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Oral Archives and the Study of Anti-Japanese War

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Abstract

With the analysis of the value of oral archives, this paper aims at pointing out the role of Oral Archives in the study of the history of Anti-Japanese War. Besides, it also puts forward the corresponding countermeasures to the current application situation and existing problems of Oral Archives in the study of the Anti Japanese War, such as enhancing the mutual authenticity between oral archives and references, strengthening the intensity, breadth and depth of the implementation of oral archives, so as to better serve the history of Anti Japanese war.

Key words: Oral archives; The study of Anti-Japanese War; Application; Problem; Countermeasure

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INTRODUCTION

Oral archives provide a wealth of information for the study of the history of the Anti-Japanese War. It can not only confirm and reproduce the history of the war,

make the history more vivid, but also be used to identify relevant historical materials. However, influenced by the limitations of oral archives, references and real materials should be used for authenticity besides in the research of the history of Anti Japanese war.

1. THE CONCEPT AND VALUE OF ORAL ARCHIVES

In 1948, the American Columbia University established the oral history research office, marking the birth of the oral history. The emergence of the oral archives derives from the Dictionary of the Archive Terms published by the International Archives Bureau in 1984. The dictionary defines "Oral Archives" as "the result of a planned interview of the individuals for study and research, which is usually recorded in the form of a voice or written recording". In August 1988, at the Eleventh International Archives Conference, Saliu M Bey with the Senegal Archives officially used the concept of "Oral Archives", and it was widely recognized by the international archives community (Dai, 2011). At present, people in China have different opinions of the concept of Oral Archives; in general, the oral archives can be defined in the narrow and broad sense. In the narrow sense, the oral archives refers to the event witnesses, or recollections of those closely related to the events and informers, including not only the oral archives created by researchers, but also autobiographies, memoirs and other forms. Because autobiographies and memoirs are also personal recollections of the past history, it lacks only the form of the process of the "interview". While in the broad sense, the oral archives refer to all materials processed in the way of dictation and preserved in the form of archives, including oral transmissions, part of the non-material cultural heritage in the dictation form (Ma, 2014).

The characteristics of oral archives are very distinct, featuring individuality, subjectivity, richness and correction (Liu, 2007). It records not the complete history of the country, society, industry, or nation, but the experience, witness, smell, the sense of individuals. However, the record of the individual of the history itself has certain subjectivity, leaving aside the living environment and experience of the respondents. Besides, the different knowledge level of different individual may bring about great gap at angles of looking at problems and ways of presentation. It is because of these differences, historians have gradually focused on the study of the common people, beginning the study of common-like history. The richness and correctness of oral archives lie in that it not only enriches the history, makes alive the history, but also corrects some errors in the official history.

As a new type of archives, Oral archives not only have the value of authenticity, just like traditional documents, but also have practical value and long-term value. Oral archives are interview records of the parties or witnesses based on certain purpose, originally reflecting the real experience, witness and hearings of the involved parties. And the oral archives are the results of the interaction between the participants' questioning and the memory of the respondents, and they are the original records of the practical activities. Different from other forms of interviews, its production process follows the strict standards, aiming to provide a real source of information for future historical research (Huang & Wang, 2013). The reality of oral archives is mainly reflected in the historical research and the public's right to know. With the strengthening of information disclosure, people are paying more and more attention to their personal rights, and they have the right to know the truth of history. On the study of history, especially that of the modern and the contemporary history, historical scholars pay more attention to the collection of oral materials. For example, in the research of the Nanjing massacre, bacterial warfare, the no difference bombing of Japan and other issues, scholars prefer to find the "live" historical materials. Oral archives are just this kind of "live" information, and they happen to make up for the shortage of literature and archives, filling the gaps in history and make up for the vacancies in History.

2. THE ROLE OF ORAL AND APPLICATION ARCHIVES IN THE STUDY OF ANTI-JAPANESE WAR

The Anti-Japanese war is an important part of the study of Chinese modern history, among which the study on oral history or the oral archives of Anti-Japanese war is the key and hot part. After the founding of new China,

in order to collect history of modern China, especially history of major historical events and historical figures, historical, cultural and academic research institutions carries out systematic, extensive and in-depth interviews and field surveys, and conduct organization and research on the gained materials. However, limited by the social and political environment, the scope of the oral historical data collection and collation of the Anti Japanese war is also narrow. Since the mid 1980s, especially since the 1990's, the study of oral history of the Anti-Japanese war has entered a stage of vigorous development. Not only the organization and personnel engaged and involved, and the interviewees of oral interviews in the oral history of the Anti-Japanese War is constantly expanding, but also the way and form of the interviews are also more diverse. At the same time, the scholars have also organized and published a series of oral historical materials and books, which provides a wealth of first-hand information for the study of the Anti-Japanese war (Xu, 2005).

