

**TWO YEARS LATER - THE FUTURE OF SMALL-SCALE AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES IN ASIA**

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**Abstract:**

At the 2017 IASA Conference in Berlin, panellists analysed innovation and human failure in small-scale AV archives and asked the question “What do we need to learn from each other?” The many contributions to the discussion helped in overcoming difficulties that were presented. In 2019, the same panellists met again to discuss the outcomes of the learning process and to focus on the future of small-scale audiovisual archives in Asia. What makes small-scale audiovisual archives so special and different from large broadcast and national archives? What types of support networks will the future bring, and how can technical staff, archive users, administrators, and the larger community work towards an effective implementation of standards that will help to make knowledge available to all? The discussion took us to institutions in China, Laos, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, and laid the groundwork to establish continuity in dedicating professional efforts to support audiovisual archive organizations in emerging and developing countries. The panel members intend to engage in further discussion and to draw attention to the weak connections between archival goals and the general understanding of continuity in some Asian institutions. This is also a creative report of the panel organizer’s work as IASA Ambassador in this region.

**Keywords: Small-scale AV archives, archiving goals, communal understanding, emerging and developing countries**

**1. Ahmad Faudzi Musib: All About Priorities**

I represent a small-scale university archive at Universiti Putra Malaysia that deals with sound and audiovisual content. Located south of Kuala Lumpur, UPM is the second-largest state university in Malaysia.

I offer an update on our recent work since the report from 2018 (Musib et al. 2018). We started raising awareness through revising course content, and introducing short courses for internal staff at the department as well as at faculty level. The Audiovisual Research Collection for the Performing Arts, abbreviated ARCPA, (Musib, Meddegoda & Jähnichen 2014) is a database containing collections of past research work conducted by students as well as lecturers. Functionality of the database can be improved through implementation of faceted search based on original format of deposited materials. Materials will include theses, still images, partly-digitized VHS tapes, audio CDs, digital WAV files, partially-digitized magnetic cassette tapes, and partially-digitized 4-track cassettes. Furthermore, there are hard drives and hard disk recorders which require special attention.

At the moment, most of these materials are in the midst of migration. Migration to a stable medium requires technical expertise with a variety of digitization tools and methods. Those who are already trained to an elementary level of both theoretical and

practical aspects of audio signal migration processes such as sampling rates and RIAA<sup>1</sup> specifications when dealing with 78rpm discs are able follow a simple digitization workflow. Migrating more complex multi-track recordings of electroacoustic music collections pose challenges for staff. For example, varying tape speeds and different wrappers cannot easily be handled by non-experts.

Staffing is an ongoing issue. At present, the music department is comprised of teaching as well as support staff. Technical staff are not exclusively employed in the archive and are involved in general technical work of the institution. Their responsibilities include maintenance of projectors, PCs, and air-conditioning systems, as well as audio systems. A senior lab assistant at the music department assists students in maintaining musical instruments' tuning, minor repairs, and managing an inventory of instruments. The teaching staff of the music department are diverse in their fields of specialization, which include performance (Classical and contemporary), voice, music therapy, orchestral studies, ethnomusicology, and sound studies. An administrative assistant, a senior laboratory assistant, and two operational assistants serve as support to the department.

One goal for the archive is to train not only the department's staff, but all who need to work with sound and audiovisual materials in the future. This includes technical staff, students, and lecturers, as well as archive users, administrators, and the general community. The effective implementation of research standards will help to ensure that knowledge is available to all stakeholders.

Curriculum development and instruction are my main responsibilities at UPM. The continuous improvement of course content is one of my many approaches. During their freshman year, students begin to learn about the significance of audiovisual preservation and the use of archives through the course MZK 3610: Introduction to Music Technology. Aside from an introductory lecture on audio equipment and devices to the students, there is space to explore both theoretical and practical issues. Through this teaching initiative and continuing efforts to encourage the proper use of materials in ARCPA (Casey 2015; Jähnichen 2017), a strong foundation based on archival principles is being established.



