

**Oral history collections development of practitioners and  
cultural institutions in Malaysia: the use of Mediated  
Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model**

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**MONASH** University

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Hanis Diyana Kamarudin

Doctor of Philosophy

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
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## ABSTRACT

Oral history is an essential method to capture history when it is not recorded elsewhere. In Malaysia, the shortage of written documentation from previous authorities and colonial powers has accelerated the need for oral history as a method to capture valuable untold community stories. Currently, local content concerning the community in Malaysia is still not being sufficiently captured and preserved, and most of the local historical collections available are not sufficient for research needs. Furthermore, most of the past research in the oral history field has solely highlighted theories on conducting oral history, or presented studies about particular ethnicities or groups, generations, regions, and places. There is a clear need to organise oral history collections and for oral history techniques to be widely promoted.

This study proposes a comprehensive protocol, *The Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol*, as a method for all Malaysian cultural institutions to revisit or scrutinise their policies and to strategise oral history programs. The protocol is informed by a qualitative approach that investigated the current oral history practices of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals. Bringing together the perspectives of oral history practitioners, cultural institution professionals and the current initiatives undertaken by cultural institutions is a unique feature of the study as these connections are, to date, significantly under-explored and under-addressed. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model was used to interpret the practices, and the study found ways to extend this model to reflect oral history practices.

The proposed protocol is important to cultural institutions and to the community in Malaysia, as it highlights ways of reframing and transforming the current practices of oral history to enrich local history and community memory for future generations.

**Keywords:** *Oral history, memory, cultural institutions, Malaysian community, identity, community of practice, Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model*

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Hanis Diyana Kamarudin

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*'Oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews'* (Ritchie, 2003). Oral history is first-hand information, passed on through the testimony of interviewees or research participants. Gorman and Clayton (2005) state two significant reasons why oral history is more in demand in recent decades. First, oral history can be corrective to the existing, largely print-based, history sources as the voices from unprivileged interviewees are captured. The second reason, initiated by historians, is that they believe oral testimony can contribute deeper insights to understand and overcome complex public history, by recording people's viewpoints about a researched topic.

Malaysia's citizens come from diverse races, religions, cultures and traditions. To date, there are initiatives to document historical information related to well-known or prominent figures, such as political leaders, royal families and other elite groups (Muhamad, 1996). However, what is still lacking is the local content related to Malaysian communities which have contributed significantly to both the communities' and nation's development. One of the techniques applied to capture historical information, to enrich and preserve the local content, is through oral history. Even though oral history techniques have been applied by several cultural institutions in Malaysia, to increase local collections, there is a need to develop a better way to document a community's memories. This thesis will discuss oral history's development and the management aspects which require further improvement.

### 1.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The first chapter has been divided into eleven subtopics. This chapter provides an overview of the coverage and structure of the thesis. It starts by indicating the motivation for this research and the background to the research, followed by the problems and gaps in the field of study. The objectives and scope of the research, its significance and contribution to the new knowledge, are outlined along with its limitations. The final part of this chapter elaborates on the organisation of the thesis.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THIS RESEARCH**

The focus of this research is on the development and management of oral history collections in Malaysia. The changing technologies have contributed to different ways of managing oral history collections, by both cultural institutions and local communities. My motivation, as a researcher, for studying the participation of communities in oral history originates from both research and pragmatic perspectives and from my background in the archives and records management field. My previous experience has driven me to conduct this research. The outcome of this research focuses attention on understanding that oral history is a useful and vital research technique, which can involve the community's participation. One of the exciting projects that I was actively involved with was a project related to capturing documentation about the usage of traditional herbs among indigenous people, called Batek communities. For me, this was a crucial project, where the voice of the community was being captured to preserve their invaluable indigenous knowledge.

From 2009 until the present, I have worked as an academic in the Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia and taught oral history as one of the core subjects. From my experience as a lecturer, I observed that oral history enables students to become immersed in the process of documenting communities' valuable stories. One of the most significant challenges when constructing an oral history interview is where I need to find preliminary information about the community being researched. Due to a lack of authentic local historical information in Malaysia, oral history projects need to start from scratch. My personal experience of accessing the local history held by cultural institutions was quite challenging. Most of the available recorded oral history interviews capture the history as seen by prominent figures. There are limited transcripts produced to guide researchers to track the flow of the audio recordings. Some of the transcripts produced do not follow a well-ordered transcription style. As a result, I needed to go back, play the audio cassette to get the details of the story and listen to the recording from the beginning. From this scenario, it indicates that oral history collections need to be managed from their early creation phase until the pluralisation process.

## **1.3 RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Trade and migration have contributed to the development of Malaysia. The British migration policy, designed to meet the labour needs of the colony, caused a massive movement of Indians and Chinese into Malaysia in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Idrus, 2016). These events



provided the starting point for Malaysia becoming rich and diverse in its languages, cultures, religions and customs. With the divide and conquer policy operated by the British in Malaya, the ethnic groups were divided based on their occupation.

Chinese indentured labourers were brought to Malaysia primarily for mining activities, especially tin, while Indian labourers were brought in to work in rural areas, on rubber estates<sup>1</sup>. According to Hirschman (1986), the Chinese became miners and businessmen, the Indians worked the plantations, while the Malays tended to stay in their rural villages and farm their land. The Malays and other indigenous groups were afforded special protection, as the British viewed them as the natives of the land.

Malaysia attained independence in 1957 as part of the de-colonisation process. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj was the first Malaysian Prime Minister. After independence, the Federation of Malaya was established as a parliamentary democracy, consisting of a federal government and thirteen state governments. Most of the nation's leaders came from the Malay political party, and the constitution was controlled by a Malay king, with the kingship rotating every five years<sup>2</sup>.

Malaysia, as a multicultural country, has been highly influenced by British political, social and governmental structures. The impact of the colonial era is not only seen from its economic implications, but also in the political arena. Previous governments addressed the issue of inequality by introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) to fulfil the diverse ethnic needs and narrow the economic and class gaps. However, the tragic ethnic riots that occurred in May 1969 proved that there was a huge gap, especially in economic inequality, between the different ethnic groups. Other than for the financial empowerment aspect, there is a great need for concern about the social development of the whole Malaysian community.

The shortage of written documentation, from the colonial powers and the early formation of Malaysia, has accelerated the need for oral history to be employed to capture the valuable untold community stories. Such untold community stories might consist of local traditions and history, the uniqueness of the ethnic communities including the Aboriginal people, the deeds of inspiring rural community leaders, the undocumented history of local places and landmarks, parenting methods, the history of the colonised people, traditional medicines and treatments

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<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth website (2017): <http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/malaysia/society>.

<sup>2</sup> MyGovernment website (2018): <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/content/30120>.

and the story behind national events and tragedies, as seen from the different communities' perspectives.

The government of Malaysia has invested in cultural institutions, with the intention of preserving the valuable national heritage of the diverse cultures and arts communities (Ming (2014) and Abu (2014)). The government hopes, with the development of cultural institutions, to bring a positive improvement to the various communities in terms of their way of thinking, to help them to make appropriate decisions about their future, based on their previous recorded history. One of the greatest challenges in Malaysia lies in the government's need to plan, coordinate and accommodate the needs of a society of citizens coming from multi-cultural backgrounds. This is where the government needs to cater to its citizens' needs, including the political, economic, social and educational aspects.

Oral history is practiced in various local and international institutions and it is not a new initiative for libraries, museums or archives either. However, the realisation of the significance of oral history, as a technique and as a supplement to fill the gaps in the written historical sources in Malaysia, was not realised immediately. In 1957, the Sarawak Museum became the earliest cultural institution in Malaysia to conduct and collect oral history and it was followed by the National Archive of Malaysia, the National Library, the Language and Literary Agency, the National Museum, local universities in Malaysia and local electronic media such as television and radio stations (Mohamad et.al, 2012).

As noted by Ding Choo Ming (2014), a Professor and Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the method of collecting oral history through memory has become popular, since many of the cultural memories vanish with the loss of the elders. Formerly, most of the cultural institutions in Malaysia involved in oral history undertook research by defining their own goals. Hence, the oral history conducted in Malaysia started on an ad-hoc basis. Local oral history collections are dispersed and have little communication either with each other or with the wider community, due to improper planning and less than clear project objectives (Kabeer, 1979).

#### **1.4 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Public cultural institutions such as the National Archives, National Library, the Department of Museums, and the National Art Gallery in Malaysia fall under the authority of Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC). This ministry is entrusted with creating links

between tourism, the arts and culture, in order to promote Malaysia as a preferred tourism destination by highlighting its community and national identity<sup>3</sup>. This transformation reflects the government's urgency in fostering cultural diversity amongst communities in Malaysia through cultural institutions and crucial as one of the strategies to promote and encourage academic staff and students to utilise archival materials in the teaching and learning process.

Cultural institutions play significant roles in community development and empowerment, through various activities including oral history programmes. Several cultural institutions in Malaysia have initiated oral history techniques in order to enrich their information relating to the local community's history in Malaysia. Recently, public cultural institutions in Malaysia have been actively connecting their historical collections through interactive networks and a digital environment, in order to attract their community's interest in cultural institutions (Manaf, 2008). Cultural institution professionals hope, that with the activities initiated, the preservation and conservation of culture and arts in society can be enhanced and the level of engagement with the local communities can be improved.

To enrich local oral history collections, cultural institutions need to put more effort into attracting their communities' participation in oral history projects, as well as becoming contact points to cater for diverse community needs. As a recent study conducted by Ariffin (2016) found, to establish such an engagement with the community or users is not always an easy task. Despite the growing number of cultural institutions in Malaysia, a study conducted by Abu, Grace and Carroll (2011) reported that facilities such as public libraries in Malaysia are still not fully utilised; for example, school students, rather than adults, are the primary users of library services. The services provided by the cultural institutions in Malaysia should not only be employed and used by school students; those institutions should be engaging with adults and a diverse range of other users.

The rapid advancement of information communication technology in Malaysia has provided people with abundant information. However, there is still a lack of local historical content and collections available for research. There are gaps in the written records, particularly regarding historical events and essential facts, which can be recorded from different group of individuals (Musa, 2018). The availability of comprehensive local historical collections emphasising community and national identity is still inadequate as they are not being sufficiently and consistently captured.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MOTAC) website (2018): <http://www.motac.gov.my/en/profile/history>.

A study conducted by Ariffin and Dyson (2012) points out that most of the local historical collections available in Malaysia, especially on the Internet, are neither sufficient for research needs, nor can be verified as reliable. This has become a huge challenge to students, academics and researchers seeking to locate local historic information to satisfy and expand the context of their research. For village communities, it is important that local content is preserved, as it is a part of their identity and memory.

There is a need to examine the current practices by communities in Malaysia and further investigate how cultural institutions can reframe and transform themselves to fulfil local communities' needs. By evaluating a community's participation in oral history projects, cultural institutions can strategise better services for the community, hence strengthening the nation's history. It is crucial to find a way to listen to what a community thinks if a cultural institution is to help in determining which parts of a community's identity and history are essential and need recording and preserving (Bastian & Alexander, 2009). To date, little has been done to investigate the role of cultural institutions and how they could be more responsive to the needs of communities, from the initial process of creation, through to access to, and pluralisation of, oral history collections. Therefore, this study aims to shed new light on community participation in oral history projects, as well as how cultural institutions could reframe or transform themselves to accommodate the local communities' oral history collections. In addressing these matters, the findings can make an important contribution to advancing the understanding of oral history's management and development in Malaysia. The following is a brief description of the objectives of this research.

## **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This research aims to add a new dimension of oral history insights from the oral history practitioners' and cultural institutions professionals' perspectives. This study seeks to examine the current practices of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals in Malaysia. This study also aims to investigate how cultural institutions can reframe and transform themselves to enrich their local community's oral history collections. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is used as a tool to address the research questions which will be outlined in Chapter 4. At the end of the study, the researcher will construct a protocol to develop and manage local community oral history collections in Malaysia based on the theoretical lens.

## **1.6 RESEARCH SCOPE**

This study focuses on the participation of oral history practitioners in oral history collections' development, while exploring the methods of reforming oral history services by cultural institutions to accommodate local communities' needs. This study examines oral history practices from oral history practitioners' and cultural institution professionals' perspectives, but it does not represent the entire views of other groups in Malaysian society.

This research is looking specifically at the and development, collection and management of oral history. This study was conducted at the National Archives of Malaysia and at other selected cultural institutions, which develop oral history collections. Data were gathered from these cultural institutions, along with one or two key participants from each institution and oral history practitioners. Since the research was conducted in Malaysia, the results are specific to that country and may not apply to other countries.

## **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

This study seeks to produce a national oral history collection development protocol in the context of Malaysia. This is done by highlighting the significant procedures and processes required to be taken into consideration by oral history practitioners and cultural institutions. It focuses attention on the significance of oral history programmes as one way to enrich valuable local content in Malaysia. The findings in the study are crucial in providing practical suggestions for the cultural institutions that are currently involved in, or plan to take part in, oral history's collection and storage to form an ideal oral history programme for local communities in Malaysia.

## **1.8 ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

The impact and contributions from this study are to identify and provide a new way of understanding oral history's management processes, which may help oral history practitioners, cultural institution professionals and local communities in Malaysia to consider the crucial issues and aspects that need to be developed and improved in this area. The future role of individuals, as practitioners and cultural institution professionals who are involved in oral history, is discussed to assist future actions by cultural institutions and other related parties. The contributions of this research are three-fold:

***i. Data collection approach***

Data from the research were collected from a number of perspectives, namely expert informants, oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals. For this reason, the data collection approach applied in this study first considered the Malaysian oral history's management context and perspectives. Input gathered from the interviews with those groups of research participants were used to create an oral history collections development protocol.

***ii. Adoption of the model as a theoretical lens***

The researcher has conducted a literature search to get a better understanding of the model before using it as a theoretical lens. A records continuum theorist was interviewed to help the researcher gain a better understanding of the model. The researcher found that each element inside the model is useful and appropriate as a basis for developing a protocol for oral history collections in Malaysia.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model was developed in a specific context, that of YouTube contributors or users perspectives. This model has not been tested outside of that context. Therefore, the researcher applied it to oral history context, which is more complex, in part because it deals with a broader range of potential participants. By adoption of the model, issues related to the role of institutions were identified. In addition, a Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol and other relevant recommendations have been outlined by the adoption of the model as a theoretical lens.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model and its theoretical perspectives are applied in a new context where a theoretical contribution to the oral history discipline is being achieved. Interview questions were developed based on each dimension, level and axis which suits oral history's context and nature. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has been used as a checklist to assess the practices in oral history's management and development by oral history's practitioners and cultural institution professionals. With the adaptation of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model for oral history's context, practical and useful recommendations can be produced as strategies to develop more accountable inclusive oral history collections.

### iii. **Community Oral history Collections' Development Protocol**

The outcome of the model's adaptation will be turned into a protocol that oral history practitioners, cultural institution professionals and local communities can apply. In the future, there is a possibility that the local communities in Malaysia will manage their community centres: such as community archives, libraries or museums. Those local communities could refer to the protocol as a guideline for the initial process, such as co-creating through to pluralising oral history collections. Furthermore, the protocol could be used as a strategy for cultural institution professionals in the planning and managing of their oral history collections and in recommending how cultural institutions could enrich local history through oral history techniques.

## 1.9 RESEARCH PROGRESSION

Figure 1 shows the overview of phases and processes that are involved in this research. The detailed processes are described in Chapter 4.

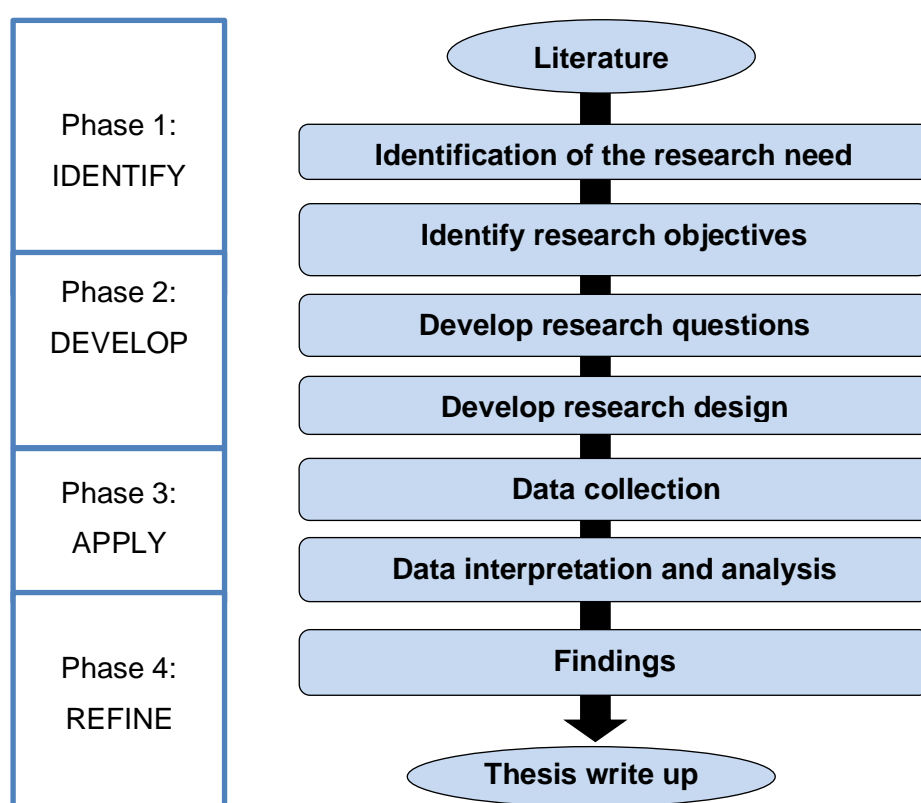


Figure 1: Research progression

## **1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1 presents the key foundation of this research, which includes the principal motivation for conducting the research, the background to the research, problem statements, research objectives, the scope and significance of the research and the expected contributions of the research.

Chapter 2 establishes the chain of this research with the available literature to set the context for this research. The definition of the terms used in this research, as well as the introduction to Malaysia as the research site and other essential concepts related to the scope of the research are discussed as part of the vital process to develop the research questions.

Chapter 3 will discuss the context and theoretical lens. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model will be discussed in this chapter. The relationship of this model and the structuration theory and records continuum model is explained. The dimensions, levels and axes of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model are defined and described to provide a clear understanding of the model as a theoretical lens for this study.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and the methods employed in conducting the study. This chapter discusses all the steps taken to go through the various stages of this research, as it is crucial to produce significant findings and an ethical research process. The research questions, paradigm, methodology, procedures for data gathering and analysis are explained in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is developed to describe the findings based on the interviews conducted with oral history practitioners. The profile of the oral history practitioners and the current practices for the development of oral history collections and the issues and challenges in oral history's management, based on the oral history practitioners' perspectives, are described. The structure of the results is arranged based on the five dimensions, twenty-nine levels and six axes of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

The main discussion in Chapter 6 includes the profile of the cultural institution professionals and the background of the cultural institutions. This chapter also outlines the current situation regarding the development of oral history collections and discusses the methods to develop and expand local community oral history collections from the cultural institution professionals perspectives. This chapter also discusses how cultural institution professionals co-create, capture, organise, curate and pluralise oral history collections in cultural institutions. Similar to



Chapter 5, this chapter brings the dimensions, levels and axes of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model as the theme for the analysis.

The analysis of the findings are discussed in Chapter 7. The aspects and input highlighted by the findings are used as the main aspects to develop the protocol which is also presented in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 8 contains the summary of the objectives of the research, the summary of the study's contributions to theory and practice and the recommendations for future research.

### **1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The first part of the thesis describes how the researcher decides on the research problems by taking into account the researcher's background knowledge and personal experience in the oral history field. The interest in this particular subject area helps the researcher to encapsulate the background to the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

There is much available literature that discusses oral history development especially from well-developed countries. The available reference sources provide insight into current oral history's development and the initiatives undertaken by various institutions around the world to document valuable untold community histories. The literature enhances the understanding of contemporary thinking about current oral history's research processes and its development. Databases, such as JSTOR, Informit, Proquest, Emerald Insight and ScienceDirect, were used as retrieval tools to access published research articles. The search terms used included: oral history, community, cultural institutions, participation, memories, identities and heritage. Books published by prominent scholars in the field of oral history were also used as reference sources. The literature searching strategies helped to frame the research objectives and research questions in this proposed study. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, which is used as the theoretical model for this research, will be explicitly explained in Chapter 3: Theoretical lens.

The common terminologies used in this research are explained. The relationship between orality and literacy, the importance of oral history, the development of oral history in other countries and in Malaysia, the challenges in developing oral history collections in Malaysia, the oral history programs initiated in cultural institutions, the oral history collection policy in Malaysia, the description of community oral history and the transformation in oral history development in broad perspectives will be highlighted in this chapter.

#### 2.2 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following definitions of terms are used throughout this study. While the terms oral history, local content, community, community of practice, local community, cultural institutions and cultural institution professionals can be applied to different domains, the following definitions are applied based on the oral history context of the research.

### 2.2.1 Oral History

Oral history can represent individual stories, with the people who describe the story identified as its narrators or interviewees. Recorded oral history interviews can represent individual stories and the meaning behind each story. Every individual has a different way of telling stories and the stories told could describe the identity of their narrators. Oral history is considered as one of the ways to preserve individual and community memories (Dayton-Wood et al, 2012).

Oral history is the practice and research method for recording people's voices and analysing memories of the past. Abrams (2010) points out that oral history has two important aspects. First, it refers to the practice of recording interviews with people, to obtain information about the past. Oral history can also represent or relate to the product of an interview previously conducted. In other words, oral history can be considered the practice of recording people's memories or the result of the documentation process. Other terms are linked to oral history, such as life-story and personal testimony research. However, 'oral history' seems to be the most appropriate word to incorporate the practice and the product, because it is widely accepted and applied by scholars and practitioners around the world (Shopes, 2005).

