THE ROLE OF INDONESIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY IN PRESERVING AND DISSEMINATING MANUSCRIPTS

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Abstract

Indonesian writing tradition has been known as a result of the influence of India coming to the country in the first century. The tradition brought about manuscripts, which spread through almost all Indonesian areas in various topics, languages and scripts. Library has responsibility to preserve and disseminate manuscripts as source of information. There will be many benefits that can be taken from these efforts including keeping long usage of the material, and increasing access to those who are interested in studying the manuscripts.

Many preserving efforts have been made by Indonesian National library to collect and digitize manuscripts in some areas of Indonesia, such as manuscripts Keraton (Palace) Yogyakarta, East Sumatera, Cirebon, Pulau Penyengat, etc. However, there will be a lot of works should be done compared with the number of manuscripts in Indonesia. Several non government organizations in collaborating with the British Library, Leipzig University, Tokyo university of Foreign Studies have digitized manuscripts which owned by personal or institutions. This leads to the increase of digitized manuscripts collection in those universities. Ironically, it does not happen the same thing with national library.
Disseminating is even worse. The library has provided online catalog for the manuscripts. However, the entry of online catalog is lesser than the printed ones, and the electronic file is always not there. To fulfill its preservation and dissemination tasks, National Library can collaborate with those NGOs, museums and archival centers. It would be very useful to approach community in order to leverage or allow the manuscripts to be kept or digitized for long usage purpose.

The purpose of this paper is fourfold. Firstly, it expands upon the discussion of manuscripts in Indonesia. Secondly, it reflects on the intended role of the national library in preserving and disseminating the manuscripts. Thirdly, this article considers problematic aspect of the collection itself, the state of the manuscripts and above all, the unfulfilled manuscripts offers for researching purpose. Fourthly, it considers possibility to collaborate to have a portal or virtual manuscripts on Southeast Asia in regional setting.

**Keywords:** manuscript, preservation, dissemination, writing tradition, online catalog.

**Introduction**

Indonesian writing tradition has been known as a result of the influence of India coming to the country in the fourth century.¹ This tradition resulted in a richly diverse Indonesian manuscripts pertaining to languages, scripts, and topics as an acculturation process from different regions and ethnic groups both in Indonesia and outside the country. Manuscripts

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production mostly has occurred since the existence of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms, palace (keraton), and other rulers. The production made significant increase after Islam coming to the region, as this religious teaching emphasized the importance of cultural literacy.²

Written on palm leaf, bark, rattan, bamboo, and paper, these written heritages are valued for both their intellectual content and their physical beauty. As sources of local history, manuscripts have become the pride or symbols of the past greatness of Indonesia. The content of the manuscripts give a response to today’s needs or future generations.

The researches on Indonesian manuscripts have been conducted by scholars to enlighten about their inner meanings or assess their beauty since long time ago. Names like Hoesein Djajadiningrat, Poerbatjaraka are few native researchers who were interested in using collection for their research. The limitation of researchers to take advantage of this collection is considered as hindrance in finding manuscripts, because of their nature and other issues pertaining to accessibility of the collection.

As ancient writing documents, they generally exist in more fragile condition. They may suffer from problems including paper and ink degeneration, lack of binding or cover. Some of them are damaged due to environment, such as, climate control, storage containers. Other reasons which contribute to the problems are pest and disaster issues. Looking at those issues, we understand that our handwritten heritage could be critically damaged.

The difficulties in accessing these handwritten documents are also caused by the fact that they scattered in many parts of the region outside archives and libraries, archives or museum. These written heritages are now stored in various institutions. There are various manuscripts repositories along the island in Indonesia and abroad.  

