

ORAL HISTORY IN USM LIBRARY: SUPPORTING REFERENCE AND RESEARCH NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Oral history has usually referred to as an account of historical event, person or place, a first person memory of the past, by an eyewitness. It is regarded as living memories which have great importance in the history of mankind. It has also become a key resource for reconstructing, recreating and recording past and present knowledge of society. Academic libraries have assisted as repositories for books and manuscripts that support in revealing the stories of world's civilization for centuries. The compilation of oral history at the library could help in reference and research if only the effort to record, document, preserve and promote information resources are well planned. Current technology could be of great help to be utilized in relaying the access to the researchers. Through institutional repositories, the visibility of the information could be increased. This paper will explain the importance of oral history, the background of the collection at USM Library and the initiatives taken to promote it as the primary and reliable sources that could play a role in historical research activities in the future.

Keywords: *oral history, Universiti Sains Malaysia Library, reference and research, information sources*

INTRODUCTION

Oral history recording is performed in diverse institutional settings. In libraries and archives settings, oral history is not a new sensation. More than half of a century had passed where archivists and librarians pondered on the hypothetical and functional applications of oral history for archives and research libraries. Libraries had first applied oral sources to fill in the gaps of historical records in the early 1950s and during the late 1960s, some articles in the library and archival literature announced its documentary value. The Oral History Association (OHA) was

found in 1968, by a library science professor named Martha Jane K. Zachert who published an article "The Implications of Oral History for Librarians" to highlight the new accountabilities and prospects facing librarians and the impression of oral history on libraries and archives in the coming decades.

In Malaysia, the realisation on the importance of oral history was not embraced instantaneously. The earliest institution in the country to carry out oral history was Sarawak Museum that started recording source materials in 1957. The National Archive of Malaysia, the National Museum, the Language and Literary Agency, the National Library, the various universities in the country, the mass media, as well as electronic media such as radio and television were among other institutions which had begun conducting and collecting oral history project soon after. Salleh Jafaruddin (1978) in the Colloquium on Oral History and the 4th General Conference of Sarbica at Universiti Sains Malaysia stated that the growth has been gradual, but sure. It gathered momentum as more and more institutions, government departments, organisations and private individuals delved into the subject. He also mentioned that initial works were done on ad-hoc basis and as such they invariably met with problems since projects plans had not been well laid out from the start. Thus, most of the institutions involved in oral history work started with their own objectives, carried out activities as they deemed fit and left off without making available for further research much of the data collected.

There are numerous definitions of oral history that can be found in literatures. National Committee on Oral History National Archive of Malaysia (1991) defines oral history as "the technique of eliciting the reminiscences of selected individuals through recorded interview sessions." The Committee further elaborate, the individuals selected are those considered best able to provide such information as derive from their personal involvement and experience of historical events; from their special relationship with a particular personality; or the bearing that a specific period in history may have had on their lives. The recorded interview, when transcribed, allows for the convenient use of Oral History as both research as well as teaching material. In this way, oral history can be made to contribute significantly to the existing sources on local history.

Rais Yatim (2005), in his opening speech during Seminar on Preservation and Dissemination of Oral History as National Heritage in Kuala Lumpur defined oral history as an activity, a detached and academic process of inquiry into the memories of people who have experienced the recent

past directly. This inquiry and the responses it generates are recorded to supplement written records that have been found wanting in some measure for historical or aesthetic analysis. It is a studied abstract and analytic practice of historians and other social scientist, and it relies heavily on recording devices, whether manual, mechanical, or electronic.