Oral history requires a well-planned interview session between the interviewer and interviewee. According to Ritchie (2011) an interview turns into an oral history when it has been documented, reproduced, and made accessible in repositories such as archives, libraries or museums. The National Committee on Oral History, National Archive of Malaysia (1991) describes oral history as a 'Technique for eliciting the reminiscences of selected individuals through recorded interview sessions' (cited in Mohamad et.al, 2012).

For the purpose of this research, the researcher uses the term oral history to describe both a research technique for documenting and capturing selected individuals' and communities' voices or video recordings, and for the product of that process. Oral history is captured in order to preserve valuable stories for future generations and to form part of the nation's heritage for the future.

### 2.2.2 Local content

Information sources, from a community's or society's perspective, are significant for facilitating interactions and communicating knowledge. According to Uzuegbu (2012), local content is locally generated information which is essential for national development and community empowerment. Oral history is known as one of the initiatives to increase the availability of local content for future reference. In a paper presented by Abdul Waheed Khan to UNESCO [n.d] and the World Summit on the Information Society, local content is defined as:

*An expression and communication of a community's locally generated, owned and adapted knowledge and experience that is relevant to the community's situation. (p. 8).*

In this research context, local content refers to the local historical information, developed locally, which is usually related to specific experiences, events, stories and knowledge of individuals or the community.

### 2.2.3 Community

Understanding community participation in historical records and cultural heritage preservation carries a particular meaning. As highlighted by Madyaningrum and Sonn (2011), the impact and value of community participation are associated with bringing people together, especially diverse individuals in the community and particularly when there is limited interaction between social groups. This importance is despite the trends that show the dismissal of the importance of local cultural heritage are often tied to the increasing domination of global culture (Smith, 2012).

Since the definition of community varies among researchers, it is important to clarify how the term is used in this study. An early definition by Freilich (1963) defines a community as, 'People in relatively high-frequency interactions, exchanging information at a set of related centers, and practicing and developing local interaction culture based on the past information they shared'. This definition reflects the common activities performed by communities in Malaysia. Another definition of a community is described by Rein (1997, p. 43) who refers to a 'Group of people sharing a common interest and set of values'. This definition is close to Ritchie (2003), who conducted several oral history projects on communities. Ritchie defines a community as a group of people who share a typical identity whether from the same race or ethnic background, religion, or profession or organisational affiliation. Furthermore, as

highlighted by Pang and Schauder (2007), a 'Community is bound up with various kinds of group affiliations or a sense of belonging by individuals; an understanding that individuals belong to multiple communities'. (p. 222).

The definition by the Division of Health Promotion, World Health Organisation (WHO), (1998) comprehensively illustrates the characteristics of a community:

*A specific group of people, often living in a defined geographical area, who share a common culture, values and norms, are arranged in a social structure according to relationships which the community has developed over a period of time. Members of a community gain their personal and social identity by sharing common beliefs, values and norms which have been developed by the community in the past and may be modified in the future. They exhibit some awareness of their identity as a group, and share common needs and a commitment to meeting them. (p.5)*

In this research, the term community refers to the definition provided by the World Health Organisation. The term 'local community' in the thesis refers to Malaysian citizens in general, who belong to one or more of the communities which are based on geography, occupation, shared values, ethnicity and language in Malaysia. For example, in this research context, input from different ethnic communities such as the Chinese, Chetty, Portuguese, Peranakan (Baba Nyonya) were sought because only they can identify community needs and priorities, which are important in providing answers to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3.

The term 'community of practice' will be described in the next section, as this term encompasses a different perspective of community.

#### **2.2.4 Community of practice**

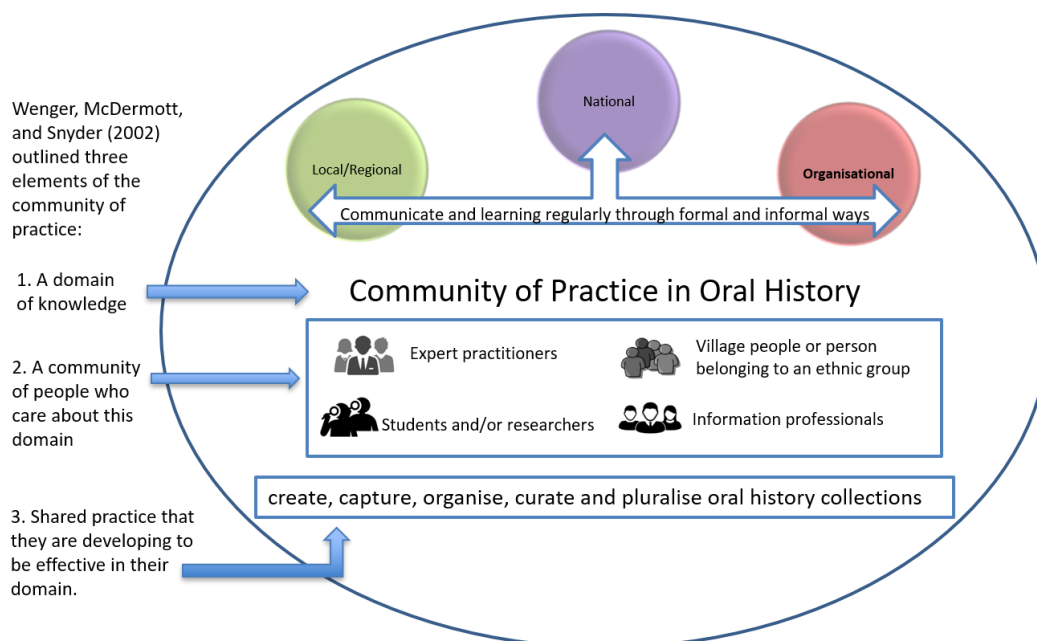
The term community of practice illustrates the relationship between those who conduct oral history, practitioners and cultural institution professionals, who are the research participants in this research. As pointed out by Shopes (2002), there are two groups with a high level of interest in oral history projects. The first group consists of the people who are voluntarily collecting oral histories to document their own valuable stories. This group of people often does not belong to any formal organisation, as they collect oral histories for their own personal interests. The second group includes scholars and professionals who conduct oral history studies to share their research outcomes or to permanently add to the archives or libraries for

future scholarly work. This group is governed by formal institutions and professional associations. This group is working on oral history projects in a continuous effort to enrich the local content and provide data on contemporary issues in oral history.

Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the concept of a community of practice as one way to understand learning situated in the workplace. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) outlined three elements of the community of practice:

*A community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental parts: a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and the shared practices that they are developing to be effective in their domain.*  
(p. 27)

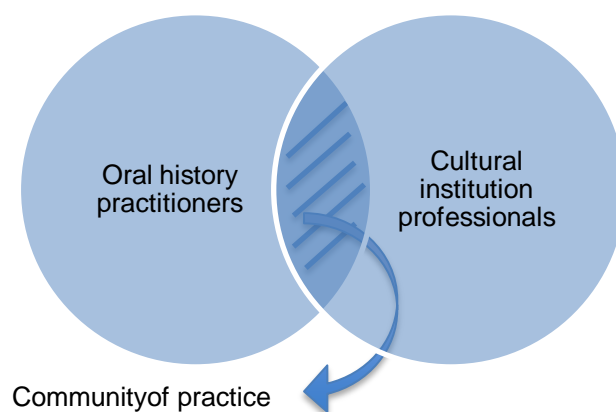
The community of practice in this research context is made up of people involved in recording oral history, whether at the local, regional, organisational or national level. They communicate at various levels to improve the way they develop and manage oral history collections. They see or recognise themselves as part of a community undertaking oral history initiatives and learning from each other to enrich and make local history sources available in Malaysia (see Figure 2 and 3).



**Figure 2: An illustration of the community of practice of this research context**

In this research, oral history practitioners (who are further divided into expert practitioners, village people including persons belonging to a minority ethnic group, and independent

researchers) and cultural institution professionals are all grouped as the community of practice. However, in this research, cultural institution professionals are distinguished from oral history practitioners. The views and insights of cultural institution professionals represent the development and management of oral history in the selected cultural institutions are shown in Chapter 6.



**Figure 3: Oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals as a community of practice**

The current oral history practices from the community of practice involved in this study are evaluated based on the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model as discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The axes in the model, which begin with memory-making, evidentiality, identities, narratives, mediated memories and transactionality are used for the theme's development, while the dimensions and levels are applied to describe the oral history practices by the research participants.

### 2.2.5 Cultural Institutions

The cultural institutions hold valuable, unique and rare artefacts and resources. They are known to create surrogate representations of their cultural heritage's information (Manaf and Ismail, 2010). Cultural institutions' roles partially overlap, especially for preserving memories. Cultural institutions such as libraries, museums and archives that have strong community engagement practices will gain many benefits by enriching their valuable local history collections. Different facets of a community's memory could be collected, preserved and remembered (Newman, 2007).

Cultural institutions should primarily serve people; their collections and other things are secondary (Carr, 2003). In recent years, cultural institutions have been moving towards enriching their local historic documentation. Manaf and Ismail (2010) define cultural institutions as libraries, archives and museums which provide access to and the use of their material or collections to societies. Pang (2008, p. 243) uses the term cultural institutions to describe '*Organisations (some of which are state-owned), whose charter is to promote and support education, the arts, and science through creating, preserving, sharing and transmitting knowledge*'.

The definition of cultural institutions used here encompasses the archives, libraries and museums administered by the government, local authorities and non-governmental organisations, which are open to the public and hold collections of valued materials for educational, exhibition, research and community development use.

### **2.2.6 Cultural institution professionals**

This section seeks to identify the definition of cultural institution professionals, who play significant roles in achieving and maintaining the coherent core mission outlined by the cultural institutions and improve the access to and understanding of their collections. Before the definition of a cultural institution's professional is presented, some of the significant characteristics and skills which could be developed by cultural institution professionals involved in oral histories are outlined.

A number of authors have considered the attributes required by cultural institution professionals, in relation to capturing oral history and suggest that many more valuable historical collections could be gathered and preserved with extensive oral history research skills and competencies. John (2008) suggests that information professionals who are employed in cultural institutions should have a strong personal interest in developing oral history. Willie and Melissa (2011) suggest librarians should be more proactive than previous decades by acting as cultural producers, which also requires them to learn about the processes related to a community oral history collection's development. Cultural institution professionals, such as librarians, could become a significant source of support to local researchers (Caroline, 2010; Sidorko and Yang, 2011). Rehman et al, (1998) describe information professionals who are working in cultural institutions as:



*Individuals who have acquired their undergraduate or postgraduate qualification in a formal education program of library and information studies.*

Based on these characteristics of cultural institution professionals, the term cultural institution professionals, as used in this study, refers to individuals who have obtained a formal education or professional qualification either at the undergraduate or postgraduate level in the fields of information management, information studies, archives' management, museum management or other relevant qualifications. These cultural institution professionals serve either in libraries, archives, galleries or museums that are open to the public. In this study, data were collected from the cultural institution professionals at nine cultural institutions.

### **2.3 UNDERSTANDING ORALITY AND LITERACY**

This section describes the concept of orality and literacy as it relates to the development of oral history. The fundamental concept of orality and literacy is discussed here to enhance further understanding of the underlying idea of oral history, before moving into oral history's concept. Ong (2013) established that:

*Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality.*

Ong emphasised that during the early period, information communicated through oral speech rather than writing. The term orality refers to oral communication or speech (McDowell, 2012). The pieces of information transmitted verbally come while literacy, or words in a written form, was developed to interpret what had been spoken. Ong (1980) stated that:

*Speech is structured through the entire fabric of the human person. Writing depends on consciously contrived rules-though it is true that composition in writing also involves special unconscious or subconscious activities. (p.200)*

Mohamad (2004), highlighted in Tempo, Indonesia's weekly news magazine, that before the discovery of writing, or the fixing of alphabets and the use of printing presses, information could only be used when someone had memorised the information. This situation relates to what has been described by Ong (2013) as primary orality, where people were totally unfamiliar with writing during that time. Information was stored and transmitted through poetry,

rhymes and stories that were passed by word of mouth, which was recorded by the poets, the keepers of local customs and those who were considered as wise.

Anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have conducted most of the fieldwork in oral societies. Bandia (2015, p.125) presents the concept of orality based on knowledge disciplines or realities:

- i. Anthropologist and the historian - Orality assumes its importance in the recording and documentation of non-literate cultures.*
- ii. Colonialist - Orality provides an insight into the traditions and cultures of so-called primitive societies in dire need of civilisation.*
- iii. Modernist - Orality becomes the sounding board for calibrating the privileges of modernity.*

Ong notes that literacy involves writing which is important forms of communication other than oral means. Without writing, the information or knowledge needs to be repeated by the sender or narrator. Ong (1980) notes that the secondary orality explains the condition where radio and television act in a fundamental way as oral-aural mediums. According to Ong, the era we live in now is identified as the secondary orality, which depends on the electronic age with its telephones, television, the radio and other information technology devices and mediums; which developed with the existence of writing and print technology.

In Malaysia, the literacy rate among the Malaysian population aged 15 years and older had increased since the 1980s. The recent survey conducted by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics shows that over 90 per cent of Malaysian citizen (below 65 years) are literate. According to Mukti and Hwa (2004), the transmission of information by word of mouth has been practised by most people all around the country. Historically, Malaysian society was very much an oral society, where information and knowledge were transferred between generations through oral means (Abu, 2014). The absence of written scripts forced local communities to transmit invaluable knowledge through their oral means. Epic stories, poetry, proverbs, legends, romances, myths, oral traditions and oral history are all classified as oral sources. Through oral history technique, more reference sources can be recorded which can be stored either in audio or oral form as well as in written form.

## 2.4 TRANSFORMATION IN ORAL HISTORY

This section will discuss the different phases of oral history development by referring to explanations made by Portelli (2006) and Thompson (2007). Technology and new media and networks have affected the techniques for how individuals keep memories across the globe. Thompson (2007) points out that there are four paradigmatic revolutions in oral history. Memory, as a crucial source of historical evidence, was recognised back in the 1970s as the first paradigm in oral history. Historians had already come to rely on eyewitness accounts, along with archival and documentary materials, back in the late 19th century. In the United States, after the Second World War, audio recorders were used to capture the experiences of people from a wide range of backgrounds, rather than simply from the elite group.

Oral history practised in Malaysia to uncover the unwritten history and to preserve verbal information which existed before it being recorded in any sources. In the early interviews, elite group and famous figures became the primary focus in oral history project development (Lim and Wong, 1999). For example, the Raja Tun Uda Library in Shah Alam, Selangor has conducted a project which relates to Selangor's royal family and the Selangor Chief of District (Muhammad et al., 2017). Oral history project related to communities mostly conducted by researchers from universities to uncover the perspectives of the ordinary people that not covered by official records (Bidin et al., 2013 and Musa, Maslan and Rahim, 2018). Memory-making, evidentiality, identities and narratives are the axes related to the first phases highlighted by Portelli (2006) and Thompson (2007). These axes will be described based on oral history context in Chapters 3, 5 and 6.

In the second paradigm shift, people engaged in the oral history field highlighted the issue of inaccurate memory, due to ageing among some of the selected interviewees. At this stage, oral history practitioners began to focus on possible biases within the interviews they had collected. Numerous oral history handbooks and guidelines were developed, to overcome the issues of accuracy, as a response to some of their positivist critics, who tended to dismiss oral sources as unreliable. Portelli (2006), for instance, highlighted how oral history differed from other techniques and methods in his publication: 'What Makes Oral History Different'. The different input and sources from individuals' memory can bring another perspective in oral history, which is essential to fulfilling the gaps in history. The different views provided by an interviewee which might differ from other interviewees are considered useful by Portelli as the input will bring different historical perspectives. Through oral history, other kinds of historical sources have been utilised to match, assess and review the consistency of the oral sources.

A similar condition happened in Malaysia, the preservation of knowledge and memory of aborigines or Orang Asli in Malaysia depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings as highlighted by Bidin et al, 2013. Yen (2013) emphasised interviewing eyewitnesses of those affected by an incident. He added that it is essential to document what has been forgotten in official records and to contest the dominant discourses and official accounts of history to bring additional context from diverse interviewees perspectives. Zamri, Sulam and Merican (2017) who explored historical consciousness of people in Sarawak highlighted the differences in views and perspectives of national history by their research participants which differ from what has been written in mainstream memory. According to Musa, Maslan and Abdul Rahim (2018), the vital role of oral history cannot be denied even though oral history techniques is not very popular and are not widely applied by researchers and oral historians in Malaysia. Issues of inaccurate memory are closely related to the identities and narratives axes in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model and are described in Chapters 5 and 6.

The transformation of an oral historian's role as an interviewer and analyst arose in the 1980s. This was the phase where oral history developed to empower communities in different contexts, including refugees and indigenous people. The voices from many minority groups could thus be recognised, with the intention that their capture and collection could contribute positive benefits to their therapy (Thomson, 2007). The latest transformation in oral history began in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Digital tools and technologies are transforming the interpretation, presentation, access and use of oral history (Holmes et. al, 2016). The Australian Generations Oral History Project, for example, offers:

- i. An online discussion forum through which interviewers share their account of each interview.
- ii. A searchable timed summary that is linked to the audio recording for each interview.
- iii. A Zotero database that can be used to access, search and share the material generated by the project
- iv. An aural history book combining text and audio.

The development of technology eases the process of managing, sharing, manipulating, interpreting and accessing oral history interviews and collections. As highlighted by Kaufman (2013), number of oral history projects have increasing and become more attractive in the twenty-first century. New digital tools are certainly making it easier to manage, document and share large oral history projects (Boyd, 2014). The users can search for topics and patterns, as interview archives become dynamic collections rather than static depositories. Oral history

outcome also leads to digital storytelling initiatives, with stories being developed based on multimedia applications. Digital storytelling has grown throughout the world, resulting in turn to the increased documentation of local history (Conrad, 2013). In summary, interactive oral history outcomes can increase better utilisation of oral history collections and attract participation from broader community.

There is not much research conducted in assessing roles of technology in oral history creation and management in Malaysia. To date, oral history created in Malaysia are distributed through history narration sessions, collection of photographs, transcripts and videos public engagement and exhibition (Muhammad et al (2017) and Musa, Maslan and Abdul Rahim (2018)). Mediated memories (which consist of tools, local systems, shared systems, collaborative systems, and archival systems levels) is the axis that relates to the application of technology in oral history project. These aspects will be described in Chapters 5 and 6.

## 2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

The following part of this thesis moves on to describe the importance of collecting oral histories. There are different methods that could be applied by communities across the country for capturing and preserving their valuable stories, records and collective memory. McKemmish (2005), in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* (p. 2) stated:

*Throughout time individuals and societies have communicated, captured and passed on many of their stories by selectively storing, structuring and re-presenting them-graphically, textually, on some kind of media and using whatever technology is available to them. The chalk on the cave wall, the carving on the monolith, the paint on the clay pot or the mummy case, the handwriting on the scroll, the sound recording on the CD, the bits on the computer disk, the image on the film. Other stories are remembered by being told, sung, danced or performed, captured in rituals and ceremonies, recalled and retold or performed again.*

Oral history collections are records transformed from oral recordings. Stevens, Flinn and Shepherd (2010) emphasised the importance of useable documentation and records which can have value and an impact in the future:

*Records are created, or received, when conducting business, to support the administration, to ensure accountability and for cultural purposes, to meet the needs of*

*society for a collective memory and the preservation of individual and community identities and history. (p. 179)*

Oral history is not only applied in the field of history (Selvi Ünlü, 2019). This method has been connected to various areas such as education, health, welfare, anthropology, sociology and psychology. McDonnell, (2003) points out that there is an increasing need to capture valuable stories from women, minorities, immigrants and people who have been overlooked and kept silent. As pointed out by Dolan (2003), the collection of oral history has become a popular research method, as a part of community enterprises, social work, and political or volunteer-led heritage projects.

Oral history remains a unique research method to bring together members of the community, which consists of students, parents, teachers, city leaders, and ordinary citizens, so they can share a common heritage (Dayton-Wood et al, 2012). A study conducted by McCarthy, Ashton and Graham (1997) revealed that oral history was considered to be central to understanding the significance of places, buildings, and sites. In this way, local history sources can be increased and allow society to have access to historical records and and preserve local community memories and identities. John (2008) reinforces that oral history has made local communities appreciate that their stories, traditions, beliefs and legends have historical significance. The functions and purpose of conducting and developing oral history program based on the perspectives of the research participants will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

## **2.6 DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL HISTORY: AN OVERVIEW**

### ***Other countries***

Earlier oral history programs were founded during the period from 1936 to 1940 by the United States Works Progress Administration. In the late 1930s, a massive documentation project in the United States of America was developed called the New Deal Federal Writer's Project (FWP), which led to the comprehensive documentation of more than 10,000 ordinary American's lives. This project was conducted during the Great Depression when unemployed writers and artists were given the opportunity to capture life stories, without any audiovisual equipment such as tape recorders. From the 1940s to the 1960s, oral history occupied a limited place within academic research, specifically in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Scandinavia.

The initiative to capture the life histories of significant social or world leaders was begun in 1948 by the historian Allan Nevins at Columbia University's Oral History Research Office (Abrams, 2010). Between the 1960s and 1970s, oral historians from western countries in Europe and North America used oral history to reveal the hidden histories of social groups which were not recorded in written historical records where oral history projects were launched in response to immediate needs (McDonnell, 2003). To date, oral history initiatives are actively employed in well developed countries to preserve memories and the national identity.

### **Malaysia**

The loss of records during the Second World War after the Japanese invaded Malaya, where heavy fighting occurred, has affected Malaysia's national heritage. During the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), official documents were frequently destroyed, to undermine the records related to the affairs of the Malay States and the records about British influence in Malaya (Muhamad, 1996). During this challenging period, a lot of the record collecting undertaken and managed by the colonial powers was paused, due to the uncertain conditions including the movement of people to fight for independence. This has caused gaps in the historical records of the nation.

