

## **THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPING A CULTURAL AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES IN INDONESIA**

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I am just starting to develop a non-governmental collective research archives made up of several small cultural institutions that have audiovisual documents. This may also be different historically from most of the archives we know. The main idea is that there are many small cultural institutions and individuals who have audiovisual materials but are incapable of creating good management and storage systems (space, funding, equipment, human resources and interests). Many people have put a great deal of effort into making audiovisual documentary and publication projects but not in preserving the media and/or organizing them for public or personal access. There is already a tremendous amount of collected material in art colleges, cultural centres, radio stations and individual researchers' collections, all waiting for better care.

The critical condition of the materials is one problem and poor documentation is another. Almost all of the individually-held materials, including my own, are stored in unsuitable conditions. Many small institutional archives operate under similar conditions. Just as an example, the earliest recording company—the bankrupt government-owned Lokananta—has thousands of open-reel audio tapes. As the company gradually went into bankruptcy two decades ago, its collections are in a very sad condition. About 20-30% of these collections are no longer usable due to improper storage and handling. The master tapes are stored in hot, humid and dusty rooms. Although the company has more than 30,000 square metres of land and more than

enough built-up space, the building that stores over 100,000 cassettes looks like an old barn.

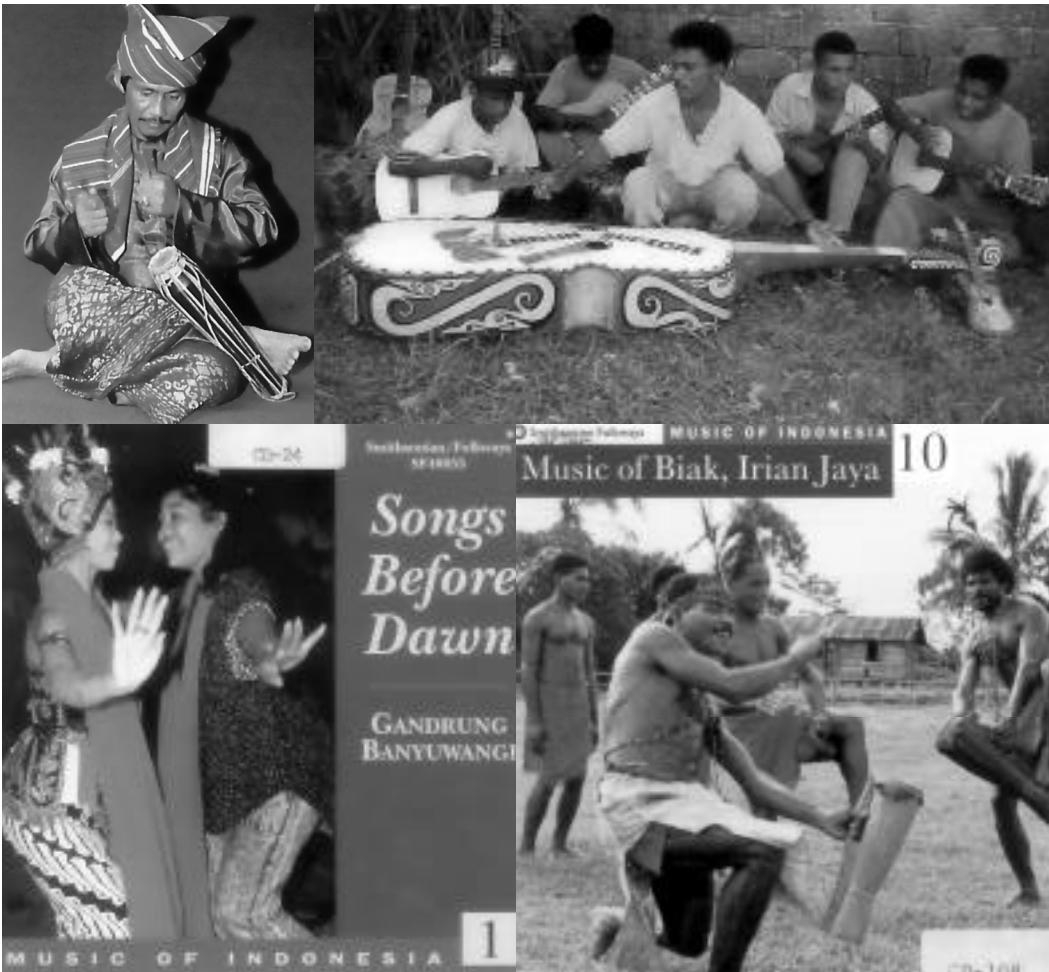
We all know that audiovisual materials are very fragile. The research documents at an ethnomusicology school in Sumatra (where I started as a self-taught archivist in 1984 when I was appointed as an ethnomusicology consultant and teacher by the Ford Foundation), have become terrifying objects only one-and-a-half years after the last consultant left. Shubha Chaudhuri said, 'As an archivist, I have never had a nightmare as shocking,' after she saw mouldy video cassettes (of about 1,000 hours of field recordings, representing over 10,000 hours of field trips and logging).