Figures 1 and 2: Introduction to audio devices training (photos by the author).

1 RIAA equalization is a specification developed by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) for recording and playing phonograph records. The equalization aims to allow longer recording times (by reducing the mean width of each groove), enhance the sound quality and decrease the groove impairment that would otherwise appear during playback.

We introduce students to sound archiving knowledge in general, exploring the requirements for preservation and planning as well as the historical, philosophical and ethical implications of sound and audiovisual archiving, including the practical handling of analogue tape recorders and magnetic tapes, and independent digital audio recording technology that requires specific skills in signal extraction for migration purposes of mono, stereo, and multi-track audio. Issues of tape degradation, refurbishment, and restoration, practical digitization techniques, file creation, and creation and management of metadata are all subjects included in the course.

Semester 1, 2019/2020 DR. AHMAD FAUDZI BIN MUSIB

LECTURE NOTES 12

**LECTURE 13: SOUND PRESERVATION AND AUDIO EQUIPMENT'S**

This lecture contains information regarding audio equipment used in a recording suite as well as equipment for live sound reinforcement systems. Introducing students to sound archiving knowledge. Exploring the requirements for preservation and planning as well as the historical, philosophical and ethical implications of audio archiving.

Practical handling of analog tape recorders and magnetic tapes, autonomous digital audio recording machine technology. Signal extraction for migration purposes of mono, stereo, multi-track audio.

LECTURE NOTES 13

**LECTURE 14: SOUND PRESERVATION PROCEDURES AND ISSUES RELATED**

Continuation of practical handling of analog tape recorders and magnetic tapes, autonomous digital audio recording machine technology. Signal extraction for migration purposes of mono, stereo, multi-track audio.

Understanding issues of tape degradation, refurbishment, and restoration; practical digitization, creating files, managing, and storing metadata.

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Figure 3: Course description of MZK 3610: Introduction to Music Technology for weeks 13 and 14 (UPM portal, internal access only).

Awareness of the importance of audiovisual preservation in the arts and humanities is cultivated, allowing students and others to benefit from their efforts, so that young people will hopefully be able to defend preservation efforts if questions are raised by the university. Another aim is to educate students to properly cite their own fieldwork data, and also to enable them to cite other researchers according to established citation practices, thus preparing them to engage in academic discourse.

There are two paths through which archival requirements can be applied. The first is by establishing ARCPA as a place where all archival materials are available to the department and can be directly observed when a search is made. Networking between the main university library and the music department must be further developed. The department is not ready to handle mass requests regarding online replay of digitized items at the moment. The department is extremely understaffed and while student workers help, their employment is only on a temporary basis.

The second path is through the university's learning management system, known as PutraBLAST. Staff are required to upload and maintain teaching materials for students, and to supplement the learning process with audiovisual materials, including audio clips and video footage. There is a serious problem with handling copyright issues (Jähnichen 2017). Staff from across the university can access archived materials online and re-use all these materials for upcoming semesters, which means that outdated materials will

soon inhabit the servers and congest traffic. Students can download lecture notes, videos, and sound files prepared by academic staff. Teaching materials available online can only be accessed for 1 semester (14 weeks). Students are also able to upload their work online and can make it accessible to their classmates. Unfortunately, this practice also leads to copyright issues (Seeger 1996).

Figure 4 illustrates that within the PutraBLAST LMS, instructors are required to upload all lecture materials according to internal system rules, not according to general copyright status. Copyright issues may arise when such materials include audiovisual content that is not yet in ARCPA, and when no collection-level or user agreement is in place. New policies for incorporating research outcomes and other audiovisual materials in the LMS should be implemented to better incorporate sound and audiovisual content into instruction practices. This would encourage respect for the work of both the researcher and for the archive itself. The shortcomings of the current system have not been addressed by the university. Educating students to possess a mature understanding of rights management issues will at least encourage individual preparedness and responsibility to not continue these practices into the next generation of scholars and educators.