Since 1960s, the Malaysian government has realised that oral history is an essential technique for capturing history, which may not be recorded elsewhere. In Malaysia, the Sarawak Museum (in 1957) became the first cultural institution in Malaysia to capture oral history and oral traditions (Mohamad et. al, 2012). The National Archives conducted the first oral history project in 1965 with film actress, Tengku AzizahTengku Ariffin, also known as Seri Dewi. To date, in an attempt to fill gaps in the historical collections, interviews were also conducted by the National Archives with politicians, teachers, soldiers, journalists and so forth

There were a lot of initiatives taken by various agencies in Malaysia to initiate and develop the recording of oral history, as one of the fundamental techniques to preserve the nation's history. The Ministry of Heritage, Youth and Sports conducted a seminar related to oral history's methodology, which was held at Universiti Malaysia in 1973. The National Archives of Malaysia was the first organisation in Southeast Asia to organise a colloquium (in 1978 in Penang) which brought together cultural institution professionals and historians to share their experiences in the implementation of oral history projects.

According to Musa (2018), even though Malaysia took the first step to develop an oral history program in 1963, the effort has been somewhat weak and has made less progress, compared

to neighbouring countries such as Singapore. Until today, oral history techniques have received little consideration and are not adequately used or applied by historians, researchers and students and cultural institution professionals. The oral history programme is not fully utilised as a critical technique for minimising the historical gaps and the issue of inadequate local content.

## 2.7 DIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES IN MALAYSIA

The language spoken by the potential interviewee is one of the crucial aspects that need to be considered in capturing oral history. This section provides a brief overview of the diversity, especially in term of languages which influence the process of developing oral history collections in Malaysia. Malaysia comprises Peninsular Malaysia, also known as West Malaysia, and Malaysian Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak), which is identified as East Malaysia. Malaysia is located in Southeast Asia and has a diverse mix of ethnicity, cultures and religions. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia<sup>4</sup>, the population of Malaysia in 2018 was 32.4 million; the dominant ethnic group is the Malays, who with other indigenous groups (also known as bumiputeras or native groups), comprised 68.8 per cent (in 2017) of Malaysia's population. The other principle racial groups (which are known as non-bumiputras) are the Chinese (23.2 per cent) and Indian (7 per cent). The state religion is Islam; while other religions can be practised, depending on one's interests and beliefs. Other significant groups are the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak including the Kadazan Dusun, Melanau, Bidayuh, Iban, Murut and Bajau. The diverse ethnics in Malaysia cause the diversity of languages spoken other than the official language.

Article 152 of the Federal Constitution clarifies that the Malay language, known as Bahasa Malaysia, is the official language in Malaysia which is used as the language of instruction in government institutions and government schools. The Malay language is seen as an important means of linking the nation together and played a major role in the literary development of Malaysia (Smith and Smith, 2017). The position of the Malay language, as the official language, was further enhanced by the National Language Act 1967 (The Department of Information, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia<sup>5</sup>). Nothofer (2006) further describe the Malay language:

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Statistics, Malaysia website: <https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php>.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Information, Ministry of Communications and Multimedia website: <https://www.kkmm.gov.my/index.php/en/>.



*Malay is a member of the Malayic group of languages, which belongs to the subfamily of the western Malayo-Polynesian languages of the Austronesian language family. Simplified forms of Malay, the native language of the kingdoms along the shores of the Straits of Malacca (also spelled Melaka), spread to the Moluccas and to numerous harbour towns.*

Other than official language, regional dialects and ancestral tongues are two other types of languages used in communication by Malaysian society. The regional dialects which differ from one state to another, as practised in Johor, Kedah, Perak, Melaka, Kelantan and Sarawak, as highlighted by Ahmad (2006). Even though the Malay language is recognised as the official language in Malaysia, other languages such as English are widely spoken, while the non-Malays retain their respective ancestral tongues which also viewed as central to ethnicity and used in their daily communication. For example, according to Albury (2017), the Chinese language in Malaysia may generally be further grouped into Hokkien and Teochew (practised in the northern peninsula), while Cantonese and Hainanese (practised in the central and southern regions). Hakka and Foochow are two languages that are widely used by the Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak. The Indian community in Malaysia speaks Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Punjabi.

## **2.8 ORAL HISTORY IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS**

This section outlines and discusses several initiatives for oral history's development in cultural institutions all around the world. Few challenges faced by cultural institutions in managing oral history collections are also outlined. As a researcher working in cultural institutions or any other associations, it is necessary to engage with the community (Evans, et al, 2012). Boyd (2014) stated that: '*The archival community must work together with the community to explore, adapt, and innovate in order to better serve our mission for the preservation of and access to oral histories*'. Each public library should play a vital role in promoting lifelong learning, better skills in decision-making and cultural development. (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994).

In the United States, oral history has long been connected with archives and libraries. Oral historians started to promote oral histories in the mid-1950s and to encourage cultural institutions to recover the missing gaps in history (Ritchie, 2011). Oral history techniques have become more prominent and widely used to supplement and explain information in existing archival collections. In cultural institutions, archivists and librarians not only develop and

conduct oral histories, but also play a crucial role by claiming that these oral histories should become more accessible to users.

In Australia, the National Library, in collaboration with other institutions, initiated the Australian Generations Project, which explored the themes of twentieth-century Australian social history, including transformations in family life and educational opportunities, the meaning of place in a mobile century and the changing experiences of mental ill health. The Australian Generations Oral History Project is a partnership between university historians and oral historians from the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Radio National. They reach people using radio, the press, social media, targeted networks, and word of mouth, and have received Expression of Interests (EOIs) from a diverse range of Australian residents (Thompson, 2016). This is positive initiative where input from broad group of community are considered.

In Malaysia, the government has funded cultural institutions to promote social development. Rashid, (2013) emphasised that cultural institutions are essential for developing an educated society and should be more responsive to the local resources needed by users or researchers. Through their services, activities and programmes, cultural institutions offer opportunities to individuals and communities. Currently, only a few institutions in Malaysia have an ongoing, full-time oral history programme with personnel who are trained and skilled at conducting oral histories.

The oral history collections available in cultural institutions all around the world are usually kept in hard drives on library bookshelves and some of the collections have never been utilised or listened to by users. Several collections are widely known but difficult to access. In Canada, for instance, there were huge amounts of oral history audio collections available, which captured the history of survivors, but these are very difficult to access. Songhui (2008) explored the challenges facing oral history's development in one of the university libraries in China. Among the identified challenges is the lack of, in terms of practical experience, people who are used to conducting oral histories and who have the correct IT skills; the inadequate number of relevant oral histories and the overall lack of funding. However, cultural institutions are service-oriented institutions and should be capable of preserving both the written and spoken word as oral history, since it is now being established as an important aspect of any library and archival institution. It is imperative to understand oral history's role in the cultural institutions such as archives, museums and libraries.

Users now seeking for living, interactive and participatory heritage and better engagement platform (High, Mills, & Zembrzycki, 2010). Mohamad et.al, (2012) emphasised that *'Archivists and librarians must be knowledgeable about research trends and the needs of their users. They must be aware of gaps in their collections, become familiar with their user groups, keep tabs on what questions are being asked, develop relationships with faculties on campus, and enrich their knowledge of their collection's subject areas or identify and connect with those who are experts in the subject'*. Brenneise (2015) stated that successful information professionals seek to accommodate the users' needs by expanding networking opportunities and establishing new partnerships. In today's era, cultural institutions can become more relevant by allowing active participation by the local community. Oral history can be used to foster collaborative learning and create connections between institutions and communities (Hamilton and Shopes, 2008).

## 2.9 MALAYSIA'S NATIONAL COLLECTION POLICY

This section was developed based on the information provided by the National Archives and other cultural institutions' official website. The National Archives of Malaysia is one of the key institutions that collects and conducts oral history projects every year. Developing and managing oral history project is part of the National Archives responsibilities, but not a specific center of focus. The Documentation and Publication Section is a department in the National Archives, which is responsible for the collection of oral histories. As the keeper of the nation's heritage, the National Archives of Malaysia has taken initiatives to capture various aspects relating to the social, economic and political aspects of Malaysian history. In fact, the documentation of the nation's heritage does not only depend on the available written documents, but also includes the narration of those experiencing such events or those directly involved in historical research. 'Know the Personages', which is a publicly accessible web page displayed on the official website of the National Archives of Malaysia, was established to share the experiences of prominent figures through a programme called 'Narration of History, Talk, Discourse and others. Prominent national figures were invited to share their experiences and contribute to the historical information on Malaysia. This process of documenting factual information, which began in the 1980s, is significant, as it complements the archival collection of documented materials<sup>6</sup>. However, despite the diversity of ethnicities, culture, traditions and languages among the Malaysian community, the historical information

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<sup>6</sup> National Archive of Malaysia website (2018): <http://www2.arkib.gov.my/english/visi.html>.

currently available is still not sufficient to fill the missing gaps in the historical records (Ding Choo Ming, 2014).

There is no specific national policy related to oral history collections outlined by other cultural institutions. The National Library of Malaysia focuses on the printed materials, where all the publishers in Malaysia are required to deposit five copies of any printed material and two copies of non-printed material in the National Library (Deposit of Library Material Act 1986 {Act 331})<sup>7</sup>. Non-governmental organisations also develop initiatives to increase the local content, other than the oral history initiatives established by the National Archive and cultural institutions. As an example, on 3 August 2013, an oral history association known as the Oral History Association of Malaysia was established in Malaysia. With its membership drawn from various cultural institutions, communities, teachers, students, and researchers, the Oral History Association of Malaysia works very closely with the states' public libraries to conduct oral history initiatives (Rashid, 2013).

## 2.10 COMMUNITY ORAL HISTORY

Communities retain their valuable memories, using both written and oral methods. Oral history sources and collections are important for preparing a more inclusive history of Malaysia. Oral history is vital to the documentation of intangible heritage, especially for communities with few written traditions. So far, in Malaysia, there has been less academic research that explores the various communities' participation in the development of oral history collections. By comparison, oral history scholars from countries such as the United Kingdom (Robert B. Perks, Graham Smith and Michelle Winslow), the United States (Sue Armitage, Rina Benmayor, Doug Boyd, and Albert S. Broussard) and Australia (Paula Hamilton and Alistair Thomson) have already conducted substantial research into oral history, thus contributing to their collections' development.

Oral history is a crucial component of a community's culture and history. This view is supported by Villarreal, (2006); who found that the '*lack of archival materials made oral history interviews the only avenue left to identify*' valuable historical information and popular arts. Welland, (2015) in her study, found community archives have a key role to play in creating and maintaining the community's memory. As highlighted by McKemmish, (2005), communities '*Retain archives as a means of remembering and connecting with their pasts, their origin*'. (p.

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<sup>7</sup> Surat Pekeliling, Akta, Dasar dan Peraturan (2018): <https://www.pnm.gov.my/index.php/pages/view/270>.

23). Furthermore, oral history is accepted as an appropriate method for encouraging a community's interest in documenting, describing, and creating access to its collections that are taken in by cultural institutions (Thurgood, 2002; Kyoko, 2012).

## **2.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter establishes the importance of the topic of oral history and reviews the previous literature. A comprehensive literature review of the research topic, including highlighting the development of oral history collections in Malaysia and other countries, will ensure a better understanding of the subject and issues under discussion. For a country like Malaysia, local content needs to be produced based on the need of culturally diverse society. Cultural institutions play crucial roles to make available and enhance local content creation which is relevance to communities.

The literature discussed in previous sections indicates the diversity of languages spoken by the Malaysian citizen, which need to be considered in an oral history project. The relationship between orality and literacy, which is essential in the development of oral history is discussed. The literature has shown the significant contribution of oral history technique in capturing untold community story. The theoretical lens that was interpreted in this study is discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL LENS

#### 3.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Since this research interprets the practice of oral history from the perspective of oral history's practitioners and cultural institution professionals through the lens of the continuum, a brief overview about the theories and models which relate to the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is provided. Furthermore, the applicable theories and useful models which relate to records management are briefly discussed in this section. Audio records, which is the central focus of this study, need to be managed in a systematic way to allow them to be better accessed, retrieved and to ensure their long-term preservation for the future. The underlying concepts adapted from the theories and models can influence the way individuals and organisations manage records.

The first section of this chapter explains the relationship between the theory and the models which influenced the development of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model (Gibbons, 2014). The second section describes how this model is applied in this research. The application of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model to oral history's development and management context is a unique feature of this study, as this is understood to be the first research undertaken based on the interpretation of the model in the context of oral history.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model selected as the theoretical lens, offers a framework for '*memory institutions to connect, collaborate and facilitate an active, participative shared memory-making network that is diverse, yet inclusive of multiple and potentially contested narratives*' (Gibbons, 2016). The model is also suitable as it can highlight points to be considered in conducting community of practice-based research (Margolis, 2019). The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is the most recent model to be based on records continuum theory and can offer rich insight into what oral history collections development and management can be improved. Other models based on records continuum theory only have four dimensions (create, capture, organise and pluralise). The two new dimensions (co-create and curate) which have been added to the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model are considered useful, if not essential, in assessing the

participation of oral history practitioners. Other potential models are more typically based on the life cycle concept of records management which begins at creation and ends at disposition. These are often limited to the management of paper records (Yusof and Chell, 2000) and although widely accepted in the field, life cycle models are limited in their understanding of the changing nature of records over time and when viewed from different perspectives.

To provide a better understanding of the suitability of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model as the instrument for this research, the definitions of the terminologies marked at each dimension, the levels and axis pertaining to the model and the core principles in the continuum theory are also discussed. Finally, the connections between the Records Continuum Model (RCM), the continuum theory and the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model are explained, to outline the way the researcher applies the model.

The model is applied and interpreted to answer the first two research questions. To answer RQ1 and RQ2, the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model was used as the underpinning theory to guide the investigation. As discussed earlier, this research seeks to explore the current practices used by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals in Malaysia for developing and managing oral history collections. This study also aims to investigate how cultural institutions can reframe and transform themselves to enrich their local community's oral history collections, in an effort to provide inclusive and comprehensive services and oral history programmes. The third research question's answer is based on a reflection: how can the model assist initiatives undertaken by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals in creating, organising, curating, providing access to and pluralising oral history collections?

### **3.2 THE THEORY, MODEL AND CONNECTIONS TO THE MEDIATED RECORDKEEPING: CULTURE-AS-EVIDENCE MODEL**

Theory helps to frame the scope, guide researchers to essential questions about the issues raised by the research problems and makes sense of the data gathered (Neuman, 2003). A theory also offers concepts that help establish a connection between the wide range of knowledge gained from other researchers' contributions. In research, a theory is significant for explaining some phenomenon, while a model is developed as a conceptual object to explain, represent and describe a subset of the real-world phenomenon. (Weber, 2013, p. 247). In this research context, the records continuum theory helps the researcher to understand the

foundation of records continuum thinking while the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model describes a dynamic environment of records.

The evolution of the records continuum theory in Australia and its practice has reinvented records and archives practices and influenced broader international discourse and the research models which were developed at Monash University in the late 1980s (McKemmish, 2001). The records continuum theory developed and emphasised the concept of records as evidence, the nature of records and the role of recordkeeping in society and business and the redefinition of the description of archives.

The records continuum theory is influenced by the structuration theory, developed by Anthony Giddens (Upward, 2000). Giddens is a prominent British sociologist; one of the important figures who influenced the ideas about understanding people and their interactions, as described in the structuration theory. This theory noted that *'Man actively shapes the world he lives in at the same time as it shapes him'* (Giddens, 1982, p.21). Gibbs (2017) recognises that *'Structuration theory attempts to understand human social behaviour by studying the processes involves between the actor and the structure'*. Upward et. al (2017), defines structuration in similar way, *'Structuration refers to theories that address the inter-relationships between our actions and the structures in which they take place'*.

According to Upward (2000), Giddens' structural insights influenced the development of the research framework for the management of records and information systems. The core component of the structuration theory and its principles has been adapted to the records continuum theory and the models it represents, such as the Records Continuum Model (RCM), Information Continuum Model (ICM), Publishing Continuum Model (PCM), Cultural Heritage Continuum Model (CHCM), Information Systems (Data) Continuum Model (DCM), Digital Forensics Continuum Model (DFCM) as well as the model used as the theoretical lens in this research; the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Those models use the structuration theory as the basis to describe a multidimensional view of recordkeeping in spacetime. The concept of spacetime has been described by Upward (2000) in this manner:

*Records can even have multiple lives in spacetime as the contexts that surround their use and control alter and open up new threads of action, involving re-shaping and renewing the cycles of creation and disposition. These are all fairly obvious perceptions. Less obvious, but of the same character, was the way every record in the archives was being constantly remade as it moved in and out of use in the search room, as the controlling and enabling structures for that use altered, and as its physical composition deteriorated,*



*sometimes so noticeably that special preservation action was required. Records can never be set aside from spacetime.*

The idea of spacetime emphasises the concept of managing records in a better way; the different dimensions, levels and axes are considered, although the activities are interconnected. Similar to the development and management of oral history collections, the spacetime concept is an important aspect to be considered, since it relates to the arrangement of all the related activities for co-creating, capturing, organising, curating and pluralising oral history collections. For example, to illustrate the relationship between space and time, it is essential to understand what the activities are that happen at the co-create stage (space) and when the co-create activities take place (time). The spacetime concept also emphasises that the meaning and interpretation of individual records can change over time.

Unlike a theory, a model can be identified as an abstraction and a way of thinking, which helps to make sense of some aspects of a research's scope. In research, a model can facilitate a researcher to establish a research's context, its scope and views. Bates (2005) has stated that:

*Models sometimes stand as theoretical beacons for years, guiding and directing research in a field, before the research finally matures to the point of producing something closer to a true theory (p.3).*

The records continuum model was developed and formulated as a different way of managing records by considering four interconnected processing dimensions: creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation. The records continuum model was first published in 1996. Frank Upward developed the model with the arrangement of points from Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino and Barbara Reed as one of the theoretical bases for the management of records and archives (Upward, et al, 2018).

The records continuum model signifies a fundamental change in the basic concepts from the records life cycle perspective, as adopted in European and Anglo-American archival theory. Gilliland (2017) describes the life cycle-based organisational records management:

*Archival science in Europe, former European colonies and the United States was typically framed within a life cycle view which holds that records move through predictable stages in their lives (creation and capture within an organisational recordkeeping system; storage and maintenance, semi-active, inactive; disposition-transfer to an archives or discarding*

*and destruction), with each stage associated with particular activities, agents (records creators, records managers, archivists) and levels and types of use (initially high, then progressively lower as records become inactive, until they are either disposed of or are preserved in an archive where they are subject to use by secondary users)(p. 40).*

In continuum thinking, records have multiple lives across space and time, in contrast with the traditional records-centric view (the life cycle-based organisational records management) (Upward, 2000). The records continuum model illustrates the integration between the recordkeeping and archiving processes, based on different dimensions. This model is particularly useful to illustrate the continuum practices in recordkeeping systems, including the process of capturing and linking the contents of documents (McKemmish, Upward and Reed, 2010). Continuum thinking is applied as a way to conduct this study, hence understanding the concept is useful as a starting point for the analysis. The development and creation of the continuum theory and models mainly affects memory institutions, especially by providing an ideal framework for pluralising archival research and education.

The researcher became interested in exploring the usefulness of this model for the oral history process after reading Leisa Gibbons' thesis, produced in 2014. This thesis emphasises the concept of memory making as:

*Interaction, interpretation and communication embedded in practices, norms and values that contribute to the continuous dynamism, iteration and progression of cultural heritage.*

Gibbons, L. (2014). *Culture in the continuum*, page 218.

Zelizer (1995, p 233) stated that '*Memory has taken on various forms in conjunction with the medium acting as its vessel*'. From this perspective, memory can be preserved through various techniques and stored in a different medium. One of the methods used to preserve the memories of individuals is through the oral history technique. In this research, the practices of oral history collections' management and development in Malaysia will be interpreted through the lens of the continuum. The process of managing oral history collections by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals can be assessed and interpreted by exploring the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, which is used to set the research's boundaries and reflect upon the interpretation of the data.

### 3.3 MEDIATED RECORDKEEPING: CULTURE-AS-EVIDENCE MODEL AS THE THEORETICAL LENS

There is a relationship between theory and theoretical lens or frameworks, as highlighted by Grant and Osanloo (2014). A theoretical framework is derived from an existing theory, which has been validated by scholars and is considered to be a significant tool for providing lenses and structure to a thesis. Based on the guidelines provided by the University of Southern California Libraries, a theoretical framework is developed to support and explain the components of a theory (Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: Theoretical Framework, (n.d).

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), a theoretical framework consists of the selected theories that underpin a researcher's understanding of the relevant concept of the research topic. USC Libraries Research Guides (2018)<sup>8</sup> describes that '*A theoretical framework is used to limit the scope of the relevant data, by focusing on specific variables and defining the specific viewpoint (framework) that the researcher will take in analysing and interpreting the data to be gathered. A theoretical framework also facilitates the understanding of concepts and variables, according to given definitions and builds new knowledge by validating or challenging theoretical assumptions*'.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, which is primarily guided by the structuration theory and records continuum theory, is used as the theoretical lens in this research. The term recordkeeping is defined as, '*A form of witnessing and memory-making, a particular way of evidencing and memorialising individual and collective lives*' (McKemmish, Upward and Reed, 2010, p 4447). The concept of "mediated recordkeeping" evolved when Gibbons (2014) researched the YouTube community using the continuum theory and models. Mediated recordkeeping refers to:

*Multiple narratives and memories, including counter-narratives and contested memories facilitated by technologies, frameworks, environments, subjective meanings, and the activities of people from diverse and multiple contexts. (p. 248)*

The methods of co-create, capture, organise, curate and pluralise demonstrate the multiple dimensions of activities for recordkeeping systems in archival and library practice. The term mediated recordkeeping challenges the notion of the archival institution as a static repository

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<sup>8</sup> USC Libraries Research Guides, (2018): <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/theoreticalframework>.

and stresses the need for cultural institution professionals to become co-creative with the wider community, not work in isolation and not be bound by existing policies and practices (Gibbons, 2014). Similar to the effort in capturing, developing and managing oral history, multiple recordkeeping dimensions and perspectives need to be considered by the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals when developing inclusive local community history collections.