Based from the above mentioned, the definition of oral history can be concluded as a methodology of collecting primary sources from a particular individual for the purpose of generating historical data for the reconstruction of the past. It can be employed by anybody in any fields, not merely by the archives or libraries, because oral history is simply the use of spoken testimonies as a source for history. It is not only preserving the memories of people who have played some important role in society but also encourages research and publication of their memoirs and aide researchers in collecting and using such materials. (Radia Banu, Cik Ramlah, Siti Roudhah, Shahriza Fadly, 2012)

IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral history supplements the written record by interviewing people to attain their reminiscences of events they themselves have experienced by providing new standpoints on historical events because the interviews are conducted not only with prominent people but also with the great majority from all walks of life. Mohd Zaini Haji Baghul (1992) mentioned that over the past decades oral documentation has become widely recognized as an indispensable means of recording and preserving information related to experiences of the past. Historians as well as other academics from various fields have accepted the significance and usefulness of orally transmitted documentation of the past as source materials for research or other documentation purposes. With a particular function as a source of information - knowledge may not necessarily be in written form because it is well known that before knowledge is hatched into written form, the idea is secured in the brain of the teller or reencounter. Therefore, it is crucial to record reminiscences, experiences, testimonies, and reflections from individuals when they are still alive; otherwise the information would be lost to the future generation. Just like a proverb says 'when an old person dies, a library burns to the ground'.

According to Walbert (2002), oral history allows people to learn about the perspectives of individuals who might not otherwise appear in the historical record. While historians and history students can use traditional documents to reconstruct the past, everyday people fall through the

cracks in the written record. Politicians, activists, and business leaders may show up regularly in official documents and the media, but the rest of us very seldom do. Chances are, if someone had to reconstruct your life story from the written record alone, they would have very little to go on and the information they would be able to gather would reveal very little about the heart and soul of your daily life, or the things that matter most to you. Besides that, Oral history allows people to compensate for the digital age. Historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can rely on extensive correspondence and regular diary entries for information about life in the past. But in today's world, telephone, email, and web-based communication have largely replaced those valuable written records. Without oral history, much of the personal history of the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries would be lost to future historians. Walbert also mentioned that oral history allows people to learn different kinds of information. Even when we do have extensive written sources about someone such as a politician we may not have the kind of information we want. Newspaper articles, speeches, and government documents may reveal significant useful information, but those kinds of sources often neglect more personal and private experiences. Through oral history, one can discover about the hopes, feelings, aspirations, disappointments, family histories, and personal experiences of the people being interviewed. In addition, oral history allows people to ask the questions people are interested in. Through talking to people in the community about the past, one can ask and create the source materials that will help in answering some pertinent questions. Moreover, oral history also provides historical actors with an opportunity to tell their own stories in their own words. Through this activity, interviewees have a chance to participate in the creation of the historical retelling of their lives. It is also worth noting that oral history is important in providing a rich opportunity for human interaction. History, after all, is all about the human experience. Through oral history, researchers and interviewees come together in conversation about a commonly shared interest — as with all human interactions, this has the potential to be tremendously rewarding for both parties.

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS IN USM LIBRARY

Universiti Sains Malaysia Library was established in 1969. Malaysia and Archives Division was established in 1982 with two purpose. First, to build a collection that meets the needs of academics and researchers' research in all areas of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam. Second, to save and preserve cultural heritage materials for present and future references. In the context of special collections, the Division is responsible for building, saves

and preserves this collection, and accounted for store and manages a collection of oral histories in the Library. The Oral History Committee of Universiti Sains Malaysia was set up in April 1982 under the chairmanship of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Development), Professor Sharom Ahmat. It comprises representatives from the following branches of the university; the Library, the Educational Technology Unit and the History Section of the School of Humanities. The committee meets periodically to evaluate research projects and to locate funds to finance the projects.

