

Old But Gold: Your Valuable Sources From The Past

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Abstract:

Rare books, manuscripts and special collection have significantly recorded historical documents of the country. This is why rare books, manuscripts and special collection are considered to be extremely important as a primary source of our history and events. It is also considered as a national heritage and witness of our civilization. Many of the most significant events and history have associations with this collection. Preserving and promoting this collection helps us to comprehend important societal ideals and traditions. The library, as a guardian of this collection, not only just preserve, but has to promote the special collections to the society, especially the younger generation and must not consider special collections as mere ornaments of the library. This is will make special collections feel like an empty victory despite all the effort to preserve it. In Malaysia, many still do not realize the existence and the value of the special collection. To ensure the Malaysian society recognize the importance and the existence of a special collection, the National Library of Malaysia has taken various efforts and initiatives to promote the special collection to the public. The National Library of Malaysia holds approximately 2,623 of rare books and 4,884 of Malay manuscripts. One of the Malay manuscripts titled Hang Tuah is in the UNESCO Memorial of the World Register 2001. The National Library of Malaysia is determined to not just display rare books and Malay manuscripts as museum pieces but as a usable collection and accessible to all.

Keywords: Special collections, Rare books, Malay manuscripts.

Introduction

Old is gold, a term used to describe rare books and special collection (my shorthand “special collection” included manuscripts), is very precise because it contains valuable primary information which is both priceless and important. We constantly discover new information in rare books and special collections, and realize that everything old is new again. Libraries collect and preserve rare books and special collection materials because of intellectual and cultural heritage, providing access to unique research resources. Henrici, (2015) divided the value of special collections into four main values, namely:

1. Informational value - this is the research value that is offered in relation to places, people, events, periods, projects or processes.
2. Administrative value - this is the functional usefulness of the resources to an organization such as is found in records of activities.
3. Artefactual value – this is in the case of rare items or interesting objects where the value is derived from the nature of the material.
4. Associated value – this is where materials have a relationship to an eminent person, e.g. Nelson Mandela’s personal diary.

Unfortunately, many library users, such as undergraduate students, professionals, secondary school students and public users, find rare books and special collections as more difficult and restricted compared to other library collections. All the rules and long process make it difficult to encourage users to use all these collections. New users might also find that rare books and special collections are the most intimidating section. Well, rare books and special collections are like gold and priceless in terms of information value. Like gold, they are kept in very high security storage and the same goes to the rare books and special collections. This is to prevent this collection from damage, missing, mutilation or theft because this collection consists of the only copies left and cannot be replaced with other collections. Librarians should have a major shift in order to encourage young readers to read and refer to rare books and special collection as their primary sources regardless of their purposes. Underutilization of this collection will prove the weakness of the librarians to disseminate very important and valuable primary sources to the society. After all, what is the purpose in keeping and preserving the rare books and special collection if no one utilizes the materials?

Background

National Library of Malaysia (NLM) has an excellent range of rare books and special collections that reflects the intellectual heritage and history of Malaysia. These collections provide rich resources for learning and research, and attracted 4,470 visitors in 2016. These collections also represent a significant achievement of the NLM research infrastructure and a crucial research resource, and are used in a variety of ways by library users, who ranges from international scholars, local scholars, and special collections enthusiasts. Rare books and special collections are resource for arts, history, medicine, astronomy, Islam, language, culture and others subjects. Based on this reason, NLM is devoted to collecting, organizing, preserving, describing, and providing access to primary source materials to the society across varieties of initiatives to ensure all Malaysians benefit from these collections. By exposing this “hidden collection” and information to the society, it will change the research patterns.

There are two centres in NLM which manage and preserve the rare books and special collections, the Malaysiana and Foreign Reference Division, and the National Centre of Malay Manuscript. The Malaysiana and Foreign Reference Center comprises of library materials published in Malaysia and overseas whose whole or larger part of the content is related to the publications date or the language used. The collection includes rare books and other special collections such as personal collections, archive collections, ephemeral collections and maps collections. NLM holds approximately 2,623 copies of rare books, 31,416 copies of personal collections, 74,255 copies of archive collections, 24,855 copies of ephemeral collections, 917 copies of restricted/classified/banned collections and 8,518 copies

of maps collection. The National Centre of Malay Manuscripts holds approximately 4,884 copies of original Malay manuscripts and microfilms copies.