According to Gibbons (personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017), culture refers to how people transmit their understanding of “who we are”. In other words, Gibbons (2014), describes culture is constructed from, ‘*Collective, shared and learned through social practices and shared values*’ (p. 9). Upward’s definition of culture is as, ‘*A system of shared meaning which can distinguish communities from other communities and organisations from other organisations*’ (2005b, p. 24). The *culture-as-evidence* concept of the model illustrates how people understand their role in society, who they are in society, how they document themselves and how they interact, through systems and technologies (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017). There are different ways of thinking about how people do and share things in their life. An example to illustrate culture-as-evidence is where some people use technology or social media as tools to preserve their memories. Another example to demonstrate culture-as-evidence is provided by Gibbons (2014). According to Gibbons, personal recordkeeping practices also relate to culture-as-evidence, which is adopted from social practices.

Gibbons (2014) emphasised that ‘Memory-making, as a concept, refers to the need to create evidence through memory’. This is also highlighted by (McKemish, 1996), where evidence is described as, ‘Bearing witness to the cultural moment’. The practices of oral history in Malaysia also reflect on the culture that is being practiced by the individuals involved in oral history projects. Oral history, applied as part of the effort to preserve memory at different points in time, is not static but encompasses movement and captures historical information, such as culture, traditions, arts and other ideas across space and time in a networked technological environment (Olick and Robbins, 1998).

### **3.4 BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MEDIATED RECORDKEEPING: CULTURE-AS-EVIDENCE MODEL’S DIMENSIONS, LEVELS AND AXES**

This section provides a brief description and overview of the dimensions, axes and levels in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. The first part of this section

explains the dimensions in the model, followed by the axes and levels. The axes in the model, which begin with memory-making, evidentiality, identities, narratives, mediated memories and transactionality are used as the primary components for the theme's development, while the dimensions and levels are applied to describe the oral history practices by the research's participants and oral history practitioners.

The meaning of each dimension, axis and level is defined from a number of sources, including by the theorist Leisa Gibbons, along with a combination of definitions from the literature on records and archives management, information management as well as from the oral history field. The definition of the terminology used in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is important to help the researcher interpret the model within the context of this research. Most of the various terminologies, which are constructed as dimensions, axes and levels in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model have their conceptual definitions, while several terms, which are subjective and context-dependent, will be defined based on this research's context.

#### **3.4.1 The dimensions of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model**

*Co-create, capture, organise, curate and pluralise* are five dimensions connected with the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Co-create involves interactive roles and processes which are influenced by all the other dimensions (pluralise, curate, organise, capture). The key important characteristics of the co-create dimension based on Gibbons (2014) are:

- i. Co-create recognises that creative actions do not occur in isolation or arise from a singular entity (p. 225).*
- ii. Creation is not an isolated event, but is an act of collaboration at multiple levels—these are acts of co-creation (p. 230).*
- iii. Co-create means that the people who are telling the story and the people, who are capturing them to retell the stories, put them in an encoding system, document them as evidence and share them as collective memories. (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017).*

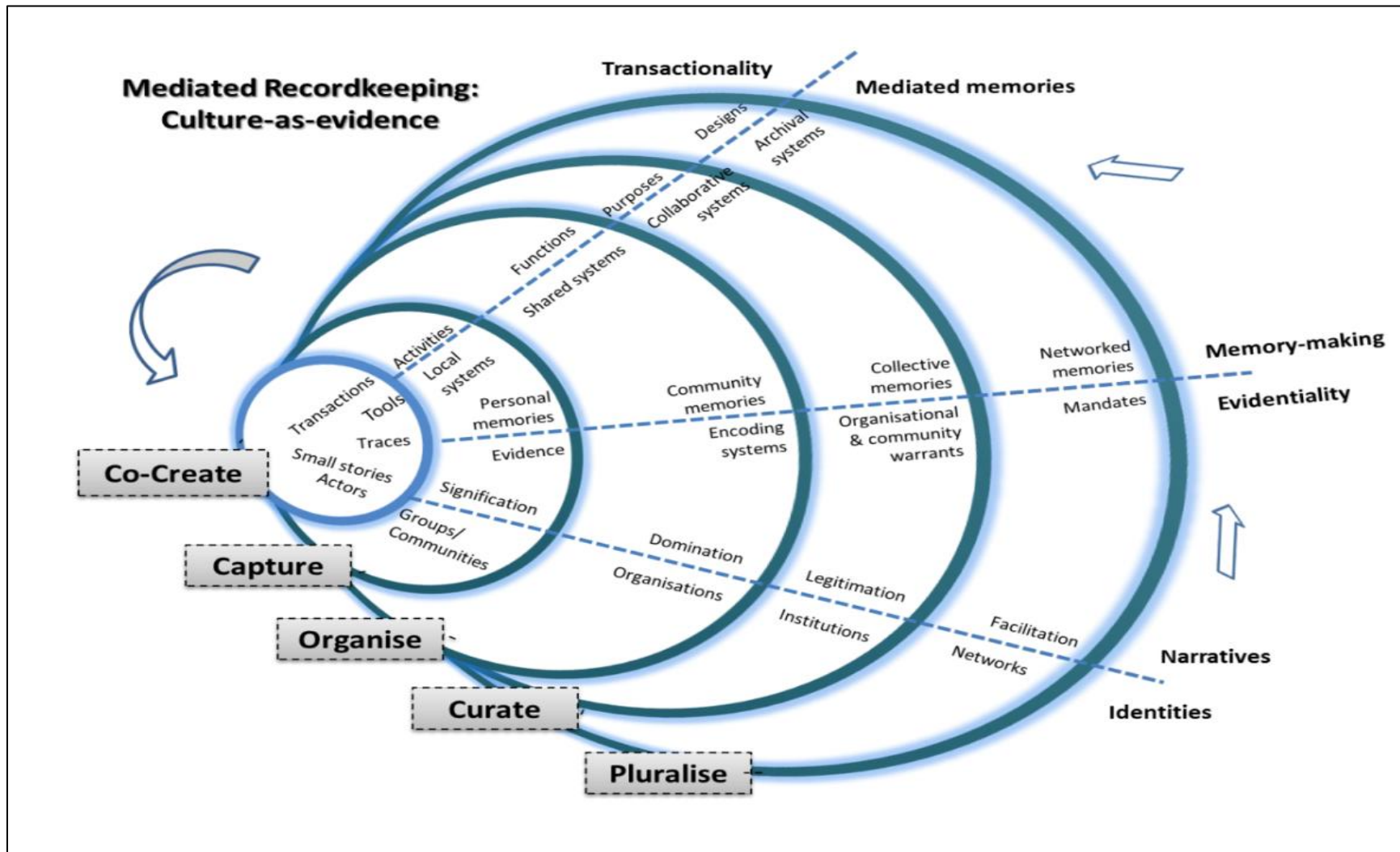


Figure 4: Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model (Gibbons, 2014)

Both interviewers and interviewees are co-creators in the process of creating oral history. They play significant roles when undertaking the process involved in oral history's creation, including who controls the session and which institutions or parties capture and own the collections, as well as the ethical aspects in the oral history's creation process. The levels involved in the co-create dimension are transaction, tools, traces, small stories and actors. The second dimension is *capture*, which is defined as:

*Capture records-as-evidence by linking documents-as-trace to the transactions, acts, decisions or communications they document, related records, participating agents, and their immediate business or social contexts. (McKemmish, (2005) p.40)*

Each activity and transaction that happens during recordkeeping activities brings significant information which needs to be captured (Flynn, 2001). For example, in an oral history project, the information collected by using the oral history techniques is insufficient without any contextual information or supporting materials or artefacts. Thus, the relationship between oral historical information and other related historical sources and artefacts needs to be captured and referenced as well. In addition, information relating to the capture of oral history can be recorded and preserved as part of the metadata. In the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, the levels that are connected to the capture dimension are activities, local systems, personal memories, evidence, signification and groups or communities.

*Organise* entails the process of keeping records appropriately. For example, an email system is created by an organisation to allow its employees to communicate with each other and is further organised into folders for certain periods. Like emails, oral history collections need to be organised and managed for them to function as long-term memories and to allow better access to them and easier retrieval processes for their users (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017). The levels related to the organise dimension are functions, shared systems, community memories, encoding systems, dominations and organisations.

*Curate* refers to the process of managing content through collaborative facilitation and determines what could be included in a list of collections or series to gain more value through the recordkeeping systems. The term curate, as developed by the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, considers the new forms of creation in networked space. For example, Gibbons (2014) in the YouTube case study, discusses how memory is, '*Created, stored, managed, shared, organised, communicated, classified, used, represented and managed as memories of continuing value*' (p. 235). The levels connected to the curate

dimension are purposes, collaborative systems, collective memories, organisational and community warrants, legitimisation and institutions.

*Pluralise* happens outside of an organisation and has a broader societal perspective (Flynn, 2001). McKemmish (2001) defines pluralise in the recordkeeping and archiving integration processes as:

*Pluralise records-as-individual/group/corporate memory by “placing” them into all-encompassing frameworks that enable them to function as accessible collective memory. (p. 325)*

Furthermore, Upward (2000) explains that:

*Pluralise equates with taking information out to points beyond organisational contexts and into forms of societal totalities, still more distant from the organisations, community totalities, and whole-of-person views of the individual, within which the creation and capture processes take place. This is a nebulous region in the broader reaches of spacetime, involving memory as it is formed across societal totalities. (p. 8)*

In oral history's management, the pluralise dimension is related to how oral history collections are placed among society in broad perspectives. For example, books, exhibitions and other outcomes are examples of methods or outcomes to distribute oral history collections, which involve the pluralise dimension. Designs, archival systems, networked memories, mandates, facilitation, and networks are the levels associated with the pluralise dimension.

### **3.4.2 The levels and axes of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model**

This section provides a working definition for each axis and level. There are six axes and twenty-nine levels involved in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

#### **Memory-making axis and related levels**

Memory-making is the first axis to be explained. The three descriptions below refer to the memory-making axis. Gibbons, 2014 explains:

- i. Activities involved in creating, capturing, storing, destroying, sharing, communicating, preserving and managing information as a tool for memory. (p. 9)*



- ii. *Interaction, interpretation and communication embedded in practices, norms and values that contribute to the continuous dynamism, iteration and progression of cultural heritage. (p. 239)*
- iii. *The cultural practice of recordkeeping, mediated through narrative, identity and the practices and values of individuals and groups. (p.262)*

Memory-making happens in an individual's everyday life. In this research, memory-making activities are explored, based on oral history processes. There are six levels related to the memory-making axis: traces, personal memories, community memories, collective memories and networked memories. An example of a memory-making activity is when someone takes a photo and describes the context, keeping it in an album for future access and sharing it across generations.

Traces is related to the process of forming a memory and being a witness, which are undertaken for different purposes. When undertaking an oral history task, the process of searching for relevant people to be interviewed and making the findings from the interview connect to the historical accounts from memory institutions is also part of the "trace" activities. In the recordkeeping field, archival documents are considered as "trace". (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017). To become memory traces or archival traces, the evidential aspects or witnesses must be in place, as highlighted by McKemmish, Upward and Reed, (2010) '*Archival traces become records when they are stored and managed by recordkeeping and archiving processes*'. In this study, the term "traces" refers to the audio or video that was recorded, the transcripts produced based on the oral history interviews, as well as artifacts connected to the subject explored.

Personal memories are linked to an event, story or artifact related to an individual. (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017). In this research, the personal memories to be captured by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. It is important to understand the types of historical information that are usually recorded, from the broader community's perspective in Malaysia. By understanding the types of community historical information to be recorded through oral history, both the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals can prioritise such initiatives.

The definition of community memories is dependent on the context. In this research's context, community memory refers to the memories related to a community that shares a common remembrance and reminiscence of history. In this research's context, community memories are constructed when a group of individuals share a common history or interest and the people

who live in the memories reflect upon it. Bastian, (2003, p. 5) stated that *'Records, oral or written, become both the creators as well as the products of the societal memory of a community'* (p. 5). Flinn (2007) provides examples of sources or materials to keep community memories and historical information. Original documents, maps, photograph, oral history tapes and local ephemera are all possible materials that can be collected and created by a community to preserve their memories.

Collective memories relate to learned social practices and shared values. According to Gibbons (2014), *'Community memories have a sense of communal agreement and are part of cultural identity'* (p. 240). Wertsch and Oers (2004), emphasised that collective memory, *'Functions to provide a useable past for the creation of coherent individual and group identities'*. There are also additional or alternate definitions by Abrams (2010). Collective memory is defined as, *'Shared memory of an event or experience. It is distinguished from autobiographical memory by virtue of it being commonly shared and circulated among a group and it might shape individual or autobiographical memory'*.

Networked memories are defined as, *'The spaces enabled by technology which enable people to share and communicate a cultural identity'*, such as social media (Gibbons, (2014) p. 240). In this research, networked memories relate to the method of access and retrieve and connect oral history to a broader group of people. Through the networked memories process, the content and context of historical information can be enriched and thus is able to provide a more explicit connection to researchers and information seekers from different places.

### **Evidentiality axis and related levels**

Oral history collections can move through all the levels in the evidentiality axis. Oral history sources are traced by using different approaches. Evidence is an essential element for providing greater context to recorded oral histories. Then, the oral history's sources need to be encoded into a meaningful content and context and the issues and aspect in curating community oral history collections considered, including the mandate relating to the ownership and control of oral history collections.

Upward links the evidentiality axis to, *'The trace actions, the evidence which records can provide and their role in corporate and collective memory'* (Upward, 1996, p. 279). According to Gibbons (2014), the evidentiality axis relates to the nature and systems for how evidence is understood. Without evidential qualities, any sources of information can be challenged.

There are six levels related to the evidentiality axis including traces, evidence, encoding systems, organisational and community warrants and mandates. The term traces has been discussed in the memory-making axis above. In the evidentiality axis, traces also relates to the process of tracking evidence, to provide proven authoritative information on audio records captured from oral history interviews and the transcripts that are produced. In this sense, there is a need to connect what has been said by a narrator with other authoritative sources.

Evidence relates to, '*Sources which consist of integrity and continuity elements in records management and play some role in the formation of cultural heritage*' (McKemmish, et al, (2005). In this research's context, the methods for establishing evidence practised by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals are discussed. The criteria and value of the information assessed by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals that are used as evidence will also be described.

Encoding systems refers to the, '*Process of delivering meaning and representation through deliberate construction and conversion, which also require processes, tools and knowledge for decoding*' (Gibbons, (2014), p. 241). In the course of this thesis, the aspects of oral history that are encoded, to create meaning and be understood by people, are described in Chapters 5 to 7. An example of an encoding system, which is useful for oral history collections, is metadata. Without encoding systems, audio or video records, as well as the transcripts produced from them, the outcomes of the interviews cannot be clearly grasped and interpreted by the people who access them.

The term "organisational and community warrants" relates to a larger and shared cultural narrative and to being accepted as group practices. The term organisational and community warrants reflects how a group of individuals document the information and the source of the information that is communicated with other groups of people. Through this level, the process, aspects and issues to be considered in curating community oral history collections will be explained.

Mandates are connected to, '*Warrants which govern all of this social and organisational activity, including metadata about social mores, laws, business policies and rules*' (McKemmish, et al, (2005). Mandates in this research's context relates to individuals who select, record and manage community oral history collections. Mandates also refers to the people who are chosen to speak as the representatives to communicate with communities and which parties will be given priority to own and control the captured oral history.

### **Identities axis and related levels**

Gibbons (2014) relates identity to, '*A distributed individual identity that is managed and what requirements and needs an individual might have to be able to manage it as part of memory-making*'. According to Upward, (2000), '*Identities relates to the authorities by which records are made and kept, including their authorship, establishing the particularities of the actors involved in the acts of the records' creation, the empowerment of the actors and their identities when viewed from broader social and cultural perspectives*' (p. 9). In this research, the identities axis relates to the co-creators of communities' oral history collections, the methods for identifying the interviewees, the process involved in developing each interview's questions and the processes involved in organising, curating and pluralising oral history collections at the organisations, institutions and networks level. Actors, groups or communities, organisations, institutions and networks are the levels associated with the Identities axis.

The term actor may be assigned to someone who is involved in the act of a record's creation. In this research, actors relates to the people who participate in the co-creation of oral history collections such as the interviewers, interviewees and other related stakeholders. For example, the village committee, government agencies, researchers and cultural institutions can be categorised as 'actors' who involve in the creation of oral history collections. The detail explanation about various groups of actors are described in Chapters 5 and 6.

At the group or communities level, this research will discuss the criteria applied by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to locate potential interviewee/s. There are different communities involved in an oral history project. Therefore, there is a need to explore the different strategies applied by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals when identifying relevant interviewees who can participate in an oral history project.

At the organisational level, the process involved in the arrangement, sorting and classifying of oral history collections for any particular purpose are discussed. It is essential to consider this aspect as it will determine the utilisation of, access to and retrieval process for oral history collections. For the purpose of this research, an organisation can be an association, a community club, or department, which develops an oral history programme for a particular purpose.

At the institutions level, the process of curating oral history collections is explained. The collaborations between different organisations and the initiatives currently undertaken by the

participants in this research are reflected at this level. In this research, the term “institutions” refers to the cultural institutions which participate in this study.

For the purpose of this study, the networks level from the model is interpreted as the initiatives undertaken by the research’s participants to expand the oral history collections related to the community. This aspect is a significant consideration in this study, as it outlines the current efforts to develop the collections so they can be pluralised to a broader group of communities.

### **Narratives axis and related levels**

There are several definitions of narrative. Linde, (2001) defines narrative as, ‘*A representation of past events in any medium: narratives can be oral, written, filmed or drawn*’ (p. 162). Gibbons (2014), defines narratives based on the records continuum’s perspective as a, ‘*Key process of cultural practices and commences with a small story and ends with a metanarrative*’ (p. 242). On the other hand, Abrams (2010) defines narrative as, ‘*The means by which we communicate experience, knowledge and emotion. A narrative is also a story told according to certain cultural conventions*’. In this research, the narrative axis will discuss the process involved in communicating oral history; the different types of community oral history that can be initiated, the method for communicating oral history collections, which stories can become dominant, the ethical aspects to be considered in recording a community’s oral history and the techniques to pluralise oral history through a different platform will all be considered. The levels relating to narratives axis are small stories, signification, domination, legitimation and facilitation.

In Gibbons study, small stories relate to the, ‘*Smallest interactions that contribute to the creation of individual community and social narratives within YouTube*’ (Gibbons, 2014, p. 152). Gibbons also adds that a, ‘*Small story is a mediation between individuals, technologies, cultural information and memory-making*’ (p. 212). The types of small stories and how they are constructed will be discussed at this level.

Giddens (1984) recognised the term signification as, ‘*The medium and outcome of communicative processes in interaction*’. Upward (1997) defines signification as the modes of discourse (p. 22). On the other hand, Gibbons (2014) describes signification as, ‘*Our interpretative schemes and the way we encode and communicate our activities*’. (p. 22). In this research, signification is connected to the modes of discourse used to expose oral history collections for various contexts and purposes.

The term domination refers to the, *'Facilities by which groups and individuals are organised and thereby harnessed to organisational or societal goals. At a macro level it includes organisational cultures; at a micro level it encompasses the actual allocation of resources'*. Upward (1997, p. 22). In relation to domination, Gibbons (2014) stated that *'Narrative becomes an instrument for dominant ideologies and power, a way to share and preserve memories and knowledge, as well as a mechanism for individuals, communities and societies to understand time as past, present and future'* (p. 243). Gibbons explains that domination also produces power, originating from the control of the resources. In this research, the types of information or the historical information which comes to dominate local communities will be discussed.

According to (Gibbons, (2014), *'Once a story has acquired the power of domination, it begins another transformation process leading to its long term memorialisation and retention in the values of a community and society'* (p. 244). Legitimation in this context seems to mean the acceptance of the record as the true story, especially by a particular group. The legitimation level in this research's context relates to the appropriate ethical practices applied by the research's participants as part of the effort to retain oral history for use as reference sources in the future.

The facilitation level is connected to the pluralise dimension. Gibbons (2014), describes facilitation as the way, *'Technology is used to create, capture, organise, curate and pluralise memories and identity across multiple memory spaces, including physical and virtual ones'* (p. 244). For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlighted the importance of the Internet as a platform to facilitate communicating information. For this research, facilitation pertains to the networked memories level in the memory-making axis. The idea is related to how oral history collections could be narrated, published and accessed on the Internet.

### **Mediated memories and related levels**

Dijck (2007) defines mediated memories as, *'Activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of the past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others'* (p.21). Mediated memories in this research's context describes how people use and experience technologies in relation to oral history's management. The levels involved in mediated memories are tools, local systems, shared systems, collaborative systems and archival systems.

According to Evans and Rouche, (2004), *'Tools are needed to support the recordkeeping processes in digital and network environments'* (p. 334). Tools in this research's context, refers to the equipment used to record oral histories. The tools selected for recording an oral history

will determine the quality of the audio or video record. The devices used by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to record oral history interviews will be discussed. In addition, these tools also have implications in terms of history's preservation and legacy, as well as its access and ease of use.

Local systems, shared systems and collaborative systems are all connected. *Local systems* in this research refer to the storage location for audio recordings and the outcome of oral history interviews. The experiences and challenges faced by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals when accessing oral history collections through local systems will be discussed. Aspects related to metadata schemes are also linked to the local, shared and collaborative systems. According to Evans (2014), descriptive metadata, which are available in a variety of forms including finding aids, catalogues, indexes and registers can all be used to facilitate, manage and mediate the access to records and archival collections. Metadata is also crucial for the automation of paper-based oral history collections into archival systems. Furthermore, the design of oral history systems and their interface depends on the metadata developed by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals.

At the *shared systems* level, this research will discuss the platforms that oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals organise and manage to allow better access to oral history collections. On the other hand, the *collaborative systems* level relates to the support, technology, and knowledge necessary to curate oral history collections.