3 Manuscripts exist in scattered places of almost islands of Indonesia. Aceh Province has several places to keep its manuscripts, including Center for Research in History and Traditional Values, Dayah Tanoh Abee, Provincial State Museum, Aceh Information and Documentation Centre and Universitas Syah Kuala University. In Bali, we can find them in Archeology Hall, Research Institute for Languages, University Faculty of Letters Udayana, Kirtya Liefrink-van der Tuuk, Provincial State Museum Bali, Documentation Centre of Culture Bali, and the Hindu University; In Bengkulu, there is Bengkulu State Museum to keep manuscripts; Jakarta also has several places, including the National Archives of the Republic Indonesia, Bayt al-Qur'an and the Museum Istiqlal, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, National Library of Indonesia, National Archaeological Research Center. In West Java province, there are 12 places, including University of Indonesia, Kacirebonan palace, Kanoman palace, Kaprabonan palace, and Kasepuhan palace, and Cigugur Museum, the State Museum of West Java Province, Prince Geusan Ulun Museum, Museum of World Archaeology, University of Padjadjaran, and Scripts Maintenance Foundation (Yapena). Central Java province also has places to keep its manuscripts. For example, Radyapustaka Museums, Mutual Library, and Sasana Library. In East Java, there are State Museum of East Java Province, Banyuwangi Government Museum, and Government Museum Sumenep. In Kalimantan, there is Resource Center of Kalimantan. West Nusa Tenggara has Sampangraja Cultural Foundation Museum. Riau has Indera Sakti Cultural Foundation. South Sulawesi has Watampone Hasanuddin University, Cultural Foundation of Southeast Sulawesi, West Sumatera has Documentation and Information Centre of Minangkabau Culture; North Sumatera has regional offices of education and culture, Lingga Museum, Simalungun Museum, HKBP Nomensen University. In Yogyakarta, there are Center for History and Traditional Values Research, Language Research Center, Krida Mardawa, Yoyakarta palace, Javanologi Institute, Puro Kadipaten Pakualaman, Taman Siswa and Widya Budaya. See further in Henri Chamber -Loir and Oman Fathurahman. Khazanah Naskah: World Guide to Indonesian Manuscripts Collections. Jakarta: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1999 P.223-225
are privately owned rather than kept in public and semi-public collections. A number of institutions have taken initiatives in storing manuscripts in save and accessible manners. The number of collections and owners covered in manuscript projects is amazing. However, it only shows a small number of manuscripts existing on the archipelago.

The discrepancy between manuscripts which have been safeguarded and those shared to public raise some issues on preservation and dissemination efforts. National library, as an institution which has authority to collect manuscripts in order to disseminate them is questioned about various projects running for manuscripts. In what follows, this article will discuss on the role of the library pertaining to the current situation on those issues, problems related to manuscripts, and possible way to solve these problems.

Current Situations of Preservation Measures

Manuscripts preservations undertaken by Indonesian people today is more effort rather than they were for long time ago. Preservation covers all managerial, technical including reformatting collections and financial considerations applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of the collections to ensure their continued availability.

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4Dick Vander Meij. “Codicology Lecture”. Graduate School of State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. 12 April 2011
National Library is the national institution appointed by law to receive deposit material. It is considered to bear the main responsibility. National Library of Indonesia holds approximately 10,000 manuscripts titles. Given its mission is to preserve library materials as a result of the national culture, the preservation of manuscripts is one of its preservation priority efforts.

From 2003 onwards, National Library of Indonesia has been digitizing its manuscripts. Its intensive effort has been done since 2006 with 1,300 manuscripts. Not only its own collection, but private collection is also become a part of digitization project, such as manuscripts in Pulau Penyengat, Kepulauan Riau and manuscripts in Pulau Lingga, Riau in 2007. This project resulted in 900 titles of digitized manuscripts.

In 2006-2007, this institution transferred into microfiches the holdings of some institutions, including 250 rolls microfiches of University of Indonesia’s manuscripts, 15 titles of manuscripts from East Kalimantan (Berau, Bulungan, and Paser), manuscripts of Sampangraja Museum in Bima, and Pulau Penyengat’s manuscripts in 25 rolls, and digitized 25 titles. In 2008, it preserved manuscripts in Eastern Java (Museum Mpu Tantular), manuscripts in Lombok Island, manuscripts in Lingga (Riau Sumatera), and Bone Sultanate, Makasar. In 2009, preservation was focused on manuscripts in Eastern Java (museum Mpu Tantular), in Western Sumatra, in Cirebon, and manuscripts Yogyakarta palace, while in 2010 preservation of manuscripts was carried out in the

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Radyapustaka museum in Solo. This institution continues to do preservation under its three departments namely, conservation, reprographic, and digital transformation.