Definition

Most libraries define their “special collections” in different ways. The term can be a convenient definition for any research materials that fall outside the main collections of current publications, serials, and monographs. Special collection also sometimes refer to rare books and manuscripts collections. For the purpose of this paper, special collections will be defined as broadly as possible. It can be used to mean almost any library materials which is more than 100 or 150 years old. “In some libraries, newspapers also fall within the category” (Prochaska, 2003). Smith (2005:3) attempts to broaden her meaning of the term by including the term “a broad range of material” in her definition. However, by giving examples of the type of materials she identifies with (namely rare books, manuscripts, and collections of modern ephemera), she narrows the perception of what the term “special collections” covers. Working group report on Special Collections in ARL Libraries, “special collections” are defined “ecumenically” to include “any kind of vehicle for information and communication that lacks readily available and standardized classification schemes, and any that is vulnerable to destruction or disappearance without special treatment” (ARL Working Group 2009). National Library of Malaysia (Amendment) Regulations 1993 defines special collection as “a collection of controlled resources which includes Rare, Confidential, Restricted or Banned resources and any other resources which may be developed from time to time and specified by the Director General as special collection”. In this sense, special collections are those materials containing primary evidence for scholarship that require special treatment in their description or handling. For the purpose of this essay the definition of Malay manuscript is also included. Malay manuscripts are defined as handwritten documents in the Malay language and in the Jawi script, which surfaced in the beginning of the fourteenth century and ended in early twentieth century. It is an invaluable documentary heritage of the past which should be saved, stored and preserved. Special collections in NLM include rare book collections, private collections, ephemeral collections, restricted/classified/banned collections, archive collections and map collections.

Overview of NLM Rare Books and Special Collections Objectives

NLM extremely believes that enhanced visibility of rare books and special collections has led to increased interest from researchers and other users. NLM’s objective is to cultivate research in primary sources as a habit and also to break the anxiety or negative perception that rare books and special collections is often an intimidating place, with elaborate rules and extra hurdles to access. NLM also faces a great challenge making available this “gold collection” and priority is always given to the rare books and special collections to be promoted to the society. NLM is now focusing to attract and increase interest from other users such as undergraduate students, professionals, school students and public peoples who may not have been aware of these materials instead of the regular core user groups such as researchers, and enthusiasts of rare books and special collections. A variety of initiatives has already been taken by the NLM to provide the rare books and special collection to the larger public and potentially increase the use of rare books and special collections within the community. Rare books and special collections extremely depend on their utilization to remain viable, thus promotion is a vital strategy strategies to ensure rare books and special collections remain relevant in a fast-changing environment. To be successful, all the initiatives and strategies had to be relevant to the users that the NLM wishes to draw in.

NLM is always continually seeking newer and better ways to reach users and communicate the value of rare books and special collections. Many strategies have been effective in making rare books and special collections more visible and accessible to the users. The term “old but gold” is not simply used by NLM without any reason. NLM is committed to promote this “gold collection” to different kinds of users for various reason as stated below:-

- i. **Undergraduate students.** NLM believes that rare books and special collections can contribute significantly in producing high quality assignments/theses/projects among undergraduate students. For example, DeBold (2012) “UC Boulder provides an excellent example of how rare books can be used in pure science courses. Historical perspectives are vital to understanding modern institutions and thought about everything from disease to the ethics of stem cell research, and Barbara Losoff and her colleagues were able to provide a rich special collections perspective to courses in disease and microbiology using rare accounts of plague, the development of microscopy, and general texts on planting and husbandry”. This is a very interesting discovery to prove that rare books and special collections can be a primary source for science and technology. However, research guide have to be provided to undergraduate students to ensure they can use this collection easily and effectively.
- ii. **Professionals.** Rare books and special collections can contribute to career development among professionals. They can combine modern resources such as article journals or thesis with ancient resources such as rare books and manuscripts to create a new knowledge. The use of different kinds of primary sources will contribute to a new knowledge which is more objective and relevant. The Library can promote this collection as resources for medical, law, linguistic, arts, economy, astronomy and science subjects. Liew, (2005) also suggested “promoting special collections as a resource for genealogy (one of the most popular forms of self-motivated learning)”.
- iii. **Primary/secondary students.** The awareness to appreciate the value and to utilize the rare books and special collections should also be cultivated among primary/secondary school students. The young generation’s information seeking behaviour is changing. They tend to seek information from the internet because it’s easy, fast, and no form required. Students are not exposed to rare books and special collection because school libraries do not have this collection. In Malaysia, Form 3 students are tested via a Form 3 Assessment. The assessment’s elements include history and geography assignments, and field and case studies. NLM encourage students to refer to different kinds of sources including rare books, special collections and Malay manuscripts as primary sources. Traister, (2003) stated that “some institutions, as a matter of policy, prohibit visits from—or to—elementary or secondary schools. School children should be encouraged to use the services and treated properly similarly to adult users”.
- iv. **Public users.** The general public also should not be left behind in the promotion of using the rare collections and special collections. The may not realize the true value of rare books and special collections. General public users can add on