*Archival systems* is the final level connected to mediated memories. McKemmish, et al, (2005) describes archival systems as, '*Specific systems that exist to manage and document records of continuing value under the control of an archival institution*'. In this research, the approach undertaken by the research's participants to pluralise oral history through archival systems will be discussed. The development of standards will also be explored in this mediated memories axis, as it will influence how oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals use and apply technology for oral history's management.

### Transactionality and related levels

Based on the definition provided by Upward (1996), the transactionality level, '*Reflects an emphasis upon records as records of activities undertaken in the conduct of affairs and upon the way these activities create links between documents. It reflects, in a basic manner, the functions of organisations and the way these are broken down according to subcategories of activity, or built up from the acts themselves*'. The transactions, activities, functions, purposes and designs are the levels which are connected to the transactionality axis.

The process of recording oral history comprises different phases of activities and transactions. In this research, the *transactions* level relates to the actions and processes which influence the development of oral history collections.

*Activities*, as described by McKemmish, et al, (2005) are transactions in which the people or agents are engaged and their related social and business purposes and functions. An example of an activity, in the context of oral history, is when an oral history team conducts a preliminary meeting before the actual interview session.

*Functions* in this study equates with the contribution of oral history collections, which may contribute to more massive actions. Oral history sources have unique functions for different groups in a community. The functions of oral history collections, from the perspective of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals, will be explained in Chapters 5 and 6.

*Purpose* as defined by Upward (1996), relates to the, '*Function viewed from a broader societal perspective*'. For McKemmish, et al, (2005), purposes relate to the reasons for the creation and retention of records. The term "purposes", for the context of this research, refers to the factors that influence an individual to capture oral history and the value that they can see from the oral history's creation activity.

*Designs* is the final level and equates to the transactionality axis. In this study, the term designs concerns the system developed for pluralising oral history. The attitudes of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals with regard to pluralising oral history collections as accessible collective memories will be reported in Chapters 5 and 6.



### 3.5 THE MEDIATED RECORDKEEPING: CULTURE-AS-EVIDENCE MODEL AND ORAL HISTORY

This section highlights how the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model can be applied to understand the oral history practices of the Malaysian oral history practitioners. The unique contributions of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model (Figure 6, page 40) was explored to understand the practitioners' perspectives of managing oral history collections.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model can draw attention to new contexts in oral history's development and promote a rich and deep understanding of oral history as a memory-making activity. Themes developed for the thesis's structure were expressed in terms of their dimensions in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has been applied to discover the processes involved to co-create, capture, organise, curate, and pluralise oral history collections. As noted earlier, this Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model was influenced by Giddens's double hermeneutic and the information continuum theories and models (Gibbons, 2014). According to Upward and Stillman (2006):

*Giddens theory of time-space distanciation has been translated into a "rhythm" for information processing, derived from the processes of creating information, capturing it as recorded information, organising it and bringing it together within the plural domains of competition. (p. 5)*

In the hermeneutic process, Giddens differentiates between interpretation or analysis in natural science and social science research. In natural science research, the single hermeneutic process is related to analysing an object which does not provide the meaning of its activities. On the other hand, social research can be conducted in a "double hermeneutic" process where explanations, or the reasons for each perception, can be interpreted in an in-depth way (Kaspersen, 2000).

The cultural heritage continuum model was constructed to assist with community informatics, by linking the concept of spacetime to the role of the recorded information process (Upward and Stillman, (2006), pp. 6-7). The cultural heritage continuum model, which was used as the basis for developing the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, was developed around four dimensions (create, capture, organise and pluralise). As an enhanced

version, the “co-create” dimension is included in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. The idea of changing the create dimension to co-create came when Gibbons found that the creation of stories for YouTube involved collaboration, cooperation and participation by individuals at multiple levels. Based on the research conducted, the co-create dimension brought significant implications for all the continuum models. Gibbons (2014) also separated-out “curate” as a new distinct dimension as, ‘*New forms of creation in emerging spaces on the edge of pluralisation*’. These significant findings and changes provide much better direction to records and archives professionals worldwide.

### 3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter illustrates the background of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model and its relationship with the structuration theory and the records continuum model. The dimensions, levels and axes of the model are defined as a basis to interpret the data gathered from the interviews that are to be conducted.

The researcher refers to the literature and applies a critical self-reflection to use and interpret the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model in the context of oral history. Data for this study will be collected based on the dimensions, levels and axes in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss the findings based on the interviews conducted with the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals, which have their themes based on the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model will also be used as a guideline for creating a protocol for developing community oral history collections, which will be presented in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **4.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

To ensure that systematic and credible research can be undertaken and achieved, it needs to be carefully planned. This chapter describes the research design for this study, to justify the rationale behind the application of this study and to reflect on the realities of research practices. The research design also addresses the methods that work well for particular contexts and which are appropriate to answer the research questions. This chapter describes the phases involved in this research, which are related to the strategies used in inquiries and the methods for collecting, analysing and interpreting the data gathered from interviews and the analysis of documents. The research questions are outlined while the research's paradigm, methodology, methods, procedures for gathering data and ethical considerations are justified.

This research explores oral history's development and management, based on the interpretation of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. The explanation about the model and its dimensions, axes and levels are discussed in Chapter 4. The qualitative method is appropriate for the nature of the research questions constructed. The selection of the qualitative approach was influenced by the subjects discussed in the previous literature review and by the past research undertaken by scholars. Certain practical matters, such as the accessibility to potential participants with diverse backgrounds, experiences and expertise in the research, are also considered to be a significant aspect that influenced the selection of the qualitative method for this research.

## 4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The project's primary research questions and sub-questions are:

**RQ1: What are the current oral history practices in Malaysia?**

**RQ2: How can cultural institutions reframe or transform themselves to facilitate their local communities' oral history collections?**

RQ2SQ1: What are the relevant oral history services, programmes and activities that oral history practitioners expect from the Malaysian cultural institutions?

RQ2SQ2: How can cultural institutions contribute to the development of their local community's oral history collections?

**RQ3: In what ways can the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model be used to develop a protocol for community oral history collections in Malaysia?**

## 4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a fundamental component for conducting systematic research. The researcher should consider all of the research's components, in order to develop a rigorous research design. The research paradigm can be defined as a guide for a researcher to use, to produce a high quality academic study. There are different philosophical traditions in the research field, which include positivism and interpretivism. A researcher who applies positivism as a research paradigm is known as a positivist. Guba & Lincoln (2005, p. 196), emphasise that a positivist usually focuses on how to verify their hypotheses. A positivist researcher frames their hypotheses and predicts the relationships of the variables that are constructed from theories and models (Williamson, 2013, p. 7).

For this research, interpretivism is selected as the appropriate paradigm; this is concerned with the meaning constructed from the research participants' experiences. Constructivism is one of several paradigms that come under interpretivism and a

researcher who applies constructivism as a framework for understanding a particular phenomenon is identified as a constructivist. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2017):

*'The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures'.*

Interpretivism allows the researcher to focus on interpreting the meaning of the interviews conducted based on what research participants thought about oral history collections development and management. The challenges confronted by the research participants and how they deal with them were questioned during interview sessions.

This study requires an explanation about how oral history practitioners manage and develop oral histories and how Malaysian cultural institutions could transform themselves to facilitate local communities' oral history collections. Each oral history practitioner and cultural institution professional might use different practices in developing and managing oral history. The way they overcome the challenges they face in the process of developing oral history collections is based on their experience and current knowledge. The cultural institutions' oral history services might also be transformed by the appropriate technology which best suits the users. Thus, this study aims to investigate the current reality of oral history development in the Malaysian context.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH METHOD**

A methodology is characterised as a general way to deal with studying research topics. Silverman and Seale (2005) have stated that the choice of methodology should be appropriate to the research problem. The correct methodology clarifies and guides a researcher on how to gain more knowledge about reality by conducting research (Wilson, 2001). The methodology acts as the entire design for the research, which includes the process of determining the paradigm and the technique to be employed to obtain answers to the research questions and for building new knowledge from the study being conducted.

Meanings from inside a social setting allow the researcher to generate an in-depth understanding of the selected research sites. As mentioned, the primary methodological approach chosen for this study is an interpretivist one, where the data were collected through a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is more effective for identifying social realities, as emphasised by Neuman (2003) and hence allows the researcher to evaluate people's experiences, personal thoughts, feelings, practices and expectations of the identified phenomenon. For this study, following the literature review, semi-structured interviews and an analysis of the relevant documents were used as data collection techniques. Data gathered from interviewing the research participants were transcribed, coded and analysed.

The research method is related to the technique for the sample's selection; the process involves gathering and analysing the data. A qualitative research approach is adopted for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) state that '*Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right, and cuts across disciplines, fields and subject matter*' (p. 9). Qualitative research allows researchers to study things in their natural settings and gain an understanding by interpreting the subject's perceptions.

The qualitative research approach was adapted to explore the context and the experiences of the research's participants. The research's objectives and questions influence the researcher's selection of the research method. The qualitative research method was chosen for this research project for two main reasons:

- i. It allows for rigorous, in-depth and holistic investigations and elaboration of the subject being discussed.
- ii. It is appropriate for the study of situated action and for obtaining the research participants' opinions or beliefs on the research topic being discussed.

In-person or face-to-face interviews were used in this study to permit the researcher to seek information directly from the research's participants. Through a semi-structured interview technique, the researcher was able to probe for more in-depth information from the participants. Unclear questions were explained to the participants, to avoid confusion, while their language and non-verbal expressions were carefully assessed and interpreted, especially when dealing with participants who have diverse cultures and languages, as suggested by Birks, Chapman & Francis (2007).

This research requires systematic organisation and record keeping, to keep track of the information related to the research's participants, questionnaires and the data obtained from the interviews. Adapted from Rea & Parker (2005), the following list indicates the processes involved in this research:

Stage 1 - Identify the focus and method of research.

Stage 2 - Determine the sample.

Stage 3 - Determine the sample's size and selection procedure.

Stage 4 - Design the research instrument.

Stage 5 - Implement the research.

Stage 6 - Code the data obtained from the interviews.

Stage 7 - Analyse and prepare the final report.

All the seven processes highlighted by Rea & Parker, are explained in section 4.5 to 4.9 based on the context of this study.

#### **4.5 SAMPLE**

This section outlines the process involved in determining the sample. Williamson (2013, p. 333) defines sampling as a process of selecting suitable elements from any part of the total population to be researched. The participants in this study are divided into three main key groups. There are 7 expert informants, 20 oral history practitioners and 11 cultural institution professionals from cultural institutions involved in the interviews. These research participants were invited to take part through emails and phone calls and were selected through a voluntary participation process.

The sample is divided, based on the research participants group. The expert informants were selected from Singapore, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Australia and Malaysia. West and East Malaysia were selected as data collection sites, as one of the aims of the research is to develop a national protocol for developing and managing community oral history collections. Prior to undertaking the investigation, ethnic, cultural and regional diversity were taken into account when selecting the research participants. The sample's research participants who are oral history practitioners or cultural institution professionals are all from West (Peninsular) and East (Borneo) Malaysia, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Data collection sites**

Data collection sites		Expert informants	Oral history practitioners	Cultural institution professionals
Singapore		1	-	-
Italy		1	-	-
The Netherlands		1	-	-
The United Kingdom		1	-	-
Australia		1	-	-
Malaysia	Central region (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur)	1	5	5
	Northern region (Kedah)	1	6	1
	East Coast region (Terengganu)	-	1	1
	Southern region (Melaka)	-	4	1
	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	-	4	3

#### 4.6 SELECTION PROCEDURES

##### *i. Group 1: Expert Informants*

The first group of participants comprises of expert informants from Malaysia and various other countries. They were chosen as research participants based on their professional experience and knowledge in the oral history field. The expert informants (from other countries as well as Malaysia) are further divided into two groups:

- a. Oral history scholars- six individuals who are or have been employed in oral history collections' development or who have experience in conducting oral histories. The oral history scholars who participated in this research are well known with the current trends of oral history from around the world. They also have an advanced understanding of the field. Those scholars apply information gathered through the techniques of oral histories and serve a broad and diverse audience.
- b. A records continuum theorist- an Australian archival scholar who used continuum thinking in her research and is familiar with the dimensions, levels and axes in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model was interviewed. The records continuum theorist's insight and perspectives were



included to enhance the understanding of the theoretical lens which are discussed in Chapter 3. Without understanding the experiences and insights of experts, there could be some ambiguous assumptions which require clarification and this could have a significant influence on the oral history protocol that we want to develop.

At an earlier stage in the design of this research, the insights and views of the group of expert participants helped the researcher to reflect on the research process.

The topic of the interviews with the expert informants is related to their involvement in the development and management of oral history collections and their opinions on a number of matters relating to the oral history services offered by cultural institutions. The expert informants were selected based on their experience and contributions in the field of oral history and were approached by the researcher via email. Email addresses were obtained from publicly available sources. A records continuum theorist was also be interviewed, to help the researcher acquire a comprehensive understanding of the underpinning theory. The experts' opinions on how a framework could be developed at the end of the study are significant. The records continuum and Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model are the significant resources used as the theoretical lens to guide the researcher to find the answers to the research's questions. Therefore, it is crucial to involve a records continuum theorist in this study.

The experts from the other countries were included in the interview process as this is an important step for the researcher to understand current theory and practice internationally. From the experts' feedback, the researcher can reflect and critically review on how oral history applied to the Malaysian situation. Their response is crucial in shaping the direction of this study. Their important insights are presented in Chapter 7.

Both expert informants and record continuum theorist provide feedback in informing the formulation of the interview questions, and to consider how the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model can be interpreted for this study.

The expert informants also help to draw insights from a broad range of literature reviews on oral history, community archives and cultural institutions. As highlighted by Remenyi et al, (2003) the chosen research area must be based on a theory or literature

review that reveals the areas of incomplete knowledge. Therefore, involving the experts at an early stage is crucial in this research.

**ii. Group 2: Oral history practitioners**

The second group of participants consisted of the Malaysian oral history practitioners which is further divided into:

- a. Expert practitioners such as academics and freelance consultants who have diverse and extensive experience in using oral history's methodology. They are working on oral history projects in a continuous effort to enrich their local content.
- b. Village people who belong to an ethnic group.
- c. Independent researchers.

The oral history practitioners were interviewed to obtain their perspectives and insights of their current participation in oral history initiatives. A purposive sampling technique based on the above criteria was used to identify the initial participants, however only a small number of potential research participants could be identified. Snowball sampling was then used as oral history practitioners can be difficult to locate due to the small number of people who are directly involved with oral history programmes.

The findings gathered from the interview sessions with the practitioners are intended to shape the outcome of the study. Cultural institution professionals and a few committee members from the Oral History Association of Malaysia assisted the researcher by advertising this research to potential research participants by sending them an email about the project. The researcher did not access private email addresses or contact details in the approach to the research participants, in order to protect their privacy.

**iii. Group 3: Cultural institution professionals**

Purposive sampling was applied to identify the cultural institution professionals. The criteria for inclusion in the sample, for the cultural institution professionals' group, are:

- i. Having a basic knowledge or experience of oral history.

- ii. Possessing academic qualifications which relate to history, public administration or information management.

The participants from this group consist of archivists, librarians and curators from Malaysian cultural institutions, who are directly involved in conducting and collecting oral history; and who cater to the Malaysian communities' need for enriching their local history. Of the 11 participants from cultural institutions, 2 were cultural institution professionals from municipal council libraries and museums, 2 were from the National Archives, 6 were from state libraries, and 1 was from a special library. Almost all the research participants from this group had received formal undergraduate or graduate qualifications in the history and information management field. On average they have five years of experience in the oral history field.

Insights into how cultural institutions contribute to the development of a local community's history were explored. The initiatives for oral history's development, undertaken by the cultural institutions, were explored through interviews conducted with oral history specialists, archivists and librarians. The cultural institutions professionals were identified, based on their current involvement in oral history initiatives. Email addresses were obtained from publicly available sources. The descriptions of the three different groups of research participants can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2: Research participants**

Key Groups	Participants	Number of participants	Number of institution/s
<b>Group 1: Expert Informants</b>			
	Oral history scholars	6	1
	Record continuum theorist	1	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>Group 2: Oral history practitioners</b>			
	Expert practitioners	4	
	Village people	6	
	Independent researchers	10	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Group 3: Cultural institution professionals</b>			
Archivist	Local/Municipal council libraries and museum	2	2
Librarian	National Archives of Malaysia	2	1
Curator	State Library	6	5
	Special Library	1	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>38</b>	

In all, a significant sample of 38 people were interviewed as data was collected until the findings reached a saturation point.

#### 4.7 DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview questions were based on the literature related to the management aspects and issues that arise with the development of oral history collections. As mentioned in the previous section, the first phase of this project explored the responses from experts in the oral history and community archives' field to answer

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected experts from Singapore, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Australia and Malaysia. These interviews and discussions relate to their involvement in oral history's research and included their opinions on a number of issues related to the oral history services offered by cultural institutions. Some overall differences that emerged between the Malaysian and overseas oral history programmes, based on the initial findings, include:

- i. The oral history initiatives and programmes conducted by cultural institutions in well-developed countries have been established for much longer periods of time than the Malaysian ones.
- ii. The oral history process is much more systematically outlined in the overseas cultural institutions, compared to the Malaysian cultural institutions.
- iii. Oral history has widespread acceptance and is effectively promoted in other countries. However, this is not yet the case in Malaysia. The use of historical records has focused mostly on archival or primary sources.

Through these initial findings, the researcher could design extensive interview questions and be more specific about the sort of questions to ask the research participants. The areas of the research which need in-depth explanations were given attention and asked about during the interview sessions with the two other groups of research participants; the oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals. The list of interview questions can be found in Appendices 3, 4 and 5.

The important excerpts from the interviews with the expert informants are presented in Chapter 7. Where relevant, the inputs from the expert informants are referred to and used to develop the Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol.

## 4.8 PROCEDURES FOR DATA GATHERING

### *Qualitative Interviews*

Interviews are the primary method that were used for collecting the data, thus allowing us to research rigourously and gain in-depth evidence. Qualitative interviews were conducted to answer all the research questions of this study. There are two main advantages to using qualitative interviews, as pointed out by Miller and Glassner, (2016). Firstly, they provide evidence about the nature, context and situation of the research being investigated. Secondly, insights from the research participants' experiences of the subject being explored can be gained. Silverman (1993) notes that an interview is classified as an active interaction between two or more people that leads to a contextually based result.

The most crucial technique to employ when collecting data is to have multiple sources of evidence, which allow the later use of triangulation to construct the validity for the study. The triangulation technique is applied to establish a fact which cannot be obtained from a single reference source (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Where available, relevant documents to supplement the data collected in the interviews were used. These documents would have most relevance in relation to cultural institutions and the Oral History Association of Malaysia (see Table 4).

Lincoln & Guba (2005) emphasised that trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In assuring the validity and trustworthiness of data collected in this study, the researcher has adopted the strategies and techniques as outlined by Lincoln & Guba (2005). These are illustrated in the Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Provision of trustworthiness of data**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Actions Taken by Researcher</b>
Credibility	Triangulation	Involved interviews and identification of supporting documentation in the data collection process. Interviews were conducted with a different group of research participants.

	Prolong engagement	Trust and rapport with interviewees have been developed. The researcher has worked with the Oral History Association of Malaysia since 2014. Therefore, the process of clarification on the data provided by interviewees became easier.
	Peer Debriefing	Discussion with peers is critical to gain valuable feedback. Advice and feedback was also gained during each conference and research milestone (confirmation, mid-candidature and pre-submission seminar) from panels, supervisors and other researchers from Faculty of IT, Monash University.
	Member checking	Interview transcripts were sent back to the research participants to be verified.
Transferability	Thick description	Data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 are extracts from the interview transcripts that allow readers to assess the scope and focus of the interviews.
	Purposeful Sampling	Research participants were purposely chosen based on their involvement and expertise in oral history.
Dependability	Recordkeeping	Audio recording, transcripts of interviews and related correspondence were recorded for researcher's reference.
Confirmability	Triangulation	Interviews data and related documents received during the data collection process.

