began showing triple movies in order to survive. The triple movies were usually a combination of karate films, Philippine movies and sex films. It survived through a reopening in 1973 but eventually closed down in 1991. The space was rented out to someone who put up a disco. The disco survived for two months and then closed down too. For a time, the decrepit building hosted a Sunday assembly of a Christian group. It has since been turned into a cramped boarding house (B. Tan, personal communication, November 30, 2010).

The city government in 2004 said it wanted to preserve Session Theater and Plaza, "both known for their art deco design" in their exterior and interior



Figure 4. Session Theatre. The sine building now houses a pizza parlor and a pawnshop. (Photo taken by the author.)

architecture. This plan never got beyond the drawing board (“The End Zooms,” 2005). Session Theater now houses a pizza place, and Plaza rented out its 420-person capacity orchestra section to a food court (B. de la Rosa, personal communication, May 11, 2009).

Through the years, the Baguio movie house came under the assault of advances in technology as well as new social norms. In 1969, cable television posed a threat to the movie industry (Florendo, 1969). The advent of the Betamax in the 1970s led to the inexorable sprouting of videotape rental stalls from the 1980s to the 1990s and drove the movies from the public theater to the home. As the 1990s telenovelas invaded television primetime, the desire to go see a movie further declined. But theater owners see “mallification” as the final blow that caused the demise of the Baguio movie house. When Baguio’s first mall opened its doors

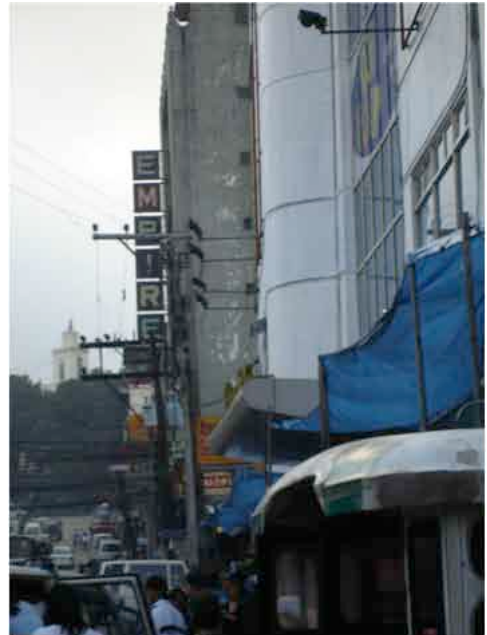


Figure 5. Empire Cinema, along Abanao Road. Empire Cinema is the only independent movie theater in Baguio that is still running. (Photo taken by the author.)



Figure 6. Pines Theatre. The sine building is now called the Pines Arcade. Inside the arcade are merchandise and food stalls. (Photo taken by the author.)

to the public at the start of this decade, it offered a new experience of movie-going-cum-malling and shopping that is seen all over the country. A former manager of the Pines Theater noted, “This theater [Pines] was bombed [by American planes liberating Baguio from the Japanese]. It was running a movie [at the time]. Pines survived that war, but it didn’t survive the malls” (“The End Zooms,” 2005). Empire Cinema is the only theater in the city outside the malls that continues to exhibit films. But how long will Empire stand?

In November 2003, the SM Mall in Baguio participated for the

first time in the simultaneous worldwide screening of *X2: X-MEN United*. This signaled the emergence of full equality among moviegoers in a global sense, as tickets were issued at the same day in all cities and continents. The stories of the Baguio movie houses are indices of a city in flux and an audience responding to modernity. But one cannot totally break from the past that always haunts the present with its stories. When one looks at the top of Session Road from below, the view has changed as the camera zooms out to the distance and the movie ends. But the phantom of the past will always come back in the form of images—Chaplin’s silent dance routine, Shirley Temple’s voice, the Philippine drama queens’ teary episodes, Jess Lapid’s riding-fighting-shooting-and-loving scenes, Franco Nero’s blazing guns and Bruce Lee’s scissor hands—that shall be permanently etched in the collective memory of a city and its people.

Hybridity

In the colonial experience, one group exercises dominance over another. A tool that challenges the hierarchal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is Homi K. Bhabha’s (2007) concept of hybridity. According to Bhabha, the players in a colonial relationship start off in a first space where they assign fixed identities to themselves and to each other, and where the colonizer enunciates his ascendancy over the colonized. In the second space, the colonized challenges this differentiation by mimicking the colonizer, eventually ending

up as a failed copy of the latter. This state of ambivalence is resolved in the third space, where both parties express their differences but also define themselves and constitute new identities, becoming “neither the One...nor the Other...but something else besides” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 41).