**Institutions other than National Library of Indonesia**

To date, many institutions or manuscripts owners realize that these historically significant properties in Indonesia are in jeopardy. Institutions which are interested in manuscripts demonstrate a remarkably different approach which deals with preservation attempts. Some preservation practices are undertaken after restoration tasks. Apart from this institution, other organizations, institutions and universities put a lot of effort on preserving this written heritage.

Center for Research and Development of Religious Literatures (Puslitbang Lektur dan khasanah Keagamaan), Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs is one of the institutions which has been active in preserving endeavors. Preservation effort is a part of its function. This endeavor is undertaken for manuscripts since it is believed that in about 114 Islamic sultanates in Indonesia, manuscripts had been written by *ulama* (theologians/Muslim scholars) since 16th to 20th century. Manuscripts from pesantren where *ulama* who productively wrote for their students and other popular Islamic manuscripts are also become priority. Initially, this institution makes exploration and inventory projects for

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8The example of writing practice is done by Imam Abdul Manaf al-Khatib as a teacher in tasawuf pesantren of surau Batang Kabung, East Sumatera. See M. Yusuf (ed.). Katalogus Manuskrip dan Skriptorium Minangkabau. Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2006.p. 54
manuscripts kept in pesantren and private collections. It has carried them intensively since 2008 by taking digital photographs, making description for catalog and producing text edition or doing researches on manuscripts. In 2009 it has stored in digital format of 498 pieces of text from different areas of the archipelago, such as Nanggro Aceh Darussalam, West Sumatra, Riau, Banten, West Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, Bali, Nusa Tenggara West, South Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, and Maluku. It held workshops and researchs on manuscripts inviting professionals or lecturers in Islamic universities and other people who concern with this written heritage. Today, its attempt focuses not only on Islamic manuscripts but other saved manuscripts in this archipelag, including Balinese manuscripts, etc.

Other institutions undertake preservation efforts by collaborating with foreign institutions as international donor agencies (collaborate with Indonesia scholars and local Specialists). Efforts to transfer manuscripts into microfilms in Indonesia have been done by the Ford Foundation in collaboration with SEAM (Southeast Asia Microform Project), and have filmed 2300 Javanese manuscripts of Faculty of Literature, University of Indonesia’s manuscript collection. 700 filmed manuscripts originated from the palace (keraton) collections in Yogyakarta, Central Java from Widaya Budaya and Krida Mardawa collections. Fifty percents of the total collection of 9870 manuscripts at National Library of Indonesia, approximately 4040 manuscripts, gathered from a variety of institutions in South Sulawesi, including National Archives branch in Ujung Pandang. In 1986, this project was to film approximately 1,350 manuscripts collection at the Museum Negeri Sonobudoyo in Yogyakarta, 2300 manuscripts of Museum Radya Pustaka, Istana (Palace) Mangkunegaran, and Istana Sultan Surakarta (Surakarta,

9Interview with Nopiyati, one of the staff in Manuscripts Collection, University of Indonesia Library. 24 Januari 2010
Indonesia), and 1800 manuscripts of University of Padjadjaran in Bandung.  

The British Library is also worth mentioning. This institution has been actively engaged in preservation program for many parts of Indonesia through its Endangered Archives Program. In 2006, it generated 40545 images of 302 titles related to the diversity of Islamic knowledge of three pesantren, namely Pesantren Langitan, Tuban, pesantren al-Thalabah Tarbiyyah, Keranji, and pesantren Tegalsari, Jetis Ponorogo. In the same year, it digitized 250 manuscripts from five suraus (prayer houses) in West Sumatra. In 2007, it produced digital archives of 200 manuscripts and hundreds of artefacts from 14th to the 20th century from 80 private collections held in Kerinci. In 2008 approximately 830 manuscripts had been inventoried from 8 private collections of Buton. Also, 100 manuscripts were preserved from 7 private collections and 8 collections of surau belonging to two Sufi brotherhoods, Shattariyah and Naqshbandiyah in western Sumatera.