	Reflexivity	Interpretation of the Mediated Recordkeeping Culture-as-evidence model based on the researcher's self-reflection, knowledge and experience.
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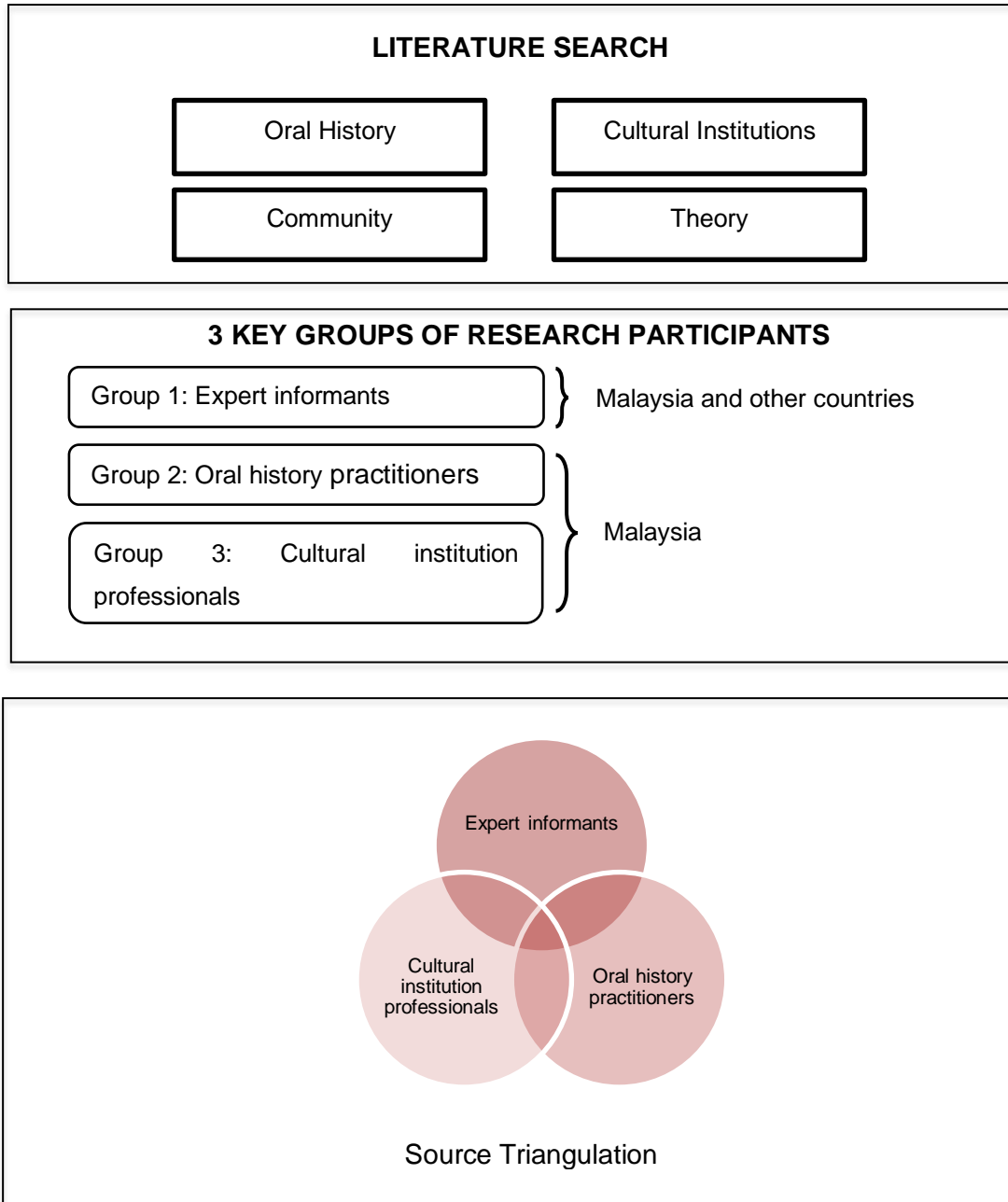
Accurate data and evidence are crucial for meaningful research. As noted by Creswell (2003), documents can enable a researcher to support the argument for one view, or another, of the evidence developed by the research project. Other than referring to the published literature, official documentary records have been used as one of the primary sources to obtain useful background information about cultural institutions. The documents received was integrated and linked to the material coming from the interviews. Some of the documents were received during the interviews or when visiting people and places. Documents presented and produced by the cultural institutions were useful in providing background information about the research's context and to answer RQ1 and RQ2. Examples of reference materials are illustrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 5: Other reference sources**

Official records produced by cultural institutions provide information related to activities and transactions in cultural institutions. However, not all research participants from cultural institutions who were involved in this study provide written reports pertaining to oral history programs undertaken in their cultural intitutions. Some documents, including annual reports, organisation profiles, functions and lists of oral history projects, were extracted from the cultural institutions' official websites and analysed. Information from a variety of sources was mainly useful in providing answers for RQ1 and RQ2.

Figure 5 indicates the research design blueprint to illustrate general aspects involved in this research.



**Figure 6: Research design blueprint**



## 4.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data from the interviews and the other supporting material, such as official records presented by the oral history practitioners or cultural institution professionals, needs to be carefully assessed with a systematic categorisation process. Transcripts were produced after each interview session was completed. By providing these transcripts, exact quotations can be presented, which is important for the data's analysis process and they provide contextual information for this research.

The coding of the interviews' data is basically a form of content analysis. Babbie (1990) suggests that semi-structured interviews' solicit responses based on the participants own words and such answers must always be categorised into the correct answer type. In this research, a deductive research approach was applied where a pre-existing theory has been identified. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has outlined different sets of dimensions, levels and axes which is interpreted in the context of oral history. The findings are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

A set of themes has been determined from the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, which are based on the existing literature. Atlas.ti 8, a qualitative data analysis software program, was used to facilitate the data's analysis. The transcriptions produced from the interviews were assigned to the Atlas.ti 8 software, which is considered to be an intuitive program based on the researcher's personal experiences when conducting other research. Keywords or codes were identified from the interviews' transcripts, which were then compared and analysed. Primary documents, codes and memos were ordered using the "Families" code, as presented in the Atlas.ti software.

The analysis of the interviews were based on the coding paradigm developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), which is known as open and axial coding.

### *i. Open coding*

Open coding is preliminary data that is coded. (Neuman, 2003). In this research, the data are coded based on the theoretical lens, the initial research design, concepts in the literature and also new thoughts stimulated by being immersed in the data. At the open coding phase, the preliminary concept and idea were highlighted by using the application offered in the Atlas.ti 8

software. The important keywords, critical terms, and the initial codes were developed in a flexible manner.

**ii. Axial coding**

In the axial coding process, additional codes emerge, based on key concepts of the analysis. After reading the interviews' transcripts, the codes were identified and arranged according to their hierarchy and grouped to establish meaningful codes. Connections among the themes and the key concepts of the analysis were identified, compared, reviewed and examined to produce more accurate themes. Some of the codes may be combined, according to their suitability, since some of the codes refer to the same group.

Data needs to be acquired through a structured process of empirical study, in order to produce new knowledge. Data analysis is one component of a research technique and relates to the deepest layer of a research methodology. In making the data collected meaningful to the study, the analysis of the raw data was explained and transformed into a meaningful conclusion. The data gathered for this thesis was transcribed, coded and analysed. The analysis methods have included both descriptive and comparative analyses. The analysis of the data were conducted based on the different groups of research participants. The data were analysed separately and then compared to identify the similarities and differences in their oral history practices. The resulting themes were then considered in relation to the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model and the results of that process form the discussion in Chapters 5 and 6, and contribute to Chapter 7. Any themes which were not adequately explained are discussed in Chapter 7.

The data from the interviews included the research participants' profiles and the research participants' interview responses which explain their practices during oral history projects. Furthermore, the documents provided by the research's participants are also referred to, such as pamphlets, annual reports, organisations' profiles, structures and responsibilities, oral history project indexes and collections' lists. Examples of documents selected are as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Documents selected for references**

	<b>Document selected</b>	<b>Focus</b>
1	<i>Senarai Terbitan Terbaru, Centre for Policy and Global Governance, UKM</i>	List of publication from the Centre for Policy and Global Governance, UKM.
2	<i>Laporan Hari Arkib 2018 (Pustaka Sarawak)</i>	Report for programme organised by Pustaka Sarawak
3	<i>Laporan Lawatan Penandaarasan Perpustakaan</i>	Benchmarking report
4	Number of Libraries, Cumulative Collections, Users and Membership, Perpustakaan Awam	Number of oral history collections

The important background information stated in official documents, which relates to the cultural institutions, is outlined in Chapter 6. Table 5 provides the map of research questions, data collection methods, participants involved and data analysis technique.

**Table 5: Brief overview of research questions, data collection methods and analysis technique**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Participants involved</b>	<b>Data analysis technique</b>
<b>RQ1: What are the current oral history practices in Malaysia?</b>	Interviews	Group 2: Oral history practitioners	i. Deductive research to content analysis
<b>RQ2: How can cultural institutions reframe or transform themselves to facilitate their local communities' oral history collections?</b>	Interviews	Group 2: Oral history practitioners  Group 3: Cultural institution professionals	ii. Self-reflections and interpretations based on interviews data gathered from the three groups of

RQ2SQ1: What are the relevant oral history services, programmes and activities that oral history practitioners expect from the Malaysian cultural institutions?		Group 2: Oral history practitioners	research participant
RQ2SQ2: How can cultural institutions contribute to the development of their local community's oral history collections?		Group 2: Oral history practitioners  Group 3: Cultural institution professionals	
<b>RQ3: In what ways can the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model be used to develop a protocol for community oral history collections in Malaysia?</b>	Interviews	Group 1: Expert informants  Group 2: Oral history practitioners  Group 3: Cultural institution professionals	

#### 4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Approval was acquired from the Monash University's Ethics Committee, which covers the interviews with expert informants, oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals. The requirements of the cultural institutions that are involved in this study were met before any fieldwork took place. The ethical requirements were explained and described in an explanatory statement and consent form. Each of the participants in this research signed the consent form once they had read and agreed to the terms and conditions stated. Participation in the research was voluntary, and consent was able to be withdrawn at any time until the research findings were published. There were no perceived risks to the participants, other than the minor inconvenience of participating in an interview. The participants are not be named or made identifiable in any way, to preserve their anonymity and ensure

confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used to describe the research participants throughout the research. To gain access to any relevant research context from the research's participants, both a moral and practical approach was considered.

#### **4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter describes the research methodology of the study. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the main method for gathering data. Relevant key personnel and individuals who are recognised as possessing insights into the main study's themes were selected as interviewees. Data was collected from three groups of research participants, namely the expert informants, oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals. The data collected from these groups of research participants was analysed and interpreted by applying the open and axial coding paradigms by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

## CHAPTER 5

### ORAL HISTORY PRACTITIONERS' PARTICIPATION IN ORAL HISTORY

#### 5.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Researching the work of oral history practitioners is highly rewarding as the researcher can explore a wide array of concepts, including the experiences and thoughts of the research's participants. This section will present the key findings in order to answer the research questions, primarily RQ1 and RQ2, as stated below.

**RQ1: What are the current oral history practices in Malaysia?**

**RQ2: How can cultural institutions reframe or transform themselves to facilitate their local communities' oral history collections?**

RQ2SQ1: What are the relevant oral history services, programmes and activities that oral history practitioners expect from the Malaysian cultural institutions?

RQ2SQ2: How can cultural institutions contribute to the development of their local community's oral history collections?

The development of oral history collections in Malaysia, based on the oral history practitioners' perspectives, is provided in this chapter. The points of view of the practitioners are presented to indicate the current state of oral history programmes in Malaysia and their view of the current and potential roles of the cultural institutions. A variety of perspectives on the issues involved with the development of oral history collections were expressed during the interview sessions. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model was used to identify the main areas of focus, which relates to the research questions. Processes related to oral history collections' development within the five dimensions in the model were explored; co-create, capture, organise, curate and pluralise. The dimensions are the crux of the framework that illustrates the context of this research. There are six axes in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, namely:

- i. Memory-making.
- ii. Evidentiality.
- iii. Identities.

- iv. Narratives.
- v. Mediated Memories.
- vi. Transactionality.

These six axes and the twenty-nine levels of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model were explored and customised to fit the context of oral history. However, not all the levels in the model can be elaborated in sequence, since some of them are interconnected to other level(s) on different axes. An explanation to indicate the link between the levels will be provided to facilitate the readers' understanding of the sense or logic of the connections. Some of the levels in the model, which are not addressed explicitly in Chapters 5 and 6, will be further explained in Chapter 7 (Findings and Discussion).

## **5.2 DATA COLLECTION**

To answer the research questions, data were collected from the Malaysian oral history practitioners in order to obtain in-depth information and to ensure rigorous research could be conducted. Involving the practitioners has enriched the research's findings. As well as discussing their own experiences in the field, they provided reflections on how cultural institutions' oral history services and programmes could be designed and improved.

Interviews lasting between 60 to 80 minutes were conducted during the period from December 2016 to August 2017, at convenient quiet locations. By the end of the interview period, data had been collected from 20 oral history practitioners. The Malaysian oral history practitioners were divided into three groups:

- i. Four expert practitioners who have diverse and extensive experience in using oral history's methodology.
- ii. Six people from villages or people who belong to an ethnic group.
- iii. Ten independent researchers.

The interview schedule depended on the availability of the research's participants, especially those from the cultural institutions. With the help of an experienced and previous contact at the Oral History Association of Malaysia, the challenge of reaching the people who could contribute their ideas and insights on the topic was met. The other challenge faced by the researcher was to locate suitable research participants. The process of identifying the people who could understand the concept and techniques of oral history was quite challenging, due

to the limited number of individuals involved in oral history projects in Malaysia. With the snowballing sampling method, research participants from diverse backgrounds were interviewed.

In this study, English was unlikely to be the first language of most research participants. The Malay language is the official language used by research participants in Malaysia. Since the primary data for this research were collected in Malaysia, more than half of the audio recordings were in the Malay language. The interview sessions were conducted based on each participant's language preference, either in Malay or English. Therefore, the data have been transcribed based on the main language used by the research participants. Notes were also taken during the interviews. Data from the interviews were transcribed to present the findings. Translated questionnaires and bilingual interviews were conducted when needed and possible. A letter was provided to outline a brief explanation about the project and the interview sessions were conducted after the interviewee had given his or her consent.

The research participants reflected on the issues and used their knowledge and experience to freely discuss the emergent issues related to the research's context. Even though such discussions may deviate from the original interview question list, the research participants were able to provide valuable inputs and allowed the reporting of any unexpected findings in this thesis.

### **5.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES**

During the fieldwork, the researcher interviewed 20 oral history practitioners who all had at least three years' experience of oral history projects. The oral history practitioners were further divided into three groups of people: expert practitioners, people in villages or people belonging to a minority ethnic group and independent researchers. These research participants were aged between 25 to 70 years old. Some of the research participants were selected with the help of members of the Oral History Association of Malaysia. The groups of research participants are illustrated in Chapter 4. The following coding was used to identify the interviewees:

- i. Expert Practitioners: EP1 to EP5.
- ii. People in Villages: VP1 to VP6.
- iii. Independent Researchers: IR1 to IR9.



The software used for the analysis, Atlas.ti 8 automatically generated the quotation codes to represent the interviewees' responses. As an example, quote 1:23 identifies the first interviewee while the number 23 represents the line sequence in the software. Through the establishment of different codes, the researcher, as well as the readers, can differentiate amongst the opinions of the three groups of research participants, so that the various responses can be assessed, described and compared. Table 6 briefly indicates the background of the research participants from the oral history practitioners' group. Detailed information about them can be found in the Appendix 1.

**Table 6: Oral history practitioners' demographic information**

Interviewee	Code	Research participants' group	Region	Sex	Years of experience in oral history
1	EP1	Expert practitioner	Central	M	More than 10 years
2	VP1	Village person	Central	M	Less than 5 years
3	EP2	Expert practitioner	Central	M	More than 10 years
4	IR1	Independent researcher	Central	M	5 years to 10 years
5	IR2	Independent researcher	Northern	M	5 to 10 years
6	EP3	Expert practitioner	Northern	M	More than 10 years
7	IR3	Independent researcher	Northern	M	Less than 5 years
8	IR4	Independent researcher	Northern	M	5 to 10 years
9	EP4	Expert practitioner	Central	M	More than 10 years
10	IR5	Independent researcher	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	5 to 10 years
11	VP2	Village person	Southern	M	5 to 10 years
12	IR6	Independent researcher	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	Less than 5 years
13	VP3	Village person	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	5 to 10 years
14	IR7	Independent researcher	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	5 to 10 years

15	IR8	Independent researcher	Southern	F	5 to 10 years
16	VP4	Village person	Southern	M	Less than 5 years
17	EP5	Expert practitioner	Northern	M	More than 10 years
18	VP5	Village person	East Coast	M	Less than 5 years
19	VP6	Village person	Southern	F	Less than 5 years
20	IR9	Independent researcher	Northern	F	5 to 10 years

#### 5.4 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Among the oral history practitioners, the expert practitioners have provided in-depth elaborations on the issues and the current state of oral history's development and management in Malaysia, compared to the individual researchers and the village people. This is due to their extensive knowledge of the gaps in the historical information and through their experience of undertaking research using oral history techniques.

Oral history practitioners conducted small scale oral history projects and applied oral history as a method of recording and preserving past events related to Malaysia's history. Based on the interviews conducted with the oral history practitioners, the oral history collections related to local community in Malaysia is still inadequate. The legal rights and privacy of interviewees receive little consideration by the oral history practitioners. In addition, the oral history collections are not preserved for long term access. The findings gathered from interviews are arranged based on the six axes: memory-making, evidentiality, identities, narratives, mediated memories and transactionality.

#### 5.5 MEMORY-MAKING

Memory-making is an activity that helps to capture memories, internally or externally where they might arise from a small item captured by an oral history project. As demonstrated by Gibbons (2014) through her analysis of the cultural heritage continuum model, the term 'memory-making' refers to:

- i. *Activities involved in creating, capturing, storing, destroying, sharing, communicating, preserving and managing information as a tool for memory. (p. 9).*
- ii. *Interaction, interpretation and communication embedded in practices, norms and values that contribute to the continuous dynamism, iteration and progression of cultural heritage. (p.218).*
- iii. *The cultural practice of recordkeeping, mediated through narrative, identity and the practices and values of individuals and groups. (p.262).*

Memory-making happens in individuals' everyday lives. In this research, memory-making activities are explored based on oral history processes. There are five levels related to the memory-making axis, these being: traces, personal memories, community memories, collective memories and networked memories.

In the context of oral history, the memory-making process helps to uncover hidden histories such as stories, experiences or events that are not recorded in any usual form, either printed or non-printed. In this research, oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals co-create memories and can be central to the memory-making process. This section discusses memory-making activities in oral history. There are four interlinked areas identified under memory-making activities through oral history:

- i. Recordings and transcripts as 'traces'.
- ii. Oral history's context or the subject's identification.
- iii. Community and collective memories.
- iv. Networked memories.

### **5.5.1 Recordings and transcripts as 'traces'**

'Traces' is a level of the co-create dimension in the memory-making and evidentiality axis in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Individual and community histories can be captured through oral history. For this research, the term 'traces' can refer to the audio or video recorded and also the transcript of an oral history interview. The recording and transcript are 'traces' until they are authenticated (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017). This is in line with what has been highlighted by McKemmish, Upward and Reed, (2010): the archival traces become records when they are stored and managed by recordkeeping and archiving processes. After the recording and transcript are produced, other evidential information used to verify the facts contained in the recording and transcript needs to be included. Based on the interviews conducted, not all oral history practitioners transcribe

their oral history interviews even though they use recording devices. How oral history practitioners provide evidence to support the recordings and transcript will be discussed in Section 5.6.1.

## 5.5.2 Oral history's context or the subject's identification

The context of oral history needs to be defined and identified before selecting any topic to be recorded. This section of the research is concerned with the process of determining which oral history subjects and personal memories of the potential interviewees are to be documented. This is a central priority which relates to the trace (at the co-create dimension) and personal memories at the capture dimension in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Since Malaysian oral history collections have limitations and gaps, as has been highlighted in Chapter 2, the process of the identification of oral history needs to be refined and streamlined. Based on the oral history practitioners' points of view, the content and context of any personal memories to be documented are typically: (i) nation building and (ii) culture, language, music, skills and good values that are rarely practiced.

### *i. Nation building*

The majority of the oral history practitioners interviewed agreed that the crucial type of personal memories, which need to be urgently captured by oral history practitioners and cultural institutions professionals, are the memories connected to the history of nation building. The history of a nation simply cannot be developed if it is based on the memories of one group of people. Oral history collections captured from across Malaysian society can also bring a range of valuable points to avoid bias or favouritism.

The research participants believe that, in making memories, the lessons and values could be documented. EP4 and IR7 agreed that documentation of the nation-building's history would significantly contribute to Malaysia's multiracial society. Young people need to know the struggles faced by the past generations in developing Malaysia as a country. EP4 holds that

*I believe history is the best lesson. We can move forward better through learning from history. What is important, I believe, is nation building especially when we live in multi-ethnic societies. It is very important that we learn the history well; we get the experiences of the people, how they developed this nation and also this country. The most important*

*thing is their struggle to ensure that we prosper. We prosper today because of their earlier struggles. (9:20)*

EP4 emphasised that oral history consists of precious memories which can be referred to in the future and could be helpful in a decision-making process. Events captured through the use of oral history can act as a foundation for integration within a pluralist society. The path of national development can be documented, including the challenging times before Malaysia obtained independence. EP4 shared his views:

*Those are the things that we need to capture, because the younger generations especially have no recollections of what has happened. It is only through reading the oral history documents that they can understand how this nation was built, through sweat, tears and blood. I think those are very important and for us to move further, in the years to come, this would have to be our foundation all the time because we are unique. We live in a multicultural and multiethnic-communities society. (9:4)*

IR6 and IR7 suggested prioritising the effort to use oral history techniques to capture undocumented national histories, such as wars and other past episodes that involved the country. IR6 pointed out on the need to use oral history for capturing diverse historical information:

*If we can accept the oral history technique to tell the biography of a figure, why do we not use this oral history approach to describe historical events? (12:7)*

IR7 believes by speeding-up the effort of capturing undocumented crucial events, more clues could be explored and the information gaps in the current local history collections, available in most of the cultural institutions, could be reduced. IR7 said,

*The lower-class community's fight to defend Malaysia from intrusion was never documented. Their involvement is only considered from the military and political aspects. They were the ones who became the eyes, ears and the front line for Malaysia. Why? Because they were the border communities. The Commonwealth soldiers, the British soldiers did not know the situation at the borders or the communities on those borders. Who were the enemy, who was not? Thus, they were the ones who became the eyes, ears and the front line in the battle. They were willing to give, to risk their lives. (14:57)*

EP1 illustrates the scenario of oral history's development by reference to historical events in Malaysia and highlights the need to widen the efforts of oral history programmes in Malaysia. He who has conducted a study on the Japanese and Thai military administrations in Terengganu (1942-1945) could not initially locate enough resources for his research. EP1 also highlights the need to unpack oral sources from different perspectives. He urges cultural institutions to actively participate in capturing undocumented stories and also consider the different dimensions of history, to derive meaning from major historical events:

*Through oral history, we will see who came in the 19th and 20th centuries. Is it the same with the 21st century? It will give us a comparison. Did they come to work or come as political refugees? The Chinese community too; where did they come from? What language do they use? Thus, many things can be done. For example, the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, how many people know about it? The generation that was born in 1968 and 1969; is it recorded in the library about the 13<sup>th</sup> of May incident? A crucial event in Malaysian history. Thus, the results could create interracial relationships, nurture interracial relationships and others. (1:31)*

According to EP1, cultural institutions could provide important contexts and comprehensive sources to explain in detail about the incident to the wider society, by making accurate information available to the public. The 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1969 was a tragic event which began a few days after the third general elections were held since Malaysian independence. This tragedy was caused by the dissatisfaction of certain groups of people with the election's results. It is considered to be the worst racial riot in the history of Malaysia and caused emergency rule to be declared (Hasim, 1986). According to Hooker, 2003 (p. 281), parliament was suspended for about 21 months but records of the historical event could not be found in the Malaysian National History Museum. Therefore, the eyewitnesses' and survivors' experiences could be recorded by an oral history project, while decisive lessons and moral values can be gained by the Malaysian citizens reading sufficient information about the tragic event.