Now, more and more historical researchers are in turn focusing on making those who have gone through the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) to directly narrate or present certain part of fragment of it through interviews, so as to better reflect the real situation of many real history of it. Beside, because the interviewees are victims witnesses or victims of the War, their historical narrative often accompanies with rich emotions and complex psychological feelings, such as joy or sadness, hatred or love and pride or disgrace, and compared with the history revealed through the references and archives, oral archives are more vivid and touching. Though not as complete, systematic and rational as history written by historians, oral archives can provide people with more vivid and emotional way of understanding the Anti-Japanese War. Through this way of understanding the history of Anti-Japanese War, it gives people new feelings, and thus it is considered to be a "living history" (Xu, 2006).

At present, the application of oral archives in the study of the study of the Anti-Japanese War mainly reflects in the following two aspects:

2.1 The Arrangement and Publishing of Oral Archives of the Anti-Japanese War

In the past, the study of the history of the Anti-Japanese War mainly focuses on the study of the political, military, economic and cultural ideas, but ignores the life of the lower class and the concept and ideology. Now more and more historical researchers are paying attention to the witnesses in the period of Anti-Japanese War, and most of the interviewees are just the common people, whose oral information directly reflect the life of the people during the war. For example, series of *Oral History by Chinese Women in the 20th Century*, which tries to display the individual memories of common, such as female

Red Army soldiers, women in Hebei, comfort women survivors, female soldiers in the northeast of China. Therefore, it also has the richness, vividness and historical sense of reality. Through the fate of these common people, we understand the complexity of history, and then feel the changes of social history (Xie, 2003).

In co-editing *Oral History of Anti-Japanese War in Shanxi* (Zhang, 2005), Zhang Chengde and Sun Liping interviewed more than 2000 elder people in more than 500 villages and communities, collected more than 400 million dictating text and a large number of recordings and photographs, to conduct comprehensive research and interview of the political, economic, cultural, military, customs, ecological, health, religious, women, famine, market and ethical morals in Shanxi Province from 1937 to 1945, composing the *Oral History of Anti-Japanese War in Shanxi* with three parts in one roll. Through the real record of the atrocities of the Japanese army, it records people's sufferings and the historical facts of Chinese soldiers and civilians in Shanxi during the war in the way of oral narration by common people (Jin, 2005).

In the *Overall Record of Atrocities of the Japanese Army in Invasion of China* (Li, Xu, & Shi, 1995) co-edited by Lee Bingxin, Xu Junyuan, it includes many research records of the survivors and witnesses and materials by participants and witness of the Japanese atrocity. The book includes non-combat massacre of innocent civilians, the massacre of captives, bombing of peaceful people, bacteria experiment on living people, rape of women, loot of properties and possessing, burning of houses and public buildings, strong grasp of laborer and prostitutes, destroying of the scenic spots and historical sites, religious genocide, and killing of cultural, scientific and technological celebrities, economic exploitation and cultural aggression etc. (Wang, 2015).

In *The Last Group of People Witnessing the Anti-Japanese War from 1931 to 1945* (Fang, 2005), Fang Jun took eight years to walk all over the nation and even extends to overseas, to interview a total of more than 260 people, including dozens of witnesses and survivors, such as the Anti-Japanese soldiers, overseas Chinese returning to China to take part in the War and American Flying Tigers, intellectuals, the workers and comforting women who are kidnapped to Japan and civilians who are victims of the War. He attempts to record the different fates of these people to show cruelty and severity of the Anti-Japanese War in a full range (Wang, 2015).

Zhou Yong is the chief editor of the *Referential Archives of the Big bombing in Chongqing: Witnesses and Their Testimony* (Zhou, 2011). In this book, related experts and scholars interviewed hundreds of witnesses of the War in Chongqing from 19989 to 2007 and conduct a detailed account of the painful experience

of Big Bombing Chongqing, reflecting the damage situation in Chongqing after days of bombing, forming the archives of witnesses and their testimony of the Big Bombing in Chongqing.

These works are interviews of witnesses of the Anti-Japanese War by historical researchers in a long time, and then formed after the clear organization of the oral materials. These works not only is in itself valuable oral archives, but also provides a valuable raw material for the study of the history of the Anti-Japanese War.

2.2 The Study of Anti-Japanese War With the Use of Oral Archives

In recent years, in addition to direct editing and publishing of the oral archives, the achievements by using Anti-Japanese War to conduct processing and creation are more and more.

On the basis of oral archives of the Nanjing massacre, many scholars have carried out the relevant research. They are mainly: Zhu Chengshan, editor in chief of the *Collection of Testimonies by Nanjing Massacre Survivor*, editorial board of *Historical Materials of Nanjing Massacre*, editing *Historical Materials of Nanjing Massacre* and so on, Sun Zhaiwei, Wu Tianwei, co-editing *The Nanjing Massacre—Facts and Records*, Sun Zhaiwei, editor of *Nanjing Massacre*, Xu Zhigeng, editor in chief of the *Blood Sacrifice—Record of Japanese Invaders in the Nanjing Massacre and the Massacre City of Nanjing—Japanese Invaders in the Nanjing Massacre* and so on.