The collections of Government Radio Stations (RRI) have different problems. Most of them are poorly labelled, and the original tapes were recorded over. So many of the live broadcast musical materials from the 1950s to 70s were intentionally abolished.

This does not mean that there are no relatively good archives in Indonesia. Sinematek is one of the acceptable ones, in terms of both storage and public access. This archives is especially focused on published films and videos. It is the best place to study Indonesian films as it has a good library as well. The Yayasan Sejati (an NGO) has perhaps the best storage system but not very good public access. The National Archives is more concerned with political documents, many of which have restrictions on their use.

On the other hand, small radio stations in small towns have a lot of local material. The Radio Cinderalas in the town of Indramanyu, for example, has over 400 cassettes on one musical genre (*tarling*), 200 one-hour cassettes on story telling (of local history) recorded from their broadcasting programme in the past 25 years: a valuable collection of cultural documents no one has paid attention to.

There are also numerous documents from the colonial period, collected by families, to be found only through research—photographs, for example, which are not available in any archives in the country—not to mention materials found in foreign archives in the Netherlands, England, United States and other countries. This, in turn, makes it difficult for junior researchers pursuing academic studies.



CD covers: 'Music of Indonesia' series published by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1991.

In short, there are no good cultural research archives in the country. This is ironic, since it is well known that Indonesia has a very rich and diverse cultural heritage. We can comfortably say that Indonesia is one of the least developed countries in terms of audiovisual archives, particularly cultural research archives, compared to other developing countries (India and Vietnam, to name just two).

To get back to my ongoing project: developing a collective (research) archives. I have identified and contacted over 30 individuals and institutions from several parts of Indonesia; all together they will have roughly over 30,000 hours of audio recordings, 15,000 hours of video and film and a million photographs and slides. This will form the start-up resource. We will be working as an NGO, Yayasan Arsip Audio-Visual Kebudayaan (Foundation for Audio-Visual Archives of Indonesian Culture). The first step is to develop a unifying system of database, information and contractual sheets for each document to be filled up at each location and to find support to train research and data-entry personnel so that the information can be merged. In two years, I hope to have at least an information centre for the materials that can also be helpful to researchers. At the same time, we are trying to get government support (at least for the physical facilities of land and building) as well as aid from other funding agencies. The target is to have a real archives in the future. I am not going to talk about the process and plans too much but there are some basic principles that I think all Indonesians need to be responsible for.

It is very difficult to get audiovisual cultural documents from 50-100 years ago which are very important for an understanding of our own history. We can't blame our ancestors, as Indonesia was colonized and there were inadequate financial and technological facilities to do it at that time. But our descendants, a century from now, will perhaps abuse us if we do not provide them with reasonably good documents as now we have much more of everything than we did a century ago.

If Indonesia speaks about civil society, we have to provide good education on cultural diversity to learn, to identify and respect the 'different'. Good cultural research archives are an undeniable necessity for this.

The difficulty of our campaign at the moment is to get public (nationwide) appreciation and support. Most of the archives or collectors are too small and/or otherwise too specific (films, photographs, stage performances, productions, local culture, etc.). So, in this case, we need to widen the areas on the one hand but focus on research and cultural matters on the other.



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At the turn of the millennium there is nothing more important in the national discourse than political and economic issues. Archiving is thus far from a priority (although almost everyone, even the villager, is devotedly watching and talking about world soccer games as much as political games and corruption issues). To get support, we apparently need to prove that an archives is important in concrete, not just ideological, terms. But in order to demonstrate concrete benefits we need financial support. A lot of Indonesians think pragmatically, with a modernist or developmentalist perspective on traditional cultures. Consequently, archiving needs professional attitudes, knowledge and skills. It is also difficult to build professionalism in this subject. Workshops on archiving have been organized, initiated by the Ford Foundation, most recently with IASA-SEAPAVAA. But there is no significant change and response in this field in Indonesia. The good thing is that at least some of us are still trying to find a better way and are not giving up yet.