**ii. Culture, language, music, skills and good values that are rarely practiced**

The loss of their language is an important issue for the minority groups like the Portuguese and Peranakan (Baba Nyonya) communities in Malaysia, as highlighted by VP4 and VP6. VP4 noted that he is most concerned about preserving his language, which is increasingly being eroded in his community due to its demographic declination and the assimilation of the local community with global influences. VP6 said that the younger generations within her community

are gradually using Malay and English as well as learning other international languages which they believe would bring greater value to them in the future.

The aim of VP4's involvement in oral history projects is to record and preserve what was left by the previous generations, by documenting the old language into a written form. The Kristang language, which was previously practised by the Portuguese community, is classified as one of the severely endangered languages by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). VP4 is committed to being actively involved in preserving this endangered language. This is a signal for VP4 and other members of the Portuguese community to document their inherited languages. These are some examples of VP4's point of view on these issues:

*The Portuguese accents or language are very important to maintain. We try to gather as much as we can. (16:2)*

*We are losing our language and cultural practices. Coming back to the resource center, I think this is our dream and I feel that this interest in coming to help is slowly building up. Because if you ask me, I just started three years ago on my own and now I'm getting involved with a Non-Governmental Organisation, I have more connection. (16:8)*

Proper documentation of a community's history, as well as celebrating the related festivals among minority groups, is important to ensure that these invaluable arts, heritage and cultures can be practiced, even with a modern life style and environment. As noted by VP2, younger generations rarely practice old traditions and these are likely to be overlooked:

*The problem is how to prevent the culture from being lost. For me, certain practices have vanished through intermarriage and cultural assimilation. (11:16)*

This was supported by IR5, who highlights the significance of documenting the rural communities' identities and memories consistently. The documentation is important as an attempt to empower these local communities in Malaysia:

*It is important for us to understand their cultures, characters, characteristics and taboos because oral history and oral tradition are very strong. It is still resilient in the rural areas among traditional communities. (10:17).*

IR3 highlighted the importance of preserving the history of traditional performances such as Hadrah which arrived from the Middle East through trading activities. As noted by Matusky and Tan Sooi Beng (2017), Hadrah is influenced and connected to the tradition of singing Zikir which originated in the Middle East and was brought to Malaysia. It can possibly be found in Perlis and Kedah (states in the Northern Region). The Hadrah performance consisted of singing in Malay, Urdu or Arabic and is accompanied by dancing and drumming; it is usually performed on special occasions, such as weddings, local festivals or national celebrations. According to IR3, even today Hadrah is still widely performed in the northern regions of Malaysia, in its own unique manner. IR3 said,

*We knew that Hadrah performances have an Arabic influence but when it arrived in Perlis the traditional performances became a bit different. Therefore, we need to document the history. (7:11)*

Oral history, as it relates to local knowledge and the survival of native people's skills in the modern era, is one of the crucial methods for documenting these dying traditions, as pointed out by IR7:

*Rural folk are rich in local knowledge compared to city folk; for instance in their knowledge about health, medicine or the benefits of certain plants. It is still practiced. (14:60)*

According to IR7, in Sabah, the involvement of non-government or non-profit organisations such as the Sabah Society and PACOS Trust<sup>9</sup> is very significant in preserving the local knowledge through the recording of oral history and uplifting the oral history programmes at the village level. IR7 shared his views:

*For instance, in Sabah, we observed that mostly it was NGOs that went there to conserve or preserve the knowledge. Just as I mentioned earlier, for instance the Sabah Society, they uplift this, they go to the villages. PACOS, for instance, is one that has been doing this for a long time. (14:47)*

IR7 has been to the Sabah Society to conduct an oral history of the local community. In this case, the indigenous knowledge which has a significant impact on the society should be given priority. According to IR7, it is urgent and critical to document knowledge about the special

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<sup>9</sup> A Community-Based Organization Dedicated Towards Supporting Indigenous Communities in Sabah: <https://pacostrust.com>.



skills, such as building houses and handicraft in rural areas in Sabah. The number of people who have such local knowledge and skills is continually decreasing. Strategies need to be formulated to increase the participation of members of the community. Based on interview data, there is much valuable historical information that can be recorded by co-creators. This cannot be accomplished without a collaborative effort.

### **5.5.3 Community and collective memories**

The term 'community memories' relates to 'records' in any form, which can contain the stories told about past events or reminiscences which are connected to a group of people. According to EP5, community memories become such when remembered and accepted by a larger group of communities. For example, the historical sources that contribute to a nation's history, when captured from a community, became collective memories when the sources are distributed and trusted by larger groups of people. The information considered to be collective memories is usually published in textbooks and exhibited in cultural institutions. On the other hand, community memories are not considered to be collective memories when a particular community, collectively, does not recognise the content of the information as being true or accurate.

Based on the interviews, EP3, IR3, VP2 and VP5 stated that most of the community memories in Malaysia are constructed from events that happened and the daily activities, practices or traditions found within a community. EP3 mentioned that community memories can turn into collective memories when more than one narrator has a collective understanding and the same views and opinions about the topic being discussed. Family histories and people's ancestors are examples of community memories highlighted by VP4 and VP6. The memories of a community are usually transferred through conversations between small groups and can be recorded through photographs and videos.

Collective memories relate to the learned social practices and shared values within a community, which form part of its cultural identity (Gibbons, 2014, p. 240). In the continuum concept, recorded information needs to be shared beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries before it becomes a collective memory. Collective memories can be presented in a written, oral or physical form, such as written documents, monuments or rituals and commemorations and performances (Ketelaar, 2005). In this research, the oral history sources related to nation building are considered to be collective memories.

This section discusses a few of the methods applied by the research's participants to organise and curate community and collective memory-based oral history collections. This part of the analysis is associated with the organisational and curative dimensions in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. The research's participants highlighted the importance of oral history as one way of organising community memories. EP1 pointed out that community memories can only be organised by transmitting the information orally. EP1 justified the need for written records, produced initially from oral sources, before they can be transformed into other forms of records. The point highlighted by EP1 is in line with the point that has previously been highlighted by Thompson (1978): '*Oral history is as old as history itself. It was the first kind of history*'. (p. 26). Musa, (2018) stated that a society's history begins with its oral history before people give more consideration to written documents and records.

The initiative to develop a community museum is one way to organise and curate community and collective memories. A private Portuguese community museum was developed, based on people's donations. The community museum stores artefacts and contains various photographs from several Portuguese community festivals from the 1950s onwards. VP4 explains,

*So basically, it is a private museum, like I say it depends on the available collections (collections from individuals or the community), to those people who come in they say you just donate, let's say give about two dollars. What I do right now, I promote that museum on our heritage walk, the museum is a must. But I say it is not open daily because they cannot afford to pay somebody to take care of it, you know. Maybe they open for few hours in the morning, and then they go for a break and then open again in the afternoon. Actually, two individuals, they take it in turns. Sometimes they cannot make it, if they get a booking for a group to come they ask a nephew to come because they have their work, they do not depend on the museum to survive. The museum is a private museum. This museum was set up, based on private collections. They have old photographs which many houses don't have anymore. So, they have collected this and maybe they have photographs from various festivals. (16:26)*

Oral history practitioners also share memories in less formalised ways such as through recording their memories and uploading them through social media. However, according to a few oral history practitioners, privacy issues need to be considered when the stories uploaded in the social media platforms. Another way to organise community memories is through the celebration of a particular way of life of people or groups through community festivals, which

are held every year. VP4 revealed that through these yearly celebrations, communities could build stronger connections with the previous generations:

*It's the most important festival to people; it's celebrated every year, 29<sup>th</sup> of June. It still goes on today and is very colourful, and vibrant, and has unique attractions, in terms of the cultural activities, cultural performances, poetry recitals, traditional games, and home cooked food. That is important. In this way, although it is not guaranteed, at least it may preserve this community, especially its languages and cultural practices. Because if we are disconnected from Melaka, you know we will slowly lose touch. (16:22).*

With oral history technique, it is important to identify valuable community memories and collective memories to be recorded. This aspect of the management and selection of community and collective memories will be discussed in the evidentiality, identities, narratives, mediated memories and transactionality axes.

#### **5.5.4 Networked memories**

In the pluralise dimension, 'networked memories' are discussed to understand how oral history collections could be accessed, retrieved and connected with by wider groups of people or researchers, in Malaysia and beyond. Concerns were expressed about the roles which need to be consistently considered by cultural institution professionals. VP1 and VP5 suggested that the cultural institutions need to provide sources based on either the users' or the local community's preferences. The cultural institution professionals need to act as one of the reference points to encourage other researchers to establish greater collaboration. Meanwhile, EP4, VP6 and IR7 suggested that cultural institution professionals capitalise on the local content to minimise gaps in the historical sources and become pathfinders in locating valuable local wisdom. EP4 mentioned that

*The librarians, especially, should not only maintain their status as custodians of information. When we know very well the collections in the libraries are mostly material that is important and there is a big gap in terms of the local content, thus I think the librarians, especially those working in public libraries and rural libraries, need to capitalise on this source of local content that is very easily available to them. (9:2)*

Based on the interviews, the majority of the oral history practitioners believed that social media, books and newspapers are the typical way to connect with people who have the same

interest in any particular oral history collection. Other ways mentioned are through involvement with associations developed by a particular community and through presenting material at a seminar.

VP1 created a personal website to allow a wider connection with people from different countries. As a result, the community centre developed by VP1 received several visits by researchers from China. According to VP1, the researchers were able to connect their research area to the oral history collections developed by VP1 and his team.

VP4 highlighted that he is interested in having a connection with Portugal, to document in-depth information about their early settlement in Melaka, as well as the language used by previous generations to describe things. VP4 said that, previously, there was a group of Portuguese, from Portugal, who tried to find their family in Melaka. However, the mission failed due to having no concrete evidence or networked memories documented in an earlier period. VP4 said,

*Since the Portuguese left Melaka in 1961, we were left on our own. No more connection to Portugal. There are no books that have all the knowledge that was passed down after the Portuguese left Melaka. It was all oral, mouth to mouth. The ladies learn all about cooking from their mothers while I learnt fishing skills from my father. So it has been passed down orally. (16:11)*

To improve the 'networked memories', the issue of the lack of publicity or promotion also needs to be addressed, as it will affect the effectiveness of the collections developed by the cultural institutions or oral history communities. The utilisation of collections depends on the promotional activities initiated either by the authorities, the cultural institution professionals or individuals. EP3 believes that the local community could be exposed to oral history programmes by providing sufficient awareness of these programmes.

## 5.6 EVIDENTIALITY

Evidentiality includes the levels of traces, evidence, encoding systems, organisational and community warrants and mandates. The evidentiality axis is crucial to an oral history programme. According to Gibbons (2014),

*Evidence and context are intrinsically linked, without an adequate, reliable and useful context then the evidential qualities of something can be challenged. (p. 253)*

Evidence could provide clues to unrecorded topics and events in Malaysia. Without evidence, the contents captured through oral history can be challenged. There are four aspects that will be discussed in the evidentiality axis as listed below:

- i. Evidence from audio recordings and transcripts.
- ii. Encoding systems.
- iii. Contents' curation and sharing techniques.
- iv. Mandates.

### **5.6.1 Evidence in recordings and transcripts**

This section discusses the need to capture other evidence to support the recorded oral history and written transcriptions. This section also discusses evidence attached, referred to or any metadata produced by the oral history practitioners to represent valid and proven information. The input from a witness to an event is vital in providing evidence and context to the data collected from an oral history interview. Oral history practitioners involved in oral history research face challenges in determining which local historical information to use to support their research findings. Social media has wrought tremendous changes; including the reality that now more of the available information is less filtered and verified. As a consequence, one of the challenges faced by the research's participants when developing oral history collections is that the reliability of the available information and records is increasingly questioned. Commenting on this aspect, EP2 said,

*Today's generations are not encouraged to write. Currently, it is challenging to verify the reliability of information. It is very hard. If we depend on social media, we get a headache. Previously, the community was well ordered. (3:17)*

Referring to oral history artefacts and the data's triangulation technique are two core methods of establishing the evidence in oral history collections:

#### ***i. Oral history artefacts***

Material items can be used to support the evidential aspect being discovered. The artefacts can be documents, diaries, images, letters, books or newspapers. Some of the research

participants are relying on written materials. Based on the interviews conducted, only a few participants use artefacts to support their findings.

Diaries are considered to be one of the crucial materials by oral history practitioners and they make a useful contribution to the development of oral histories. Photographs are another kind of material that is used to support, accompany or supplement the description contained in an interview. Photographs can help to describe the situation recorded in an interview in a better, clearer way. VP2 kept many old photographs and artefacts concerning Chetty community life, including marriages and traditional foods. IR2 said he was always referring to a photograph of his grandfather dancing the Menora, to tell others about their traditions. According to Matusky and Beng (2017), the Menora is also known by the names Manohra, Manohra Chatri, Nora Chatri or Lakon Nora which originated in the South of Thailand. Menora is a kind of folk-dance theatre which is performed in southern Thai and northern (Peninsular) Malaysian states (Kedah, Penang and Kelantan). Instrumental music, singing, dancing and ritual elements are part of a Menora performance.

For EP3, newspapers are a fundamental source, which will open up the research's context. The newspapers selected are based on the background to the research, so they provide a basic picture of the chosen topic for an oral history project. From the specific context, more clues can be gained to widen the research. In-depth and comprehensive oral history documentation can be achieved instead of relying on a single reference source. EP3 showed one of the newspaper cuttings to illustrate the technique used to identify the subject of his research:

*As an example, if you refer to this (press cutting), this was the first newspaper that I referred to while doing my PhD. Okay, in this newspaper, the Seruan Rakyat from 1945, it was reported that a Malay was killed. I read the original newspaper. Okay, this was what I highlighted. You see this "Perkelahian Cina-Melayu di Sabak Bernam" (Chinese-Malay clash in Sabak Bernam). (6:9)*

From the report obtained from the newspaper, EP3 was able to shift to another context and locate potential interviewees who could speak about the topic. With additional information from informers who were familiar with the subject matter, EP3 could expand and verify the networks or contacts to get more people involved in his research exploration and he was able to verify specific dates for the event.

VP1 added that newspapers contain a wealth of material which is very useful to open up new research agendas in oral history. Hints sometimes could be gained from local newspapers and provide the interviewer with vital information. Indirectly, a newspaper could act as a storehouse for information, which over time becomes a valuable source for the verification of information given by a narrator.

## **ii. Triangulation**

Evidentiality is a crucial element to improve the availability and use of reliable information and records worldwide. Flick (2017) defines triangulation as a process of verifying and examining data by combining various information sources from multiple persons at different times and places. Oral history's content is always being questioned for its validity and whether the data gathered from oral interviews are reliable enough to be referred to in the future. This view is supported by Abrams (2010), who writes that

*Conducting an interview is a practical means of obtaining information about the past. But in the process of eliciting and analysing the material, one is confronted by the oral history interview as an event of communication which demands that we find ways of comprehending not just what is said, but also how it is said, why it is said and what it means.*

The different sources to support the validity of the points and answers provided by oral history practitioners are discussed throughout this section. The majority of those who responded felt that relying on just one source was not recommended for an oral history's documentation process. Other peoples' points of view are also essential to determine the accuracy of the information. Cross checking with various sources will increase the credibility of the sources, thus ensuring the authenticity and integrity of the memories and knowledge captured. EP2 stated that

*If possible, in each place or for any event, do not depend on only one person. Try to find information from two or three people so we can compare what they present and with that, even without a written record, we can study the history of any event or any place. (3:2)*

IR4's opinions differed as he highlights the need for verifying records gained through interview sessions before the final documentation is considered as complete and trusted:

*I think oral history is the first part. The most important part is verification. Verification is very important, either through the document, or through the other party involved, so then after the verification we can say that it can become a record. Otherwise, I think it is not complete and unreliable. (8:6)*

EP4 strongly supported the enhancement of the verification aspect in oral history's documentation. Additional exploration needs to be conducted by the interviewer to verify the input given by an interviewee, through assistance provided by libraries and archives:

*We have to do a further search after the interview through the information services that are available. We have to go to the library, to the archives, we have to check just to verify, or maybe if nothing is available for verification perhaps we can ask a few other people to seek consistency for the claim being made. (9:15)*

Finding a reliable resource person after an interview session to support the findings from an oral history interview is one of the methods to verify the authenticity of the information gathered in the interview. A resource person can also be an expert or a person who has in-depth knowledge, is familiar with the research's interests and is experienced in the subject matter. EP1 shared,

*If I meet a person who is knowledgeable about the field, there may not be a lot of discrepancies. Even in my research, the records that we read are very helpful to the research that we do. (1:4)*

VP1 has a similar point about the need for further clarification of the information derived from the participants' interviews, importantly from the older generation:

*Old people are interviewed based on their memories and experiences. Some of their memories have faded and the answers they give are based on their personal perspectives. So, we have to clarify what they say from various sources such as old newspapers and documents from archives. Even though some of the interviewees came from the same community, there can be contradictions in the facts they state. Therefore, an in-depth analysis and comparison is needed. (2:10)*

According to IR3, forums and symposiums related to oral history are considered to be the platforms used to correct any facts which are not accurate. During a forum or symposium, any information which needs verification can be discussed.



### 5.6.2 Encoding systems

Gibbons (2014) defines an encoding system as a 'Process of delivering meaning and representation through deliberate construction and conversion'. Gibbons, in her study on social media, has drawn encoding systems in the context of digital data's transformation. In this research's context, audio records need to be transformed and transmitted to be understood by the people who access them. In order for an oral history's content to be understood, certain requirements need to be fulfilled and these involve a transformative process.

VP3 suggested keeping the primary audio recordings' sources as this will help the translation process, data clarification and interpretation in the future:

*We need the original tape or audio recording as a reference to help better interpretation; not only relying on the written output. (13:2)*

Using oral history as a reference source is challenging, especially when determining the content and context of the source. The written records available in cultural institutions are used to cross-check and maintain reliability. However, the transcripts produced by some cultural institutions do not provide sufficient background information on cultural matters. IR1 has pointed out that the transcript produced was not written using formal language which can be readily understood by a researcher. Without denying the importance of transcripts formed in a local dialect, the cultural institutions should consider providing transcripts in the official language of Malaysia (Bahasa Melayu) as suggested by IR1. Other difficulties include the frequent absence of transcripts. IR1 spent hours listening to the original tapes. EP3 has faced the same situation and commented:

*Some of the audio recordings in the National Archives are not transcribed and this situation cause difficulties for users when accessing the content of the audio. For example, most of the sources in the National Archive exist only in the form of tape recordings. (6:2)*

It was suggested by IR1 that the information professionals in cultural institutions produce complete transcripts and provide a reference list of the available records in the National Archives. By providing complete and comprehensive interview transcripts, it would help researchers to locate the right data or information they need before they produce any research outcome from their interviews.

Mohamed (2009) discusses the linguistic similarities and distinctions between the dialects available in Malaysia. The settlement of people with varied ethnic backgrounds in Malaysia brought different customs, traditions and languages. As Malaysian society consists of various ethnic groups and cultures, several research participants highlighted the need for cultural institutions to cater for oral histories in different languages and dialects. This effort is imperative in preserving the valuable views from diverse perspectives and experience. VP1, a Chinese man who lives in Selangor, indicated that he could not understand those he interviewed from the Minang community (an ethnic group indigenous to Sumatra, Indonesia) currently living in one of the villages in Selangor. Some of the Minang people had settled in Malaysia after seeking more significant economic opportunities in the late 19th century. According to VP1, the Minang people have their own dialect, inherited from previous generations.

EP2 emphasised the need to cater to various ethnic groups and languages in developing local community collections. This is supported by Okorafor (2010), who highlights the importance of addressing dialects and multiple languages when documenting local content so that it can be understood by a specific local community. Even though the Malay language is the official language in Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil are the primary languages used by the Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia. Then, other minority ethnic groups have their spoken languages, which they use for daily communication, as highlighted by EP2. Some of the interviewees selected for interview are more comfortable speaking in their mother tongues (the language of their ancestors); which is also vital to maintain the context for the subjects discussed during the interview sessions. EP2 said,

*English is not enough. The Malay language is not enough. We actually need the Chinese language. And for Indian it is more difficult. (3:14)*

Additionally, EP2 mentioned that sometimes researchers are not aware of the actual Malaysian setting and background. Most of the independent researchers interviewed thought that it is adequate to cover the three major ethnicities in Malaysia. In fact, broad and extensive coverage still needs to be considered when developing a local community's oral history in Malaysia, as highlighted by EP2:

*People say Malay, Chinese, and Indian. That is not enough. For me it is not enough. (3:36)*

Another research participant, when asked about this issue, pointed out that there can be slight linguistic differences between two places that are, geographically, relatively close to each another. VP3 said,

*Limbang is different; Kuching in fact is different because it has Brunei's influence. (13:5)*

In this case, at the project's planning stage, the oral history practitioners have to consider the languages and geographical locations before conducting the actual interview sessions. One of the solutions to these language barriers is to identify suitable intermediaries in the local community. VP1 pointed out that:

*Usually, my friends introduce me to these old timers (interviewees). That is why I learnt a Chinese dialect, Hakka. This area has lots of Hakka speakers because it used to be a tin mine. The Hakka were miners. (2:9)*

By understanding a local community's spoken dialect or language, an interviewer will be able to ask more questions and gather more detailed stories from a selected narrator. The contents of the interview can be understood and interpreted from a better perspective. There is a need to have people who can act as intermediaries or interpreters, to help understand the diverse ethnic languages which are associated with the interviewees' ethnic backgrounds. The message delivered by the interviewee during an interview session needs to be interpreted clearly to avoid misinterpretation or misconception, which will further affect the oral history's outcome and also to ensure the authenticity of the facts for the future. IR5 shared his experience:

*Thus, before we go there, we need to find someone who is conversant in the local ethnic language, because how are we going to communicate if we do not understand. (10:18)*

IR7 also interviewed rural people in Sabah:

*Language. That is part of it, because most of the ethnic people that I met are Dusun. Some of them could not speak Malay. Thus, I have to use an interpreter. (14:34)*

EP2 also highlights the need to cater for different stories from multicultural and multi-dialect societies to allow diverse voices to be heard from the various ethnicities, races and cultures, indirectly balancing the interests of each local community. For example, the Chinese

community in Malaysia comprises of many different speech groups, such as Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochiu, Foochow or Hokchiu, Hainanese and others.

