

# DecoSEAS Visiting Fellow Final Report

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Over the course of the 3-month fellowship, with an effective research period of approximately 2.5 months, my work focused on two main objectives: finding information about vernacular music in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and understanding the processes and experiences involved in accessing these archives now housed in former colonial institutions.

My research began with visits to key archives, including the Jaap Kunst archive at the Allard Pierson Museum, the Musicology Department of Amsterdam University, Leiden University Library, and the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KIT) collection at The Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (NISV). These visits were complemented by extensive use of online databases such as Clariah ([clariah.nl](http://clariah.nl)) and DAAN ([daan.beeldengeluid.nl](http://daan.beeldengeluid.nl)) which is the abbreviation for Digitaal Audiovisueel Archief van Nederland. The combination of physical site visits and remote digital access allowed me to explore a wide array of audio and visual materials, which were instrumental in broadening and contextualising my research inquiry.

## Challenges Encountered

Despite the comprehensive access to various resources, my research was not without its challenges. While conducting research at NISV, I was provided with an email account that grants access to NISV's digitised audio-visual archive via Clariah. Features on Clariah, such as bookmarks, personal annotations, and filters, were very helpful in exploring the archive. However, after successfully exploring the archives via Clariah and discussions with one of the curators at NISV, I learned that there were several limitations in accessing the NISV online archives and its metadata. Accessing the NISV online archive via DAAN will reveal more detailed metadata. To acquire a DAAN account, it is necessary to furnish an email account associated with the archival or educational institution of one's affiliation. Although I managed to obtain a DAAN account using this method, it poses a potential obstacle for independent researchers who lack affiliations with universities, research institutions, or archival institutions. This requirement may limit access for individuals working independently outside of these institutional frameworks.

A significant portion of the sound archives within the KIT collection at NISV remains undigitised. Moreover, the limited access to non-digital archives presented another substantial challenge. Due to the restricted accessibility, I was compelled to arrange visits with one of the curators responsible for overseeing the collection. However, this poses a challenge as the curators are often occupied with their responsibilities, making it difficult to secure convenient and timely appointments. This limitation in availability complicates the process of gaining access to non-digitized archive materials.

Another challenge at NISV was the scattered locations of the KIT collection, compounded by the curators not yet identifying each specific location. This lack of clear identification poses a hurdle as it complicates the retrieval process for specific materials within the collection. Without precise information on the whereabouts of relevant items, navigating through the scattered locations was a time-consuming task. This situation not only hampers the efficiency of accessing desired materials but also adds an additional layer of complexity to the organisation and retrieval of information from the KIT collection.

My research at the Allard Pierson Museum also faced unique challenges. The Jaap Kunst collection at the Allard Pierson Museum has not been listed on the Amsterdam University Library's website. This presents a hurdle for individuals seeking information about the collection, as the absence of an online listing means that potential users, researchers, or interested parties may not be aware of its existence, contents, or availability. It essentially limits the collection's reach and potential utilisation by those who rely on digital platforms for resource discovery.

## Findings

Despite the challenges, the readings I did on various documents stored in the Jaap Kunst collection turned up interesting findings. In his writings, Kunst emphasised the threat of what he referred to as the "Western infection," which posed a risk of eroding or overshadowing Javanese art, including gamelan music. He highlighted the accelerated pace at which this influence was spreading, even reaching the traditionally safeguarded realm of the Royal Courts. Kunst also demonstrated awareness of the impact of Western popular culture on traditional music. Specifically, he acknowledged the influence of Western cinema on the musical landscape, particularly focusing on gamelan music in Java. In this context, Kunst highlighted the significant role played by Western cinema in shaping and influencing the musical expressions of Java. The pervasive influence of Western cinematic elements, such as soundtracks and musical styles, had impacted the traditional music scene.

Through his research, documentation, and preservation efforts, Kunst aimed to facilitate the development of Indonesian traditional music while maintaining its authenticity and protecting it from Western influence. He also emphasised the importance of utilising contemporary recording technology to preserve Indonesian musical traditions. Kunst's various research, documentation, and arguments, which can be examined in the Jaap Kunst collection archives, offer significant potential for understanding how colonial society viewed and positioned traditional Indonesian art, especially music. Additionally, we can gain insights into Kunst's responses and views on Indonesian vernacular music, such as keroncong, which he considered a direct result of Western cultural influence in Indonesia.

At NISV, I discovered that the KIT collection contains a vast array of Indonesian music recordings. In the 1920s, the foundation for the sound archive of the Ethnomusicology Department of the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KIT) or Royal Tropical Institute was laid by curator J.C. Lamster through the strategic acquisition of a collection of 78 rpm records. This acquisition was done in collaboration with Jaap Kunst, highlighting Kunst's significant role in shaping the ethnomusicological holdings of the institute. The KIT collection also contains field recordings of Indonesian music, stored in cassette tape formats of 13 cm, 18 cm, and 26 cm bands. Over time, the KIT sound archive has been relocated to NISV in Hilversum. Within this collection, I discover various recordings of Indonesian vernacular music such as keroncong and gambang kromong. However, only a limited portion of these recordings has undergone digitization, posing a challenge for researchers and musicians interested in accessing the collection.

Additionally, my research at the NISV online archive highlighted the potential of the "amateurfilms" or "amateuropnamen" keyword that opens up the possibility of discovering documentation of Indonesian vernacular music activities in public spaces. This is particularly valuable because such footage is likely absent from films created by the Dutch colonial institutions or officials which relatively can be accessed in and from Indonesia. Amateur films, characterised by their non-professional and often personal nature, have the potential to capture more candid and unfiltered moments of community-based musical expressions in public

settings. In contrast to films produced by Dutch colonial institutions, which may focus on formal events or curated performances, amateur films offer a unique glimpse into the spontaneous, everyday musical practices of Indonesian people in public spaces.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on my research, I propose several recommendations for future research:

- Correspondence documents in the Jaap Kunst Collection can serve as a reference for further research on how colonial society positioned traditional music in its colonies, especially Javanese and Balinese gamelan.
- The same correspondence documents can also serve as a starting point to better understand how Jaap Kunst's role as an ethnomusicologist adapted to technology and influenced the music recording industry at that time, especially in the context of Indonesian music.
- The amateur film archives stored at NISV online archives can serve as an entry point for research on vernacular music in Indonesia during the colonial era.
- The recordings included in the KIT collection can serve as a reference for understanding the curation and selection process carried out by the Royal Tropical Institute as a colonial institution to establish sound archives.