knowledge in their respective special interests. NLM consistently apply Ranganathan's Five Law of Library Science. To sum up what we should take from this first law, care must be taken to provide a facility and an organized collection that invite and promote the use of its resources. If the general public user refuse or are not interested to access the physical collection, the library can use social media as a promoting tool to encourage them. Graham, stated that "social media presence communicates special collections commitment to their users and that rather than being an antiquated department, they are an innovative collection with an appreciation for news forms of communication".

NLM's Outreach Awareness Strategies for Rare Collections and Special Collections

Over the past years, the NLM is planning comprehensive strategies to attract new users of our rare book collections and special collection such as undergraduate students, secondary school students, and community groups, and also as a means of broadening our reach. According to Harris and Weller's (2012), "special collections librarians should develop plans and programs for outreach that encompass not just the traditional activities of outreach such as collection "show and tells" and exhibits. Part of outreach programs will naturally include these, but should also look to effective use of social media, collection dissemination through digitization, active instruction and partnerships with schools, and friendly, efficient, and helpful customer service" (p. 302).

Heritage Tourism

In terms of knowledge tourism, rare books and special collections should be seen as part of heritage tourism along with the other heritage tourism items such as buildings, cultures and other heritage attractions. Library, as a knowledge institution, is an important factor behind the development and improvement of heritage tourism. By definition, knowledge tourism enables places which are not tourism-oriented and do not receive many tourists throughout the year, to make a tourism offer owing to their collection resources. NLM offers a variety of rare books and special collections including Malay manuscripts which can attract more visitors appreciate and learn about their history and culture through these collections. The NLM holds a number of valuable, unique and distinctive collections as a main attraction for tourists to visit and to understand Malaysian history and culture. *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is one of the special Malay manuscripts is listed in the UNESCO Memorial of the World Register 2001. *Kitab Tib*, a Malay traditional medicine manuscript is also one of the unique collection that visitors could read to learn and understand about Malay medicine. Rare books collection also offer a comprehensive information on Malaysia's history, cultures and languages. The oldest rare book in NLM is a bi-language dictionary published in 1631 titled *Dictionarivm Malaicvm-Latinvm & Lation-Malaicvm*. These golden collections successfully attract significant numbers of tourists. In 2015, 3,625 local tourists and 181 international tourists visited NLM and this number continued to increase in 2016 which was 4,211 local tourists and 259 international tourists visiting NLM. Rare collections, personal collections and Malay manuscripts are among the most popular collections visited by local and international tourists.