In a survey that was done in 2012, USM library indicated that they currently retain oral history collections and hold approximately 1 to 25 oral history recordings. The Library doesn't have an established policy regarding the collection, processing and use of oral history collection. Audio tapes and typed/handwritten transcript are the most commonly held format even though it also holds the collections in digital-video-discs (DVD) and digital files format. However, there is an awareness among the librarians that digital format will become more prevalent in the future and Oral history collections previously available in audio taped formats are in danger due to media deterioration, thus in need of format refreshment or transfer into new medium. As for physical treatment of the materials, USM library made use copies of recordings and migrated deteriorating formats to digital. Various topics of oral history are being collected. USM library covered topics on Japanese occupation in Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia and Prominent figures of Penang and Kenangan Abadi (Corporate Memory collection). Systematic representations to aid in discovery as well as individual ability to use materials once patrons are aware that they exist should be created. Therefore, the library provides access on oral histories to their users and researchers through full MARC records in Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). This format allows users to conduct more useful and productive searches of library holdings. According to the survey, the main faculty that has been accessing oral history collection in the library is the School of Humanities, USM. The survey also indicated that the usage of oral history collection for research purposes in the institution is between the range of 1 to 25 per year.

The collections of oral history available in USM Library are as follows:

A. History of Japanese Occupation

The first Oral History project that was produced by the Oral History Committee of USM is 'The Japanese occupation in the Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia' that covers Kelantan, Perak and Penang. This 2-year project involved the lecturers and students from the Division of

History. Individuals from all walks of life who have gone through the life in the Japanese occupation were interviewed for their views regarding the administration of Japanese in certain areas, daily problems related to food, business and employment as well as general view of the military camps, the Japanese entry into the city, social disruption, the resistance movement and the reaction of the people in general.

The tapes recording of the interviews were cataloged and indexed by the Library for ease of reference. University will ensure the recording and transcript only being used in line with the informant. For this purpose, an official agreement was made with each person interviewed, set conditions how the recorded interview and transcript will be produced and used. Among local personalities who have been interviewed were Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Koh Sin Hock and Captain Mohamad Nor.

Recording is available in cassette tape, transcript (printed and digital) and compact disc (VCD).

1. Y.T.M. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj	24/03/80
2. Mr. L. R. Shori	22/08/83
3. Mr. Chan Yik King	20/09/83
4. Mrs. P .A.Dass	26/10/83
5. Mr. Khoo Chor K wee	27/10/83
6. Mr. Teoh Chooi Hor	12/11/83
7. Mr. Tan Lip San	06/04/84
8. Mr. Heah Hock Khoon	06/04/84
9. Mr. Cheang Kok Choy	13/04/84
10. Tun Datuk Hj Awang Hassan	23/07/84
11. Mr. Doraisamy s/o Narayanasamy	09/10/84
12. Mr. Tsang Jan Nam	11/10//84
13 . Mr. Wen Tze Chian	11/11//84
14. Mr. Lim Hong Pei	12/11/84
15. Mr. Han Kok Fu	14-16/11/84
16. Mr. Ng Yeam Poey	07/12/84
17. Mr. K. S. Maniam	09/03/85
18. Mr. M. B. Jinadesa	06/04/85
19. Y.T.M. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj	29/04/85
20. Mr. Joginder Singh Jessy	07/05/85

21. Datuk Ghani	23/05/85
22. Mr. E. D. F. Cooray	11/10/85
23. Dato' Abdul Razak Hamid	28/12/2002
24. Mr. Mohd Jagar Din	n.d.
25. Mr. Manicasothy Saravanamuthu	n.d.
26. Mr. Majid Mohd	n.d.
27. Dato' Hj. Abdul Razak	2002
28. Mr. James Jeremiah	n.d.
29. Dato' Hajjah Saleena Yahaya	13/07/2007
30. Dato' (Dr.) Anwar Fazal Mohamed	18/07/2008

B. Penang Public Figure

This collection presenting the individuals who have contributed to Penang on education, community, administrative, religious and so on. The recording is saved in the format of video compact disc (VCD).