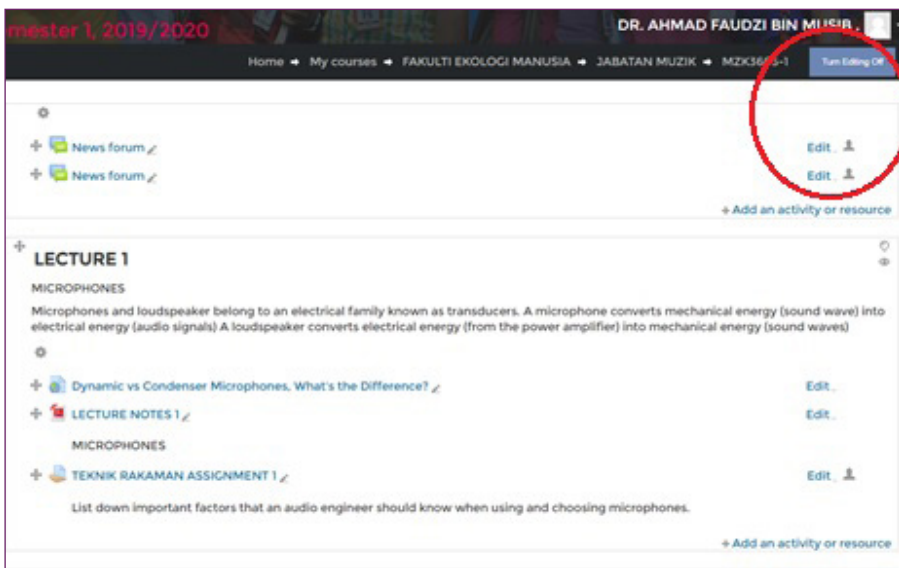


Figure 4: Learning management system in edit mode, which enables the account holder to control what is available for the students to view (UPM portal, internal access only)

At the moment, our situation seems better compared to other institutions in Malaysia, yet it is hoped to implement meaningful changes to systems and processes. It is very difficult for dedicated lecturers to produce high-quality publications for Q1 and Q2 indexed journals. The music department needs a properly functioning archive to serve the academic community as well as non-academic staff. A sense of urgency does not exist. Staff members mainly focus on their own outcomes without looking at the connection to the archive and its potential, or the problems it faces.

## 2. Thongbang Homsombat: All about Understanding Purpose

I represent a small-scale sound and audiovisual archive at the National Library of Laos. In 2019, it celebrated its 20-year anniversary.

Since establishing the Archives of Traditional Music in Laos, Gisa Jähnichen has worked to highlight the importance of researching, archiving, and providing access to the public. She has also supported the purchase of equipment and training of specialized staff to continue the culturally vital task of documenting and preserving traditional music and dance in Laos. From 1999 on, colleagues and students have regularly visited the ATML—first at the old building on the second floor, and now in its new location. Everyone involved with the ATML tries to undertake fieldwork and help at our archive. However, we still face many unresolved problems.

At the end of 2016, the National Library moved to a new building that is located six kilometers from the old building. The new building is much larger, with four floors, a lift, and specific safety infrastructure. At first, the Archives had two separate main rooms: a storage room containing original tapes and a public room for access to copies. The original tape storage room was on the second floor, and the main office space for our two staff members, myself and Bounmy Phonsavan, was on the fourth floor.

We had to separate the ATML space according to the architectural situation of the new building. The small storage room was not adequate to provide public services and the originals would have suffered from its uncontrolled environmental conditions. One year ago, we discovered that the original tape storage room posed problems due to changing temperatures and humidity. I considered this is a really big problem and an important issue to get a safer storage room, so I urged the director of the National Library of Laos to provide a new room to preserve sound and audiovisual materials sustainably.

Some coinciding events helped in obtaining a new space: In 2018, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, led by the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, celebrated the inscription of *Khaen* music of the Lao people on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). According to the UNESCO ICH Convention, safeguarding the cultural heritage, including measures like documentation, research, and preservation, should be prioritized. The National Library of Laos, as an important community participant in safeguarding *Khaen* music, also recognized the significance of the UNESCO ICH inscription, and so it was agreed to arrange a new room for the ATML.