Exhibitions

NLM used exhibitions to promote rare books and special collections and considered them as a successful medium through which librarians can make rare books and special collections more accessible to both scholars and the public. Brewerton (2004) said that “displays of resources are one of the cheapest and most effective marketing methods available to libraries”. “Exhibitions can have a positive effect both in terms of public relations and education provision” (Prendergast, 2003) and “in terms of raising the profile of collections” (Gifford, 2002). NLM has an active exhibitions program such as in-house exhibitions and outreach exhibitions. The exhibitions were based on materials already in the collections and one theme was selected for each exhibition to attract visitors. NLM’s rare collections and special collections are regularly displayed in exhibition cases and posters at the rare books and special collection display gallery located at the 10th floor of PNM Tower, while Malay manuscripts exhibition is located at the 11th floor of PNM Tower. NLM often invites students, researchers, and public users to visit the exhibitions. NLM also offers individual or group tours to teach and facilitate learning. Visitors are encouraged to ask questions and suggestions to fulfil their curiosity or research goals. Besides the in-house exhibitions, NLM is also planning outreach exhibitions throughout country in various organizations such as government agencies, private agencies, state public libraries, higher education institutions, schools and seminars. In 2015, 20 outreach exhibitions were held for rare books and personal collections and 20 outreach exhibitions were held for Malay manuscripts. In 2016, 10 outreach exhibitions for rare books and personal collections were held while 11 outreach exhibitions were held for the Malay manuscripts collections. Perhaps the most successful exhibition of Malay manuscripts was the International Exhibition of Malay Manuscripts in 2014, mounted in conjunction of Visit Malaysia Year 2014. The exhibition successfully attracted 16,794 walk-in visitors and 54,748 visitors for online exhibition. The exhibition platform was a large traditional Terengganu vessel called the Pinis Gobel. The Pinis Gobel, a two-storey high structure covering an area of 30×100 square feet, was placed in the exhibition lobby of the National Library and is bound to captivate visitors. The exhibitions showcased Malay manuscripts on governance and leadership, law and order, navigation, religion, astronomy, warfare and weaponry, medicine, decorative art of illumination, literature (Hikayat and poetry and lifestyle).

Merchandise

Merchandise or souvenirs are the most important promotion tools in every single program organized by the NLM. “The provision of free merchandise such as postcards, bookmarks, and pens can be a useful tool for re-enforcing other promotional activities” (Brewerton, 2001; 2003). “If developed with a particular product in mind they can stir interest amongst new user groups by being informative and intriguing at the same time, as demonstrated by the use of specially designed beer mats to promote the presence of the National Brewing Library at Oxford Brookes University” (Brewerton, 2004). NLM collaborated with Malaysia Post to produce first day stamps and envelopes in conjunction with the Official Opening of the National Library Building on 16 December 1994. One of the first day stamp featured the Malay manuscript to represent an important part of Malay cultural wealth. The RM1.00 stamp is still available until now. NLM also produce and sell postcards featuring pictures of rare books. PNM published ten postcards with different pictures as the background. All the pictures were based from the rare books collections already in NLM collections. This RM10.00 postcard will act as a memorable souvenir to people and encourage users or visitors

to read and study the rare books. Besides that, NLM also produce other merchandise and souvenirs such as note books, pens, bookmarks and mugs.

Seminars and Talks

Seminars and talks bring together library and rare books and special collections experts to discuss everything about rare books and special collections. Coote and Batchelor (1997) noted that “these methods should continue to be used. Talks on specific collections are perhaps one of the key selling points for special collections librarians who work with such collections constantly, and are knowledgeable of their contents”, and Melrose (1999) highlights the “frequency in which local librarians are called upon to give talks about resources in their collections”. “Talks can also be delivered to a wide variety of clientele, and not just core user groups” (as Sambrook and Donnelly (2006) have noted), and this can “widen the outreach potential of the library service as a whole, thus promoting an enhanced perception of that service to a wider audience” (Bengston, 2001). Seminars and talks specializing on rare books and special collections are among the important events in NLM. Every year NLM collaborates with local university experts, professors and lecturers, and also with Malaysian National Laureates to present a research paper, rare books reviews and other issues related to the rare books and special collections to promote knowledge and the use of rare books and special collections. In 2016, NLM organized two (2) seminars and two (2) talks on Malay manuscripts collection. NLM also organized one (1) talk on personal collections and the speaker was Malaysian National Laureate Professor Dr. Muhammad Haji Salleh. He reviewed a rare book collection entitled “Sole of Malaya”, since he was the author who translated that book into the Malay language with the title “*Nurani Tanah Melayu*”. The seminars and talks were so successful that attendances ranged from researchers to regular library users. The benefits of the seminars and talks are strengthening of ties among librarians, rare books and Malay manuscripts experts, government agencies as well as a generally heightened awareness among library users and students, as well as on Malay manuscripts and rare book collections in NLM.