1. Dato ' Hajjah Wan Johara Mohd. Sultan 7/11/2008

(The interviews were conducted with individuals that closed to her:

- Datin Hajah Wan Zainab Abu Backer – daughter
- Hajah Latiffah Abdul Rahman - friend
- Hajah Zaiton Merican - friend
- Ustazah Sutar-bi Yahaya Marican – friend)

2. Dato' Hajjah Khairon Mohd Ali 19/12/2008

C. Kenangan Abadi

The collection is produced by the Project Committee of Kenangan Abadi in the format of video compact disc (VCD). The aim of this project is to record information and experiences by the public figures that have contributed to the development of USM since its establishment.

Information and experience were never recorded or documented before.

1. Tan Sri Hamzah Sendut, The first Vice Chancellor
2. Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir, The Second Vice Chancellor
3. Dato' N. A. Ogle, The first Registrar
4. Encik Lim Huck Tee, The first Chief Librarian

5. Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, The third Vice Chancellor
6. Dato' Sharom Ahmat, Deputy Vice Chancellor

D. Bicara Ilmu Kaum Peranakan Asia Tenggara

These collection resulted from Program Bicara Ilmu which was held in conjunction with Majlis Pelancaran Koleksi Kaum Peranakan Asia Tenggara on 14 April 2010 officiated by YB. Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled bin Nordin, Minister of Higher Education Malaysia.

1. Tuan Haji Yusoff Azmi Merican, Kaum Jawi Peranakan
2. Tuan Haji Mohd. Mustakim Mohd. Mastan, Kaum Jawi Peranakan
3. Pak Majid (Tok Dalang Wayang Kulit Seri Asun), Kaum Siam Peranakan
4. Bapak Tjong Fung Fon, Kaum Cina Peranakan Indonesia
5. K. Nadarajan Raja, Kaum India Peranakan

Apart from the collections of the above, there was an oral history interview held with a model public intellectual, Professor Syed Hussein Al-Attas' who has spoken at the International Conference of Libraries 2005 organized by Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Final product for oral history may appear in various formats. It may come with complete documentary style of videos complete with the transcript or it may be documented as a book and it may be in a form of digital audio. It depends on how the oral history team wants to manage the information to be accessed by the user. In USM, it is easier to provide the information in the traditional form of book combined with historical and selected photos and bibliographies inside for further research. With this medium, it is believed that the information can be disseminated more comprehensively and it may also be transform in the form of digital books in the future. For the users, it may saves their times and provide more meaningful comprehension for the subject of the oral history content. These are the two publications resulting from oral history.

E. Sejarah Masjid & Keramat Di Pulau Pinang 1730-an-2012

Published as a book, the study was based on original works entitled "Historical survey of the mosques and Kramat in Penang Island" that has been done by a group of students from Malayan Teachers College in 1974. This book was published under the Think City grant lead by Dr. Mahani Musa and involved many researches from various local governments' organizations such as:

- Majlis Agama Islam Pulau Pinang,
- Jabatan Perancang Bandar dan Desa
- National Archive of Malaysia
- Pulau Pinang Museum
- Pulau Pinang Public Library
- Mosques management include Imam, Siak, bilal and khatib
- Persons who inherited stories about the mosque or Muslim Saints

The book has contributed to sociocultural heritage and serves as evidence of Islamic community engagement in Pulau Pinang as an important trade port since 18th century. Mosque is a place for the Muslim societies to socialize, shares thoughts and culture and Keramat is a place for people of different background to place offerings and do good deeds. It contains 75 mosque entry and 24 entries for Keramat in Pulau Pinang since 1730 to 2012.