At the beginning of 2019, the Chinese Cultural Center and the Chinese Embassy in Laos donated 30 computers to the National Library for public users, especially for the playback of audiovisual and sound recordings. We received 15 workstations and 15 sets of musical information software for audiovisual items. The donation helped in providing additional space for researchers and students, who use the equipment regularly.



Figure 6 and 7: The donated computers for users and the archive entrance (photos by the author).

Today, the ATML is located on entirely on the 3rd floor. The temperature and the humidity are lower, and the working conditions are much better. But this was only a solution for certain preservation and logistical challenges. Additionally, while the new building is large and in good condition, it is too far away from the city center and the number of visitors has decreased dramatically.

Another definite problem is that we are not flexible enough in making many daily decisions. The archives, which makes research information on traditional music and Lao popular music available, depends on the general service section of the National Library. This section coordinates access to resources and materials. And the National Library itself is managed by the Publishing Department of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism. A decision of any importance must be approved by several people, and decisions may not be made quickly enough.

Our small staff is well-trained, yet we always need fresh updates and better knowledge of global trends in order to find creative ways to serve the public. We have learned in the last two years that we have to personally fight for improvements, and that we have to make use of knowledge far beyond archiving matters to reach our goals. Thus, advocacy work is our main focus at the moment.

### 3. Gisa Jähnichen & Xiao Mei: All about Being Included

We work at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which has its own small-scale archive. We are trying to establish an informed source of archiving of sound and audiovisual material throughout ethnographic institutions and universities in China. We are working to establish an educational and professional network in ethnographic institutions and universities in China to advocate for the needs of audiovisual archival collections. With workshops and direct interventions, we convey the message that there is no shortcut around the hard work of digitizing and providing access to audiovisual collections.

The Shanghai Conservatory of Music has achieved many significant goals in the past two years. These include for example the construction of the Great New Opera House, prizes won in both local and international music contests by staff and students, and successful recruitment of new students and staff. However, not very surprisingly, archival work and necessities are not among the first-grade achievements. Thanks to Xiao Mei, an engaged professor of ethnomusicology, Han Bin, an administrator of the Institutional Library,

and other staff, a large mobilization project for audiovisual archives was funded by the central government. It includes workshops, training, visitations, inventories, and local actions throughout the entire country. This will positively impact on work in Yunnan, Sichuan, Liaoning, Shanghai, and Zhejiang. The project is still in its very early stages. Regarding our own archive as well as a number of other archives at universities, the following problems are noted:

There are few institutional guidelines for the operation of AV archives in general (Xiao Mei 2019a). As some may know, China employs a rotation principle, in which people working for state companies must change their workplaces regularly in order to prevent corruption and educational standstill. This principle is good but has a shadow side. It can be difficult to implement organizational change or to effect long-range and strategic plans when directors are rotated. Over the course of seventeen years, Xiao Mei built up a well-functioning archive in Beijing, but due to a change in leadership, the work declined and she had to move to Shanghai. There, the entire procedure for establishing archives started from scratch. First efforts to reliably continue audiovisual archiving in an effective way were undertaken through people working in the field of arts museums (Xiao Mei 2019b). The most difficult problem is that there is no staff for the daily tasks and also no general teaching program that integrates knowledge about AV archives and archiving (Musib et al. 2017). With new staff on board, some small steps have been undertaken to ensure the younger generation takes up the responsibility. One, for example, is to send students for internships in other audiovisual archives abroad.