In 2009, this institution took several preservation project in some areas of Indonesia, including Aceh by digitization of 405 manuscripts with 46,029 pages in total, written between the 17th and 20th from private collectors in Pidie and Aceh Besar regencies. Also, it digitized 182 manuscripts from 12 manuscripts owners of the villages of Hila, Hitu Lama, Hitu


11 Interview with Yusri Akhimuddin, a member of manuscripts digitalization project of West Sumatera in collaboration with Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. 15 January 2011.

12 Information on British library preservation projects can be seen in Endangered Archives Programme, British Library. http://eap.bl.uk/database/. I also have opportunity to get some information on this, from one of my colleague in Research and Development Center and Religious literature of Ministry of Religious Affairs. 3 March 2010
Messeng, Kaitetu, Morella and Seith in Ambon, and Kabau and Pelalu on the islands of Haruku. In 2009, it digitized Old Javanese and Old Sundanese palm-leaf manuscripts, dating back to the pre-Islamic period of the 16th century and earlier. In 2009, approximately 176 manuscripts, 17,361 pages of manuscripts from Cirebon Sultanate (including Kasepuhan, Kanoman, Kacirebonan, and Kaprabon) and the private collections of sultan descendants were digitized. In 2010, it dealt with written Islamic heritage from Sufi brotherhoods: Shattariyah and Naqshbandiyah in Western Sumatra (Minangkabau) and Jambi. It generated digital copies of about 100-120 manuscripts.

Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) is also a good example. In 2003, it digitized manuscripts in Palembang and several surau and private collection in Minangkabau. It then moved to Aceh after Tsunami disaster to digitize Aly Hasjmi’s museum collection in 2005.

From early 2008 onwards, Leipzig University has been doing a lot of efforts on preserving manuscripts in Indonesia mostly in digitized formats from Aceh, Keraton Yogyakarta, Keraton Surakarta, and Keraton Cirebon. The University, in cooperation with Centre for Education and Society (PKPM) Nanggro Aceh Darussalam Province and Museum Ali Hasjmy undertook digitization program for manuscripts kept by museum and manuscripts owners. This year, the University will conduct manuscripts digitization in four keratons (palaces) in Cirebon, keraton Kacirebonan, Kasepuhan, Kanoman and Keprabonan.

The result of preservation projects done by institutions above is, of course, astonishing, given the fact that a lot of manuscripts which are not known before, now they exist in digital format. However, digitized items are not always preserved in National Library. As a result, the delivery of
manuscripts to the reading room and or its catalog in NLI has been considerably small.

Dissemination programs

Traditionally dissemination happens orally. The development of writing allowed history to be recorded on manuscripts. The subsequent development of printing and other online systems made wider dissemination possible. One important aspect of the relationship between manuscripts and users is the process by which manuscripts preserved find their way from the library to users, whether to researchers, students or community at large.

Creating catalog and linking catalog searching to a document delivery service is one way to disseminate information. Particularly, information from catalog is very important to figure out manuscripts and take the following steps regarding a certain manuscript. In the middle of 16th century, this practice had been done as shown in a simple list by Isaac de St. Martin, Francois Valentijn, and a list of Werndly. S Van Ronkel’s catalog only appeared in 1909 which included Malay manuscripts that are recorded in Bataviaasch Genootschap Kunsten en Wetenschappen or National Library in Jakarta. In 1966 Howard published a list of scripts that are now stored in various libraries in the world. In 1972 National Library of Indonesia generated *Katalog induk naskah-naskah Nusantara* but published in 1998 with the involvement of T.E Behrend.
Several dissemination efforts by publishing printed catalogs are produced by collaboration of foreign institution as international funding agencies with local scholars from various universities including University of Indonesia, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universitas Islam Negeri Jakarta, Universitas Sriwijaya, Universitas Andalas, IAIN Imam Bonjol and IAIN Al-Raniri, and from MANASSA. Collaboration with SEAM and Ford Foundation generated *Katalog Induk naskah-naskah Nusantara* 1-4 vol. the current catalog published is *Katalog Naskah Dayah Tanoh Abee*, Aceh Besar edited by Oman Fathurahman, in 2010. Puslitbang through Balai Agama will publish *Katalog Naskah tasawuf* and (mysticism) *Katalog Naskah Fikih* (Islamic Jurisprudence) in the next few month.13