F. Memori 100 tahun Sekolah Al Mashoor

Original idea to produce this publication comes from Yang Di-Pertua Negeri Pulau Pinang, Tuan Yang Terutama Tun Dato' Seri Utama (Dr.) Haji Abdul Rahman bin Haji Abbas in a short meeting with the Chairman of the Jam'iyah Al-Ikha Al Khairiyah at Seri Mutiara in May 2016. This publication will serve as an appreciation to a well-known religious school that already produces many scholars and figures in Malaysia and around the world. The effort was funded by Yusof Abbas Rafie, son to Ustaz Sheikh Abbas Al Rafie who is a one of dedicated teacher in Al Mashoor. The project also was led by Dr. Mahani Musa from History Section of Humanities School of USM. It contains 15 entries of memories from interviews done by the group formed by Dr. Mahani and a note from Sheikh Mohd Hussein Rafie to the Pulau Pinang Director of Education in 1979. For this project, the library collaborate with the School of Humanities in terms of technical facilities and preparation for conducting interviews which include drafting the questions for the interviewees, transcribing the interviews, shooting videos, taking photographs and scanning of photos and certificates of the interviewees and applying the ISBN number for the book.

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION IN USM INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORY

University libraries have long been the main player in supporting academic research. However, the recognition of importance of libraries in supporting research might be declining since researchers could manage to get the information online without having to go to the library, using

the library gateway. Some of them don't even recognize the contents available in library collections. Academic researchers mainly use electronic resources, which they access remotely, with only arts and humanities researchers visiting libraries regularly, but less often than before (RIN, 2007). Librarians have also reported that developing liaison relationships with researchers is difficult because researchers prefer to work independently, access information remotely and are satisfied with their information searching abilities (Grefsheim & Rankin 2007; Haglund & Olsson 2008; Haines et al. 2010; Research Information Network 2007).

Veryard (1986) mentioned that visibility is an important property of human activity systems. The intentions, workings and structure of any system should not be hidden away but open to view. The point of enhancing visibility is to improve the relationship between systems and people. Therefore, in order to better market the resources and services available in the library including Oral History, USM Library will be displaying the records in its Institutional Repository to make it more visible and serves the reference and research needs of the users.

According to Markulin and Šember (2014), Institutional repository (IR) is an online archive that captures and preserves works created by members of an institution, providing access to them in digital form. The content of an IR has to be institutionally defined, scholarly, cumulative, perpetual, open, and interoperable. IR can host peer-reviewed articles published by scientific and professional journals, as well as other content, such as theses, professional and technical reports, conference proceedings, data sets, etc. By concentrating the intellectual products of an institution IR provides:

1. Greater visibility of the scholarly work, increasing the impact and prestige of the authors and their institution in the scientific community.
2. Support to the scientific and educational process in the institution i.e. reference and research needs.
3. Public insight into the institutional intellectual output, also important to the funding bodies or sponsors.
4. Cost reduction in acquisition of scientific literature.

USM REPOSITORY (REPOSITORY@USM)

The Universiti Sains Malaysia Institutional Repository (Repository@USM) was developed and launched in 2008 and serves as a repository for storing a variety of electronic information materials such as articles from academic magazines, books, thesis, examination papers, research reports, photographs and others. Perpustakaan Hamzah Sendut is the department which responsible to manage this repository as a whole. This repository provides free access to the world and can be used freely for research and learning at the University. It can be used as an online reference source that is easy, effective and accessible at any times via the Internet. This repository also plays a role to guarantee continuity of intellectual property in the USM community as an online reference source and supports the vision and mission of USM Library to achieve the APEX standard. The establishment of the library's institutional repository has helped transform the Library into a digital library where materials can be accessed quickly through a computer network anytime anywhere in line with current fast growing technological developments. Repository@USM can be accessed at <http://eprints.usm.my> or via library website www.lib.usm.my and USM portal www.usm.my.

Google scholar index (visibility to all over the world)

Google Scholar provides a simple way to broadly search for scholarly literature. From one place, you can search across many disciplines and sources: articles, theses, books, abstracts and court opinions, from academic publishers, professional societies, online repositories, universities and other web sites. Google Scholar helps you find relevant work across the world of scholarly research. Google Scholar uses automated processes for indexing. To index a repository well, our search engine robots need to be able to quickly reach all articles by following links from the home page and they need to be able to recognize bibliographic data for the article. If our robots are unable to find the URL for an article or are unable to fetch it, the article cannot be included in the Scholar index. Furthermore, if they are unable to determine correct metadata for the article, we may not be able to identify citations to the article - which in turn will impact its ranking and visibility (Google Scholar, 2016).