Publications

NLM produces a lot of publications related to the rare collections, personal collections and Malay manuscripts collection because it would be noteworthy to showcase materials from the NLM’s rare books and special collections. Publications can come in all shapes and sizes, from professionally produced monographs to local newsletters printed in the library. “The former are often catalogues published alongside other outreach events such as exhibitions, or as a result of specific cataloguing projects” (Traister, 2003). NLM produces a lot of publications related to rare books, special collections and Malay manuscripts. The number of publications related to Malay manuscripts already published by the NLM are 12 books, 23 volumes of Philology Journals and 21 Malay Manuscripts Catalogues. The most popular Malay manuscripts books are *Kitab Tib: Ilmu perubatan Melayu* (Malay traditional medicine) and a Malay manuscript coffee table book. Three books and two special collections catalogues were also published for rare books and personal collections. In 1994, a Guest Scholar Program was introduced to study and transliterate a selected Malay manuscript, personal collections and rare collections by the notable scholar. Since that, eight important manuscripts and one personal collections has been studied, transliterated and published such as *Sumber Histografi di alam Melayu* (John Bastin Personal Collection) and *Petua Membina Rumah* (Malay Manuscripts Collection). NLM also produced posters and fliers which were used to publicise upcoming events and exhibitions. Information repacking related to the

history, culture and geography of Malaysia for form 3 students who are sitting for the Form 3 Assessment was also produced by the NLM. The resources of the information repacking came from various source and one of them being from rare books and special collections. These collections are the primary sources of Malaysian history, culture and geography and the library should expose the collection to secondary school students for their projects or assignments.

Web site/portals/social media

In order to make rare books and special collections on screen, NLM has invested a lot of money and time for the planning, choosing, organizing and interpreting texts as well as scanning, mounting and choosing navigation tools. “Library websites have the potential to enhance services for users” (Abraham, 2001), “act as a first point of contact for new customers” (Brewerton, 2002) and act as a promotional tool in the process. “They can also be used to showcase research and resources” (Traister, 2003) and “generate new resources” (Jay and Webber, 2005). However, “to successfully achieve this goal library websites should be accessible, usable (i.e. easy to navigate) and easily searchable” (Ould and Burton, 2005). If these targets are achieved, the benefits of a library website will far outweigh the cost of development. NLM has already digitized 1,578 titles or 203,096 pages of Malay manuscripts, 1,844 titles or 371,236 pages of rare books and 2,626 titles or 572,765 personal collections. This digitized collection can be accessed through various online tools for free global access such as The Glorious Legacy of Malay Manuscripts portals at http://www.pnm.gov.my/manuskrip/melayu/03koleksi/302_hikayat.htm, National Library of Malaysia Digital Repository at <http://myrepositori.pnm.gov.my/>, and u-Pustaka portal (ubiquitous library) at <http://www.u-library.gov.my/portal/web/guest/home>. Increased access is one of the main factor why it so worthy to represent NLM’s rare books and special collections on the internet. Digitized collection will not be fully utilized if the materials are not uploaded into a portal or database. “The special collection website carries enterprise-wide implications for promoting awareness of all library services, including information about the library as an organization and community resource” (Wilson, p. 36). “With its existence as a website already established, part of the outreach and marketing project is completed” (Harrell, 2016). The site is out there in the cyber sphere where anyone with access to Google or other keyword searches, would find it. NLM also uses social media to promote rare books and special collections to a larger public. As Griffin and Taylor (2013) stated “social media profiles existed... to serve as outreach tools, to provide additional access points for reference transactions, and to provide additional access points to special collections materials in locations where new, potential users were already located”. Social media is a user-friendly technology which allow users to interact with people who have similar interests. Functions like commenting, tagging, and sharing content make the communication between library and users easier and more casual. The advantages of social media in disseminating news and content fast both locally and internationally should be fully utilized by the library.

Conclusion

As an institutions which are guardians of intellectual heritage, NLM should take more advanced initiatives to reach larger target users. In order to make the collections widely accessible, online exhibits may be used as one of the methods to gain public awareness with efforts on digitizing the collections. NLM also should focus on rare books and special collection staff by acknowledge them, because they are well aware that their main task is to enable the ongoing collection of materials of intellectual and cultural heritage, and also to give access to these collections in the best way possible. The staff should be given enough training because educated and skilled staff is the key to providing quality services. In order to promote the use of rare books and special collections among library users, tourists and the local community, it is vital to develop an excellent promotional strategy that can attract more users not only to look at the collections but also use the collection to add on their current knowledge, or even for other purposes.

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