Besides, there are also ONLINE CATALOGS freely searchable on the Internet. National Library of Indonesia with 350 file entries can be downloaded14 *Thesaurus of Indonesian Islamic Manuscripts* is one of online manuscripts database which compiles digitized manuscripts from Puslitbang Lektur dan Khasanah Keagamaan in collaboration with the Centre for the advancement of academic excellence in research and policy studies (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.15 It

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13 Interview with Agus Iswanto, one of the staff in Balai Agama Research and Development Center and Religious Education of Ministry of Religious Affairs. 17 Januari 2011


has now 315,000 entries in the catalog but actually there are still many more in Puslitbang Lektur.\textsuperscript{16}

Other online databases are *Manuskrip-Manuskrip Peninggalan Aceh* and *Portal Naskah Jawa*. The online catalogs are created by Leipzig University cooperating with some manuscripts institutions in Aceh and Jawa. Using three languages: English, Arabic and Deutsch, the catalog has provided detailed information on manuscripts and allowed users to download.

In different ways, disseminating tasks can be done by building awareness and publicity of scholarly products, and making those products part of the discourse of community. National Library of Indonesia runs some programs regarding manuscripts. For example, *Seminar Nasional Naskah Nusantara : Pengobatan Tradisional Dalam Naskah Nusantara*, conducted in September 2011. Puslitbang Lektur arranged seminars on manuscripts studies, text edition and the like regularly. The program invites communities who are concerned with national heritage. Developing program study on manuscripts as University of Indonesia (UI), UIN Jakarta, University Padjajaran Bandung is also worth mentioning for dissemination purposes.

Accessibility of manuscript is demanding. Even manuscripts in National Library are not necessarily easy to find. Preservation and dissemination tasks, which cover aspects pertaining to philosophy, department, people and budget, are deemed to be the cause of the problems.

**Problems with preserving and disseminating efforts**

\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Nurrahmah, one of staff in Center for Research and Development of Religious Literatures, Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. 21 Januari 2011
National Library of Indonesia and those institutions mentioned above have done various preservation and dissemination efforts. However, those programs still leave some problems. Firstly, having concern with manuscript is awakened by a good understanding of the collection. It means that philosophy and ethics exist prior to touching this local collection. Philosophical manner toward manuscripts is the understanding of definition of terms, principles of programs, priorities of programs, categories of materials and that they are culturally and historically significant will justify local commitments. Ethical aspect refers to how standards or guidelines to assist professionals in meeting the specialized goals of their profession within the more complex circumstances of the greater society in which they live and work are available.

Regrettably, a wide range of ethical and philosophical issues occurred, including the neglect of manuscripts. The handbook should include library policies, procedures, and guidelines. There is no written implementation to guide the programs. No outline for areas of concern and activity. In addition, sharing experience is best practice at networking or professional meetings, trainings or continuing education.

Secondly, administrative role asserts goals and policies to ensure that relationship with other institutions is clearly articulated. This role can be seen in a number of occasions, including establishing a formal advisory role for collector with primary preservation responsibility regarding collection maintenance, ensuring the program which is coordinated and in balance with National Library’s major programs, serving advocacy and information role, overseeing the operational components of the preservation and dissemination programs, and showing the expertise and leadership. National Library, however, has not performed its roles pertaining to those programs clearly. The absence of holistic approach to coordinate or engage other institutions in manuscript preservation project is obvious. Consequently, National
Library and other institutions may do the same things, perhaps with the same manuscripts in the same area. Also, the lack of awareness on the part of individual or institutions to send manuscripts or digital copy to the library is another problem. Building an amazing catalog like the Library of Congress would be possible if this role can be run effectively.

Thirdly, most today’s preservation projects undertaken jointly by international funding agencies and local scholars or institutions focus on digitization of manuscripts owned by public or private collector. Short training on that purposes is delivered by the agencies. But what has been lacking is conservation and restoration measures. Therefore, it is no wonder if we find manuscripts put in the wrong way and they have not been arranged even in any simple list to search for easy access. 17 Besides, there is little attention puts on dissemination purposes. Some evidences show this situation, including not all inventories or digitization result in a catalog separate from the creation of databases, different standards of cataloging, catalogs has been published with various standards. Even, there is incorrect information which is not relevant to manuscripts because of careless reading and language proficiency.