The next big problem is missing national guidelines regarding audiovisual archiving, including principles of digitizing, managing, and providing access to audiovisual collections. There is not yet a unifying idea (Breen et al 2014) about how to deal with “over-collecting” (Topp Fargion 2019). Progress in archival work is usually achieved gradually and there is no instant gratification. Unfortunately, many staff members prefer to transfer to another department instead of committing to long-term, incremental change. Staff impermanence de-emphasizes the importance of in-depth exploration of a professional domain that leads to expertise. The archival profession in China would be better served if its employees were viewed more like orchestra conductors or professors, who are exempt from the rotation principle. Continuity and consistency of staffing would better promote the achievement of long-term institutional goals. These staff members need strong support and protection in order to develop. Students who regularly help out in archives are also not much attracted to this work. They often return home or go elsewhere after finishing their studies with the same background: too little attention, no gratification, no protection.

The third problem is historically weak cooperation among institutions. Cooperative endeavors are often contingent on personal relationships between leaders, and can be jeopardized if leadership changes. In addition, there is a general distrust of cooperative efforts. Staff members, even if employed long term, are often afraid of personal dependencies (Jähnichen 2015). In the mood of underlying competition for financial and central support, many institutional decisions are made too slowly or ineffectively, especially when they have to pass a number of decision-making departments.

The new project widely promotes cooperation between state and state institutions and between private and state institutions. It aims to broaden institutional attitudes towards joint goals. Upgrading current needs and improving cooperation based on trust and understanding of the archive is essential not only within China, but throughout the region, and can be encouraged through increased contact with the IASA community.

Besides many good steps, there must be resistance against setbacks. The Magnetic Tape Alert Program<sup>2</sup>, which Janet Topp Fargion<sup>3</sup> repeatedly made us aware of during the course of its existence, was well thought through, yet many of the archives working with this type of material do not know enough about the entire archival process in order to follow the questions. The fear of mistakes and misunderstandings among higher-ranking report units is greater than the hope for improvement. A summer workshop recently held in Shanghai, which involved AV archivists and librarians from all parts of the country and which was supported by the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University, has shown that an acceptable concept of audiovisual archiving is still missing and that many who consider themselves pioneers in the field are still on the side of merely collecting and publishing research. In summary: The work to be done in China is as huge as the country itself. It will require a lot of energy and a working strategy for the long term, patience, and positive input from all sides. It is also clear that workshops emphasizing primarily technical matters will not solve the problems which will pile up in the coming years. Technical understanding is the least worrying part of the process. The most burning issues are making informed decisions to establish a flexible and feasible system and concept of audiovisual archiving that can be applied to all state and private institutions as well as development of new ways of cooperation among them.

#### 4. Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda: All about Survival

The latest survey of literature and updates on websites of various archives in Sri Lanka indicate that sound and audiovisual materials are not recognized as being in need of urgent preservation (Mohamed Majeed Mashroofa, 2016; Navirathan & Jeyakanathan 2018; Balasuriya 2018). The National Library of Sri Lanka has updated their official website and has listed available materials. In the conservation process, paper materials have been given a higher priority than the sound and audiovisual collections in the National Library, and several collections are available via microform formats. While sound and audiovisual items on their original carriers are available to library patrons, they are only mentioned on the library's website under broad, mostly format-based categories and have not been digitized:<sup>4</sup>

Audiovisual materials and microform can be used by readers to obtain required information. At present the entire audiovisual and microforms collection consists a large number of materials.

The collection is divided as follows:

- Microfiches
  - Annual reports of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka
  - Government publications of Sri Lanka
  - Bibliographies of some of the National Libraries in the Asia Pacific region
  - International Standard Serial Numbering (ISSN) register

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2 <http://www.mtap.iasa-web.org/node/2>, last accessed October 25, 2019.

3 She took the initiative to alert all IASA ambassadors. Her recent work reflects on her deep knowledge about the topic.

4 [http://www.natlib.lk/collections/audio\\_visual.php](http://www.natlib.lk/collections/audio_visual.php), last accessed October 3, 2019.



- Microfilms
  - Theses and dissertations on Sri Lanka
  - Some of the National Newspapers
- Audio-cassettes
- Video tapes
- CDs and DVDs
- Gramophone records of Sri Lankan songs, documentaries, plays and teledramas.