In the study of comfort women, the works are mainly *Research of Comfort Women* by Su Zhiliang, *The Sexual Slavery of the Japanese Army—the Truth of Chinese Comfort Women and Monstrous Sins—the Japanese “Comfort Women” System during World War II* (Co-edited by Su Zhiliang), *Hundreds of Thousands of Comfort Women* by Li Xiuping and *Military Prostitutes of Empire, Real Military Life Record of Comfort Women, Let the Women Themselves Speak: Witnessing the War* by Li Xiaojiang, *Tragic of Comfort Women* by Sun. All these works expose the fact that the Japanese forcefully recruited Chinese “comfort women, record the victim's complaint, narration and recollections.

In the study of Japanese plunder of labor, the main works are *Memoir of Huagang Riots* co-edited by Chen Liang and Zhu Tieying, *Huagang Event* by Zhang Guotong, *The Huagang Riot—the Honorable Action of Chinese Laborers in Anti-Japanese War* by Liu Baochen and so on. These results reflect the historical facts of Chinese laborers being rooted to Japan to engage in heavy labor and subject to inhuman abuse in the Anti-Japanese period.

Researches on the implementation of the Japanese bacteria warfare research include *Evidence of Bacterial Invasion by the Japanese Army* by Han Xiao's, *The Monstrous Bacterial Warfare—Infiltration of Plague in*

Ningbo in 1940 by Huang Ketai and Wu Yuanzhang, *Revelation of the Mystery of 8604—the Exposure of the Secret Bacteria War of Japanese Army in Guangdong* by Sha Dongxun, *Chinese Disaster—Documentary of the Sins of Japanese Invaders in the Anti-Japanese War and the Bacteria War in 1941* by Xing Qi and Chen Daya, *Documentary of the Invasion of Japanese Bacteria Warfare—The Concealed Historical Facts in History* by Guo Chengzhou and Liao Yingchang, *Records of the Japanese Invasion and Bacterial Warfare* by Tong Zhenyu and *Crime Evidence—Record of the Japanese Invaders in Quzhou* by Qiu Mingxuan, and *Documentary of Bacteria Warfare by Japanese Invaders in Chongshan Village, Zhejiang Province*.

Through the above information, it is not difficult to see that, now, fruitful results have been achieved from both oral archives based on the history of the Anti Japanese War and researches on the oral archives.

3. THE EXISTING PROBLEMS AND COUNTERMEASURES IN THE APPLICATION OF ORAL ARCHIVES IN THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE ANTI-JAPANESE WAR

Although oral archives plays a very important role in the study of the history of Anti Japanese War, it is undeniable that there are many problems in the application of the oral archives in the history of the War, which are mainly manifested in the following two aspects:

Firstly, it is the authenticity and objectivity of oral archives. The majority of those interviewed are in old ages. They have rich experiences in life and many resources worth mining. However, in the retelling of the War, due to memory, emotional, psychological factors and knowledge level, it's easy for them to misplace, invert, narrow-mind the facts. If there is no identification and verification of the oral materials, it may easily mislead history research on the Anti-Japanese War.

Secondly, it is the intensity, breadth and the depth of the oral archives are not enough, which makes the rich and potential oral historical materials of the War face the situation of the permanent loss. With the passage of time, those who have experienced the War has died one after one and who are alive less and less, the implementation of the oral archives is urgent (Xu, 2006).

To make a better application of the oral archives in the study of the history of the Anti-Japanese War, we should make efforts for the following two aspects:

First of all, in view of the subjectivity of oral archives, mutual authenticity should be carried out between oral archives and documentary. The process of mutual authenticity between oral archives and documents is the process in which the memory of an individual is verified and valued quantitative after extraction and

integration, and comparison with existing information. If oral materials and documents are consistent in the presentation of something, then the oral archives will be given a human temperature, filled with feelings of sound and image on the original words to reproduce the past time, making the simple historical record made up by six elements of “time, place, person, cause, process and result” turn into human memory and social memory with fresh appeal (Ma, 2014). If the oral material and literature data are contradictory, then the researchers need to find more evidence to determine which side of the argument is correct. In historical research, oral archives and traditional forms of historical materials have their own advantages, if we can combine the two together to reveal the history and supplement each other through mutual authenticity, then the history would be more vivid

Secondly, we should strengthen the intensity, breadth and depth of oral archives. Oral archives are a collection of materials in the form of human narration, rather than the attentive research in the traditional sense. The life of a man is limited, and the time that he is conscious, fluent in language expression and suitable for oral narration is only a few decades, therefore, the oral archives shall be completed when allowed by the language thinking ability and physical condition of the interviewed. There has been 70 years since the victory of the War, and the witnesses of the war are now going into old age, if not listened in time for their oral narration, then their precious memories will forever lose and can not be restored. To this end, we need to further expand the organization and personnel engaged in the collection of oral archives, in order to carry out long-term, systematic collection of oral archives. What's more, we should strengthen the joint efforts of academic research community and scholars at home and abroad in collecting and organizing the historical materials.

CONCLUSION

In a word, oral archives provide a wealth of information for the study of the history of the war, however, we can't overstate and exaggerate the status and role of oral Archives in the study of the history of the Anti-Japanese War. Any one of the oral archives should use the text files and historical materials and the combination of them to conduct mutual authenticity. Thus it can effectively overcome the limitations of oral archives. Only in this way can we build a more comprehensive and objective history of Anti-Japanese War.

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