Fourthly, preservation and dissemination efforts have enormous impact on spending budget to pay staff, buy equipment, new technology, and supplies, or other areas to advance the state of the art of the collection. The fact that private or semi public collector, who directly or not infers the lack of budget is obvious. As far as dissemination is concerned, bringing detailed information of manuscripts through online catalog or maybe just offline setting which is stored in the reading room would be beneficial. Putting the

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17 This is the case I found in Keraton Kacirebonan, Cirebon. Manuscripts put in plastic bag for long term usage. Also, they didn’t list what manuscripts they have.
images into the online system as National Library has done is outstanding. Yet, it is only a small number. Another area of concern is providing fund or scholarship for manuscripts studies just like the British Library through Endangered Archives Program, and Puslitbang Lektur Keagamaan through scholarships in Islamic Philology in UIN Jakarta.

Both dissemination and preservation of manuscripts would be a great efforts if National Library is the only institution to solve the problems. However, considering the large number of manuscripts, their nature and other problems regarding personal or public issues, collaboration might become a possible approach.

Collaboration Approach as an Alternative Solution

Dealing with preservation and dissemination of manuscripts means not only deals with the collection, but also with those who are involved, affected and people who have relevant information or expertise. These problems need a good solution. The possible solution is in the hands of the institutions to collaborate. Collaboration will bring a vision of a better improvement because institutions or people with various interests can work together to make decisions and solve problems. It also creates the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate communication and cooperation for mutual benefit.\(^{18}\) National Library and each institution or private interest should know their rights and obligations, but all should agree on common ground that their efforts will

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Contribute to the advancement of knowledge for the benefit of the general public.

Collaboration needs reciprocity, representation, skill and human development, belief in collaboration, transparency, continuity and regularity, equitable participation, and trust. 19

There are 3 levels of collaboration that can be undertaken: National Library with local institutions or scholars, with international funding agencies, and with countries in regional settings.

1. Collaboration with local institutions, scholars, or private collectors

To date, the library and institution or individual seem to have not taken any serious steps toward developing collaborative initiatives. At national level, strengthening local commitment that we are together in saving our national heritage is a starting point in order to value our intellectual resources. We should understand that we are the first group who have the right to safeguard our national heritage because manuscripts are not mere objects of scientific or historical interest. There are also something that some people agree to honor and protect them. Therefore, the way we define this heritage broadly and holistically is important. This is one of strategies to invest in each generation the responsibility to learn and carry on our particular values, ideas, language, and tradition. If collaboration can run smoothly at the local level, then it

will be easier to build a cooperation with other foreign institutions and with countries in regional setting.

2. **Collaboration with foreign institutions or international funding agencies**

Various foreign institutions have wrestled with manuscripts, dedicate time and money to identify, inventory, and preserve manuscripts. Communities throughout the world from developing to developed countries continue to struggle in the face of globalization to maintain the ideas, belief, and practices, which figure out in manuscripts that define us as unique people who care about our own identity relative to others. We understand that the involvement of international funding agencies, in some situations is not favorable. The inclusion of National Library naturally creates a broader base of support for solution and increases the likelihood that it will be implemented to take advantage by linking with them. Another important point is a balanced right, not dominated by them. Joint project done with foreign institutions has to be monitored by national library.

3. **Collaborative with countries in regional setting**

Administered by national libraries we can share information by placing new technology for easily accessing the collection. A variety of technologies would be available for citizens to track the progress of planning and decision-making process and to participate in a meaningful way. We can make bibliographic control on this level. The result we may expect is bibliographic control for manuscripts.
In short, National Library of Indonesia and other institutions involved in preserving and disseminating manuscripts should find the right chemistry for collaboration within the region and those outside. Hopefully, there is a bright prospect that manuscripts which have already been preserved are being brought to good use and give a greater impact on Indonesian development and other countries. The simple results, at least, is a bibliography control of manuscripts.

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