

Philippine Cinema, Era by Era

Nine eras, defined by a change in the economic structure of filmmaking, not by taste.

#	ERA	YEARS	THE ONE-LINE THESIS
1	Imported spectacle	1897 to 1919	Cinema arrives as a colonial import, owned and operated by foreigners. Filipinos are the audience and the subject, not the authors.
2	A national cinema forms	1919 to 1941	Nepomuceno makes the first Filipino-produced feature. Local production grows under an American-dominated distribution and exhibition system. Sound arrives 1932 to 1933. The studios are founded in the late 1930s.
3	Rupture	1941 to 1945	Japanese occupation halts feature production. The physical archive of the first 25 years is largely destroyed. This is the origin of the archiving crisis.
4	The studio era, First Golden Age	1946 to 1961	Four vertically integrated studios, a contract star system, roughly 350 films a year, second only to Japan in Asia. First international recognition. Ends in labour conflict and studio collapse.
5	Collapse, the independent producer	1961 to 1972	The studio system dies. Independent producers, genre cycles, and the bomba film fill the vacuum. Talent goes freelance. This is the birth of the freelance precarity Filipino crews still live in.
6	Second Golden Age under martial law	1972 to 1986	The paradox. State censorship and state patronage coexist. Brocka, Bernal, Mike de Leon, Kidlat Tahimik. Cannes, Berlin, Venice. The Manila Film Center and its dead workers.
7	Post-EDSA drift and decline	1986 to 2000	Freedom arrives, the market does not. A 30 percent amusement tax, piracy, Hollywood's grip on screens, and the pito-pito survival economy. Admissions and output both fall.
8	The digital indie wave	2000 to 2015	Cheap cameras plus grant-funded festivals equal a new production base. International prestige at Cannes, Venice, Locarno, Berlin. Domestic box office does not follow.
9	The platform and precarity era	2015 to now	Streaming, a post-COVID exhibition market, an oligopoly of mall cinema chains, a gutted incentive law, a labour law finally passed after a death on set, and a restoration project that just shut down.

Key dates to anchor the chain

1 January 1897 · first screening in Manila, at the Salón de Pertierra.

12 September 1919 · *Dalagang Bukid*, the first Filipino-produced feature, directed by José Nepomuceno.

31 May 1961 · LVN Pictures stops producing. The last studio with contracted crew closes. Every conversation about Filipino crew precarity today is downstream of this date.

29 January 1982 · the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines is created by Executive Order 770, with Imee Marcos as Director General. It funds *Himala* and *Oro, Plata, Mata*.

21 May 2009 · RA 9640 cuts the amusement tax ceiling from 30 to 10 percent. (The widely repeated "December 2009" is an error.)

16 June 2015, final 15 October 2019 · the Supreme Court, in *FDCP v. Colon Heritage Realty Corp.*, strikes down the country's only non-discretionary production incentive.

24 May 2024 · RA 11996, the Eddie Garcia Law, is signed, 63 years after LVN's last production and five years after Eddie Garcia's death on set.

31 March 2025 · Sagip Pelikula, the country's largest restoration project, formally ceases after restoring over 240 films.