I met Udaya Cabral, the Assistant Director of the Preservation Division of the National Library, on 12 September, 2019, in his office. His division is responsible for the preservation of newspapers, magazines, and some audiovisual materials. The conservation department has large collections including nearly forty thousand digitized field recordings which were recorded on magnetic cassette tapes by staff of the National Library. A compact disc with about twenty folk songs extracted from these recordings was published, which drew upon field recordings of farmers, fishermen, and various service workers. As Udaya says, the biggest challenge is the pressure to use the sound recordings for commercial purposes. The newly-introduced copyright law limits this approach in many ways. With the intervention of the National Library, some folk performances have been classified as world heritage. However, these recordings have not yet been explored by any researchers. Udaya confirmed that they have already digitized all the recordings through outsourcing the transfer work, as this is much cheaper than doing it by themselves. Unfortunately, the noise in the recordings was removed using a special software while digitizing, which presents issues of file integrity. The National Library did not have any staff devoted to digitization work. There are two servers where these digitized recordings are stored. Two access copies were also made of each recording on compact disc. However, all the items are not only on the same type of carrier, but are stored in a single location, which poses preservation risks.

Reflecting on the lack of use and understanding of the collection, I could see that there was not much awareness of the value of sound and audiovisual archives beyond the potential for commercial exploitation. Those recordings are not yet understood as knowledge resources that must be sustained in order to enrich human culture in general (as suggested by the Council on Library and Information Resources and the Library of Congress). Udaya named a few archives where archiving is supposedly well-executed in Sri Lanka. Those are the National Library (his own institution), the National Archive, which has enjoyed several stimulations through external workshops and events, the National Film Unit, and the private film archives of Thissa Nagodawithana and Hemapriya Kandambi. The state television and radio broadcasters, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation and Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, received many offers from foreign funding sources to preserve their historic recordings. Unfortunately, the current directors of those institutions were reluctant to let their materials be digitized or to outsource this task, as there was speculation that the recordings could be misused by others.

Most university archives in Sri Lanka face strong administrative barriers hindering their development. The University of the Visual and Performing Arts is a clear example. Archive budgets have been historically small and their mission is often not prioritized at the university level. Progress is often hampered and it's difficult to see initiatives through because of lack of institutional support. So, in the last two years, there have been very few improvements regarding technical matters. The main problem is still the general lack of understanding of the value and character of the knowledge resource that sound and audiovisual items represent.

To illustrate a nationwide problem: The Sri Lankan Department of National Museums website<sup>5</sup> lists the museums which are administered by the government as follows:

- Colombo National Museum
- National Museum of Natural History
- Dutch Museum
- Kandy National Museum
- Ratnapura National Museum
- Galle National Museum
- Maritime Museum
- Anuradhapura Folk Museum
- Independence Memorial Museum
- Magampura Ruhunu Heritage Museum

Unfortunately, not one of these institutions maintains a sound or audiovisual archive.

### **In summary:**

Udaya is one officer in the field of archives who is rather experienced in conservation and aware on what is happening in other archives of Sri Lanka. I have gathered through my observations of his work, his workplace, and his comments, that most archives and archivists in Sri Lanka are strongly confronted with administrative barriers which discourage them and hinder their endeavours and enthusiasm to work freely. As an aside, I wanted to also share how difficult it was to convince the Ministry of Higher Education to give its consent and a Third-Party Note (TPN), which I needed to get a Schengen Visa to travel to Germany to attend the 50th IASA conference. It was a struggle to convince them that academic conference attendance should be considered an official visit for a university academic. However, at the time I am writing this report, the TPN has still not been issued. I had to manipulate the invitation letter and instead go directly to the Foreign Ministry to get the TPN with the help of a friend who works there. It took me much more effort than I spent on writing this contribution. Similar conditions apply to archivists across Sri Lanka, who have to struggle for each step that they plan to enhance productivity in their work.

I know that IASA cannot solve this overarching problem, yet it should not be overlooked when we talk about what is needed the most. Acknowledgement and feedback to our institutions can help in the long term to make our situation safer and more optimistic.

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