Repository@USM is a platform that compatible to index by Google scholar. Google scholar will index the collections in repository and make it visible online. When users search items in google scholar, the search results will include the collections of repository if the topic is available in the collections of our repository and it also provides link to our repository. Google scholar is an academic search engine that was been used by people all over the world. By depositing OH

collections in the repository and being index by google scholar, we can promote our OH collections all over the world.

Visibility in Malaysia – MALRep (<http://malrep.uum.edu.my/rep/>)

Besides that, our repository also being added to MALRep that helps in visibility of the materials to all users in Malaysia. Users just need to do a search via MALRep website and the results will include all collections of institutional repository in Malaysia.

The MALRep© is a union catalog of records representing open access digital resources that was built by harvesting from Malaysian Higher Education Provider (HEP) open access collections using the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH). Today, MALRep includes more than 349k records representing digital resources from more than 25 contributors. The records of the open access digital resources available via MALRep lead to a wide range of materials and include: Journal articles, Newspapers, Manuscripts, Digital text, Photographic images (jpeg, tiff, gif) and Theses and research papers.

This discovery service is able to search Malaysian Academic Library Institutional Repository from various information databases (OAI-PMH Service). Authentication required when users are trying to get fulltext documents. MALRep includes all contents of 27 Malaysia Institutional Repositories from 24 Libraries. It helps users to get information from various institutional repositories in Malaysia.

Visibility in ASEAN – AUNILO (ASEAN University Libraries Network) Repositories

Our repository's contents also available and can be search at AUNILO Institutional Repository Discovery Service <http://aunilo.uum.edu.my/Find/>. This is the Discovery service that harvests all Institutional Repositories of AUNILO members' libraries.

AUNILO is a continuous effort in enhancing information networking among member universities through the sharing of digital academic resources. It would support the development of an ASEAN virtual university, which is the AUN's ultimate goal. There are 30 AUNILO member libraries from 10 AUN member countries are committed to share information resources that are available from university library repositories. All AUNILO members' libraries can get access to our collections in institutional repository.

Oral History collections in Perpustakaan Hamzah Sendut will be uploaded to repository to make it visible to all users all over the world. The full text will not be revealed but the brief information about OH collections will be displayed, hence the users will come to the library for further reference for their research. By making OH collections available in repository, the visibility of them in all platforms as mentioned above will help in promoting the collections.

CONCLUSION

Oral history has been an important research methodology and tapes and transcripts need to be effectively integrated into academic library collections. According to Swain (2003), archivists and librarians must assume an active role in oral history discourse, collaborate with each other and colleagues in other fields, and be attuned to current scholarship needs if archives and special collections departments are to be viable, utilized research sources in the future. Zachert (1968) mentioned that oral history provides a unique opportunity for academic librarians to draw on their research expertise, public relations skills, and knowledge of collection gaps to make a “creative, intellectual contribution.” In other words, archivists and librarians must be knowledgeable about research trends and needs of their users. They must be aware of collection gaps, become familiar with their user groups, keep tabs on what questions are being asked, develop relationships with faculty on campus, and enrich their knowledge of their collection subject area or identify and connect with those who are experts in the subject. If archives and libraries are to be relevant and responsive to the research interests of their users, they must seek out and identify the resources these users need through oral history, active collection development, and appraisal. If they do not hold the resources needed by current scholars, scholars will go elsewhere. Oral history is a valuable research tool with historical value and nature. The academic community must place emphasis on the entire cycle of oral histories if future generations of scholars are to profit from their rich content. It is up to the library to rejuvenate these materials by preserving and providing dynamic access.

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