Particular to the Baguio colonial experience, the American colonizer began by differentiating himself from the Igorot of the place. Fascinated with the American, the Igorot tried, but failed to copy his colonizer. Over time, both engaged in a process of “contestation” and “collaboration” that gave rise to reworked identities (Bhabha, 2007). This experience illustrates their evolving relationship in the first, second and third spaces.

Baguio is often described as “unique” among all other cities in the Philippines, owing to its history as an American construct. A Filipino author has noted: “Baguio is the only American-made city in the Philippines. All other cities are of Spanish origin or organized later after the American regime. But Baguio was dreamed up by Americans, discovered by Americans, planned by Americans, and, if truth be told, maintained in the beginning mainly, if not solely, for the comfort and enjoyment of Americans” (Licuanan, 1982, p. 38). Within this context, the Baguio local did not fit in, thus the colonizer assigning a fixed identity of “Igorot” and “native,” an experience Homi Bhabha (2007) would call the First Space. In response, the “Igorot” or the “native”—charmed as he was by the American, the sine and the American in the sine—refused to be objectified and tried to seek his own space both physically and socially. By reworking the social and physical spaces of the sine, the Baguio local negotiated a Third Space. To Bhabha, the Third Space is important because it is where individuals or communities define themselves and engage in a continuous creation of culture, where they are able to “construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory” (1993, p. 212).

The word *kinnoboyan* is often used by Baguio Igorots in many a discussion. Kinnoboyan means the state of being a cowboy, or more specifically, the state of being a Benguet cowboy.⁵ Local journalist Joel Dizon has related that the Igorots came to own thoroughbreds and quarter horses courtesy of the Americans who gave these away in exchange for guide services and other favors (Dizon, 1991). Travelling across the mountain terrain, the Igorot identified with the American who labored hard in the daytime and slept beside the campfire at night. This is the reason why Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, John Wayne, Alan Ladd, Gary Cooper, Henry Fonda, and later Franco Nero and Tomás Milián were popular among the locals. These movies, shown by First, Garden, New Baguio and Plaza, heavily catered to the Igorot taste, featuring an idealized version of the tough and independent loner in Stetson and boots. Even without

the requisite horse to complete the picture, the Benguet cowboy created his own version of the Marlboro man by patronizing Filipino versions of cowboy movies, by localizing country tunes,⁶ by turning the rice wine *tapuey* and gin into the cowboy drink and by eating his own dog meat version of steak. These have all left an indelible mark on Baguio culture.

Film historian Nick Deocampo (2003) has noted that the sine in the Philippines started out as a medium that catered to the upper classes. The movie theaters in Baguio catered to both the elite and proletarian tastes. The variety of genres offered by the theaters that crisscrossed the city is a testament to the breakdown of social exclusion, and the inclusionary force exerted by the need for escape and fantasy, and, to borrow from Bhabha (1993), the need to “construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory” (p. 212).

References

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Notes

¹A 1920s picture postcard of the Baguio Theatre building has the words "Cine Real, Baguio, P.I." written on the lower right of the photo. There are no historical records or accounts that speak of a Cine Real in Baguio.

²Flynn's Robin Hood continued to attract return engagement audiences even after World War II was over.

³In 1907, The Philippine Commission passed Act 1639, prohibiting "the non-Christians from buying, drinking or possessing intoxicating liquor other than their own home-brewed native drinks to which they have been accustomed." In 1937, an Igorot named Cayat was arrested for violating Act 1639. The Benguet Court of the First Instance judge fined Cayat P50, including in his decision the observation "that intoxicating liquor has a very injurious effect on non-Christians in the Mountain Province" (Afable, 1938, P. 1). The Supreme Court upheld the conviction. Cayat's case angered the "educated" Igorots, who demanded a rescission of the discriminatory law. In 1939, Act 476 repealed Act 1639.

⁴The film kept the Baguio audience spellbound despite its running time of three hours and 39 minutes. It was a 'first' in that *The Ten Commandments* was shown in VistaVision, Paramount Studios' own format to counter the then widely-used Cinemascope. VistaVision promised clearer and less grainy pictures (Ryder, n. d.).

⁵The pony boys of Wright Park in Baguio are a popular representation of the Benguet cowboy. When Baguio celebrated its centenary in 2009, the local government came out with a "Builders of Baguio" list acknowledging the contributions of individuals, families and institutions to the city. The pony boys are included in that list ("Builders of Baguio," 2009).

⁶Igorot scholar Jimmy Fong has done extensive research on American country tunes syncretized by Igorots (Fong, 2011).

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