Encoding systems in this research's context are closely related to Section 5.6.3 (Organisational and community warrants) and Section 5.8.2 (Signification in the narratives axis). Other discussions relating to the encoding systems can be found in these two sections. Encoding systems are central to the presentation of oral history. The number of languages and dialects practised in Malaysia are clearly a challenge that needs further attention.

### 5.6.3 Organisational and community warrants

Organisational and community warrants relate to larger and shared cultural narratives and having them accepted as group practices. This section relates to organisational and community warrants on the curate dimension at evidentiality axis. Techniques to curate the oral history collections which have value, are discussed based on the points of view of the oral history practitioners. From this perspective, curation can be described as a process of managing an oral history's content and determining what could be included in the oral history collections.

The way oral history practitioners keep and manage the audio recordings will determine the access and utilisation of those collections in the future. However, the privacy and degrees of access rights in oral history collections are less mentioned by oral history practitioners during the interview sessions. At the oral history practitioners' level, audio recordings are kept in their own personal storage systems, such as their personal computer, or on compact discs, while some of them are kept in the form of a processed document such as a transcript or research paper. VP1 said that he is keen for the collection he has gathered to be deposited in cultural institutions. However, he has concerns about the legal and privacy aspects, as some of the content of the collection mentions sensitive issues:

*Sometimes the content contains sensitive information which cannot be exposed to the public, due to legal concerns. (2:34)*

Transforming audio recordings into other kinds of storage systems is an important curation process. As suggested by nearly half of the oral history practitioners, cultural institutions are encouraged to approach their local community to ask them to contribute their papers and publications, so other communities can learn about them. Key methods of promoting the

outcomes from an audio recording, which are usually practiced by oral history practitioners, are by producing tangible products such as articles and magazines. Conference papers and journal publication are also considered effective ways to curate the contents of audio recordings, which is practised by VP1.

IR8, who is involved in the academic field, organised an event for spreading information about the audio recordings to her students who undertook a history course. She coordinated the event and talked about the contents of the interview she conducted as a sharing activity. Sometimes the narrators are invited to participate in a programme called 'Pengkisahan Sejarah'. During the programme, the invited narrators will share and express their views and opinions on historical events and figures that have played a significant role in building the nation and identity of Malaysians. The programme is created as a space for the public to express their views about the topics discussed.

In curating organisational and community warrants, EP1 and IR4 have suggested considering the ownership aspect of the oral history sources recorded. In this case, there are no clear rules in determining the owners of the recordings. From the points provided by EP1, the determination of ownership depends on the purpose of the oral history project. However, if the oral history sources are collected by an individual, they are subject to the reason for their collection. EP1 gave an example:

*However, if the record belongs to an individual, if someone asks to share it, he would not share it because he wants to use the data, perhaps for his project or thesis until he finishes it.*

IR4 has concerns about the oral history system's copyright issues if the collections developed by his faculty are uploaded to the system. This is because there was no proper legal agreement between the interviewer, narrator and the institution. He is worried about the legal rights if the collections are uploaded. In summary, legal, privacy and ownership issues impact the ability to curate material because of concerns at the community or collection level. The discussion about ownership of the oral history collections, which consists of different oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals' point of view will be discussed in Sections 5.8.4.2 and 6.8.4.2.

#### 5.6.4 Mandates

'Mandates' in the pluralise dimension is marked as the final level in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Mandates in the pluralise dimension in this research's context refer to the relevant parties who could select, record and manage oral histories, while the ethical aspects are considered to ensure the authoritative content is captured. Moral codes and embedded cultures also need to be considered during all the processes involved with oral history. Embedded culture is influenced by socio-cultural ideas, people's attitudes, values, goals and other related factors, which can impact the development of oral history.

The mandate to record a local community's oral history in Malaysia depends on the project initiated and the allocated funding, especially from state governments. Cultural institutions such as archives, libraries and museums are among the parties being given the mandate to collect historical information of great national value. Based on the interviews with oral history practitioners, oral history projects related to a community will be framed based on the government's direction, interest and agenda. VP2 commented on the current directions from the government agencies. He said,

*The government is more focused on tourism projects. The building being constructed at Kota Melaka today aims to encourage people to shop rather than acknowledge the world heritage sites and documents. (11:7)*

Other than the self-initiated projects, expert practitioners and independent researchers, such as EP1, EP2, EP5, IR3, IR9 and IR7 also conduct oral history projects which are supported by research funding from the related ministries in Malaysia. The initiatives are considered as short-term ones, rather than on-going oral history projects. Several village residents, such as VP2, VP3, VP4, and VP6 have been appointed by the state libraries and museums to support oral history projects related to their ethnic groups.

The mandate is also associated with Section 5.7.2 (Interviewee identification), and explains the criteria used to choose reliable interviewees or the group of people who are trusted to represent their community. The ethical aspects will be discussed in Sections 5.8.4.1 (Ethical considerations in oral history) and 5.8.4.2 (The legitimization of the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections).

## 5.7 IDENTITIES

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the functions of oral history is to preserve individual and community identities. Upward (2000), stated that *'Identities relates to the authorities by which records are made and kept, including their authorship, establishing particularities of the actors involved in the acts of records' creation, the empowerment of the actors and their identity viewed from broader social and cultural perspectives'*. (p. 9)

In the identities axis, the co-creator is only involved in collecting the oral history. Aspects relating to this including the process of identifying the interviewee, the technique applied for developing the interview's questions and the method of organising, curating and pluralising the oral history collections in organisations, institutions and networks will be discussed in the following sub-topics.

### 5.7.1 Oral history co-creators

Actors are the first level placed on the co-create dimension in the identities axis. In an oral history, the interviewers, interviewees and other related stakeholders are considered to be the actors. An actor can be a single interviewer or interviewee, or they are a group. This section elaborates and encompasses issues related to the actors who carry out the process of co-creating an oral history. In addition, to those being interviewed, oral history initiatives require broad participation across all the sectors. In addition to those being interviewed oral history collections can be co-created by three different groups: (i) researchers from schools and universities; (ii) cultural institutions and (iii) other government agencies. Based on the oral history practitioners' point of view, this group of people, or the institutions they belong to, are the ideal group to begin collecting the local history from various communities in Malaysia.

#### *i. Researchers from schools and universities*

A wide range of government institutions, which include schools, colleges and universities are responsible for activating oral history programmes at the schools' level. Local researchers, either from local colleges or universities, as well as freelancers, are also recognised as the co-creators of oral history projects. Talking about this issue, EP2 and IR9 comments that education institutions or related ministries need to revise their roles in upholding local history. Public universities in each state could play their role in documenting the oral history about

places and the local communities as part of their research initiatives. History teachers could collaborate and be actively involved with seminars where papers are presented.

On the other hand, two respondents felt that young people should be encouraged to get involved in co-creating oral history projects. VP1 is more focused on helping and supporting the youth of today to participate in documenting their local history. VP1 collaborates with young researchers, mostly from a private college which shows a high level of interest in the history field. VP1 also offers help with locating the historical sources which are used to support the young researchers' findings. For VP4, the young people play vital roles in preserving their language and cultural practices. The excerpts from VP4 suggested how crucial the young people's involvement in upholding local history is:

*For the young people they must see that this is a unique community, all of it. They are not aware that this needs to be preserved, needs to be passed on next generations. To get it preserved is not easy. When they appreciate, they will slowly have an interest. (16:9)*

VP4 makes an effort to bring young people inside his community, so they can appreciate their native language, traditions and culture. He met a small group of youngsters and taught them about the traditions of the Portuguese community. He was setting up a small youth group for the Portuguese community, so he could encourage their interest.

## **ii. Cultural institutions**

Cultural institutions were highlighted as important co-creators of oral history initiatives by IR4. Based on IR4's experience, there is limited involvement from other organisations and agencies. Currently, only a few parties such as museums, public libraries, the National Archives and universities are involved directly in oral history programmes. However, according to IR4, the most suitable agencies for the process of co-creating or documenting a local community's history are libraries, because they are closely involved with their local community. More local content needs to be developed to increase the number of collections that involve a wider range of ethnic communities in Malaysia.

Rural libraries, which are considered to be the closest centres to society by EP4, are highlighted as crucial agents for documenting the local history especially at the village level. Instead of relying on one party or headquarters, rural libraries could play a role in the co-creation process and provide awareness to their society about what they are doing. The initiative and effort to increase local collections through oral history also depends on the level



of awareness among the initiators; in this case, as mentioned by EP4, the rural librarians. Realising that rural librarians are part of the local society; they live with and understand the local culture and language better than any outsiders can, more training on relationship building is needed for rural librarians.

The awareness to preserve a community's history-related records should be encouraged by engaging with all levels of that society and by making their contribution important. By engaging with people when developing oral history, they will be more enthusiastic, as their contribution matters. It is valuable, therefore, to identify rural people's priorities for the documentation of oral history, as pointed out by EP4:

*We cannot force people to share their experiences with us. But there are roles for those who are working on the front line, especially those in rural libraries. Why? We have the National Archives, we have archival institutions across the country, we have libraries across the country, but if we rely only on the HQ (Headquarters) of these institutions, they are very far from those people who have that knowledge. We have to engage people who are the closest to these people. They will understand the language better. They are placed nearby where these people live and the historical sites, so they understand the culture better. (9:18)*

However, too much dependency on cultural institutions documenting oral history does not contribute to a successful oral history programme. EP4 added that by instilling a level of awareness among society, a culture of preserving oral history could develop. This may include the process of educating the society about the techniques and appropriate methods for oral history's documentation. Thus, the comment below illustrates the importance of having a flourishing interest in oral history programmes among society:

*We have to engage all levels of society. We have to engage the front end, the closest, those who are the closest to society. I was mentioning just now, like rural librarians for example. Yes, this is something very interesting. Many projects fail because they rely on one party. For example, very easily we say 'Okay, don't worry about the rubbish on the street in the city, because we have city hall people to clean it up'. If we keep on doing that, we will fail, because it has to come from an individual. So, we must create this awareness of oral history because this is something that is very important and then this has to be initiated, and people have to be motivated to do this. (9:17)*

The view of EP4 is supported by IR9, who urges cultural institution professionals to mix with their local communities as often as possible before co-creating any community oral history project. The idea is supported by VP3 and VP5, as they emphasised the need for cultural institution professionals to have essential information about the culture and life of a community.

As discussed in Chapter 2, cultural institutions act as stewards for preserving and making available the country's recorded history. However, according to IR1 and IR8, the available recorded history in the National Archives focuses exclusively on political leaders or other prominent public figures. As a consequence, the local content related to the Malaysian community is still limited. This gap needs to be addressed by the cultural institutions in order to fill these gaps in the historical reference sources. Based on EP2, oral history projects in Malaysia are not consistently applied in cultural institutions. EP2 stated that,

*We found that many records were missing from the Japanese era or period, such as the state secretariat's files and government office files and other files. Thus, we have to depend on the oral history of those who have direct experience. Actually, it is not a weakness. Just that sometimes we have to be careful because people can forget what has happened. (3:33)*

EP2 added that oral history programmes in Malaysia are less progressive than those in developed countries; in particular as the essential facts about national events are still not properly captured and preserved by the respective ministries and agencies. Significant histories are not recorded systematically and this causes a massive gap between one historical event and the next. Besides, the oral history programme is not seen as a critical mission by many cultural institutions and this initiative is yet to be appreciated in Malaysia. EP2 added that, during the colonial era, the national records were well kept, much better maintained and systematically managed. This was due to an awareness of the importance of preserving the historical records shaped by colonial ventures:

*In the British era it was good, they kept it (records). After 1957, if we want to find it (historical records), it is difficult. (3:19)*

EP4 and IR7 agreed that cultural institutions in Malaysia are contributing to the development of their local communities' histories. However, according to EP4, the current collections in libraries, museums, galleries and archives are focused more on gathering objects, rather than

collecting tacit knowledge from an individual with valuable experience, or from experts on culture and heritage. Commenting on this issue, IR7 said,

*Not only in universities, but even in this institution. In my opinion, this is a disease spreading through the institution that is supposed to be responsible for uplifting these oral sources, oral histories, oral traditions. We only prioritise physical forms such as the museum, pottery, keris, swords. (14:25)*

IR7 and VP5 also highlights the need to provide essential descriptions of the artefacts collected, rather than just displaying the items in cultural institutions. The information about the collections that are available in the cultural institutions can be described in a better way by gathering information and the relevant content through oral history interviews. The public could acquire a better insight from the effort to provide metadata on the collections available in cultural institutions.

IR8 thought that the lack of knowledge about local history causes Malaysians to be less patriotic and to lack a feeling of self-belonging. VP2 agreed that cultural institutions need to collaborate with their local communities to help the younger generations become aware of the importance of preserving their traditions.

### **iii. Other government agencies**

Various ministries were also highlighted as significant co-creators of oral history projects. In the view of IR5, all the ministries including the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Rural Development could play a role if they were keen to get involved in oral history initiatives. Ministries and other government agencies could coordinate by inviting headmen and village chiefs to participate in oral history projects. The participants can talk about their villages' history, culture, economy, politics, legends, myths and other things. IR5 also highlighted the need to include women as interviewees in an interview session, to give them space to share their valuable life experiences and recover the lost voices of the ordinary woman's experience. IR5 also highlighted the importance of capturing the women's experiences through oral history as he believes that women play significant roles in shaping their communities' identities:

*Perhaps, some of the storytellers, narrators could be women. Women can play a role. If we compare with Singapore, perhaps Singapore is more advanced in preserving its traditions, cultures and history. (10:47)*

The opinion from IR5 was supported by VP2:

*The government has to take the responsibility to preserve the heritage. (11.5)*

A similar expression about the government agencies' roles in the development of communities' oral histories was also highlighted by IR8, who is concerned about the collection of historical information for teaching purposes. She pointed out the need for collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the central government agency for the film industry of Malaysia, which is the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS). Documentaries or audio collections can be created and distributed to schools to support the teaching and learning process.

### **5.7.2 Interviewee identification**

This section relates to the 'group or communities' level in the capture dimension. Identifying suitable and appropriate narrators is important if it is to reflect the community identity but is not an easy task, especially within large communities. The process needs to be streamlined with the context or subject of the oral history project. The strategy of identifying participants needs to consider how to encourage the local community to take part. Through interview sessions with the research participants, three main essential strategies to identify an interviewee were identified.

#### ***i. Determine interviewees' criteria***

The credibility of the interviewees or narrators is one of the significant aspects to be considered during a selection process. The narrators can be identified by their contribution to a selected subject, as well as through other people's recommendations. IR3 highlighted a relevant approach to locating the right people to speak about the aspect of arts and culture in Malaysia:

*The National Department for Culture and Arts will award someone who has significant contributions in upholding the national arts and culture in Malaysia. So, based on the information provided by the National Department for Culture and Arts official website, I can locate the potential interviewees. (7:9)*

EP1 and IR9 ensures that they select interviewees who have in-depth experience of the research area. With experience, EP2 can assess whether the selected interviewees have a broad idea about the story. He began to explore by starting with small points and then extended out into more significant historical points. The credibility of the interviewees is not only measured by their broad and in-depth knowledge. For an interviewee to be selected, a good memory and health factors also influence the selection process, as emphasised by IR1 and IR5. The health factor can be determined by someone who knows the potential narrator such as a family member.

The portfolio or task of an individual also influences the selection process. Someone who is respected by their fellow villagers could also be chosen as an interviewee, as pointed out by EP3:

*In the village, the people who are respected include the village head and the Imam. That is why I like to find the people at the top and they involve people at the lower level. (6:29)*

According to IR5 if any historical issues arise, he will search for people who have first hand experience and vast knowledge in that particular area. EP3 adds the age factors of interviewees also play an essential role:

*That is selection and the age has to play an essential role. Let say I want to study, that is why when I want to study this period my respondents must be born in the 30s, only then could they talk about the Japanese era, about the communists. If the story went to their children, it means the source could be questioned because it became a secondary source, not the primary. That is the problem. (6:31)*

IR1 pointed out that the potential interviewees' involvement in politics and religious related activities, or their participation in social programmes or activities would become one of the factors in selecting the interviewees:

*Usually, I will look for the oldest one, who still has a sharp memory. I will ask other people who are familiar with the potential narrator. Can he talk? Is he available or not? How about his credibility? Then, I'll look at his background. How about his or her political ideology? I will consider aspect concerning politics, religion or involvement in the community. (4:42)*

Networking through social media is the most popular method for locating potential narrators, as pointed out by VP2. IR1 locates potential interviewees by considering the available

literature. He makes contact with authors who publish books or reference sources related to the subject being researched. From there, he will be able to locate more interviewees to fulfil the gaps in the research:

*Firstly, if let's say I want to research Kanaq ethnic history, I search for any available literature as the first point. I will try to find any written research or books. Then when I find the sources that I am interested in, I will contact the authors by email. If I receive a positive response, I will set up a meeting and make the necessary preparations to interview the authors. (4:36)*

## **ii. Identifying the elderly or veterans**

As pointed out by VP1, the elderly or veterans act as valuable resources to describe incidents, events or cases that happened. According to VP1, the village head plays a crucial role as a resource person who can act as the first point of contact and be referred to if specific incidents happen. The selection of the village head will depend on the oral history projects' context and scope. Besides, VP1 mentioned that younger people could only be interviewed if they have researched the subject being discussed, as their memories are sometimes limited:

*Young people may have no memory about it unless they did some research. The elderly, based on their memories, do know something. I have interviewed the ex-village head. He told me about a lot of events and incidents there. He was the village head, so he knew about what happened in the village. (2:37)*

Using the village head as one of the crucial strategies for locating potential narrators is supported by IR2:

*I feel that for this we have to find and observe the local community. In the village nowadays it is easy, there is the village head. We could identify who was involved in that particular event. (5:18)*

The locations for meeting potential narrators can be varied. For rural areas, IR5 usually meets people in a coffee shop where the elderly generation gets together with their friends. The villagers will meet in their usual place to socialise. In there IR5 will begin a free and easy conversation in a flexible, relaxing environment and further develop his contacts and networks:

*At the place where the elderly hangout, such as the coffee shop, you will find the potential interviewees (10:11)*

Other oral history practitioners who participate in this do not generally use this approach. There are disadvantages with this approach. Sometimes, the person selected as an interviewee is not the appropriate person to interview. In addition, IR2 highlights the importance of approaching someone who could influence others to engage in the oral history initiative. Among the people who are classified in this group is the community's leader or an association's leader. This group of people can contribute to the process of the identification of potential interviewees and encourage the local community to rebuild or recollect their community's history;

*As for today, the tendency is there, encouragement from certain parties that have a little bit of leverage or influence, have a bit of an idea or have some status. That person could be a community leader, an association leader or perhaps a senator. He goes back to his place and gives some enlightenment or shares some ideas so that the society and the community could re-evaluate or reconsider what they have. (5:15)*

### **iii. Approaching prospective interviewees**

As highlighted by IR5, some of the local people prefer an informal communication. Through a casual conversation, more spontaneous information from the interviewee can be documented. The interviewees are encouraged and allowed to speak freely and candidly. This method is supported by EP1:

*And another matter, I talk indirectly. Sometimes it is better to do it casually. (1:18)*

IR5 also practices a similar approach as an identification strategy:

*Once I did research into Rosli Dhoby<sup>10</sup>. I did not know anybody in Sibul. I went to the market. In the market many old retirees gather there. So I asked politely 'Uncle, do you know any of Rosli Dhoby's friends or family?'*

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<sup>10</sup>Malay Sarawakian nationalist from Sibul who sacrificed himself to obtain Sarawak's independence from the British. Rosli Dhoby and three others were hanged in 2 March 1950. Rosli Dhoby is celebrated in Malaysia's national history as a nationalist hero for his struggles. Reference: Hooker, V.M. (2003). A short history of Malaysia: Linking East and West. Singapore: Allen & Unwin.

*'Yes,' the uncle answered directly, 'you go to this store, in this village; his family, his friends are there.'*

*Once I find the key person or the first potential interviewee, it is easier to find the next interviewee. (10:14)*

EP2 suggested that anyone involved in oral history projects surround themselves with potential narrators through informal discussions or conversations to develop and establish valuable oral sources. An ice breaking conversation is needed to develop trust, acceptance and mutual understanding between the interviewees and interviewers as pointed out by IR7:

*We need to socialise. That is a very important method. We need to mix with people, only then we can encourage them to tell us what we want to know. For example, when I meet my students, the first time I usually ask where they come from. Then I encourage them to speak about their family or their village. Thus, when we find someone, we must ask regularly. (3:3)*

This was supported by IR7 who believes that developing trust is significant for creating a better relationship with informants:

*We want to gain the informant's trust, the one that we want to interview. This is because, in oral history, when we meet someone, we should not just conduct an interview. We meet several times to establish trust between the researchers and their informant. (14:39).*

Through mixing with people, much preparation can be done before the actual interview is conducted. The preparation includes identifying translators who can understand the ethnic language, or carrying out any training needed by the oral history team's members. IR5 highlighted the need to include someone as a communicator in an oral history project team, as a bridge to the related community:

*Thus, before we go there, we try to find someone who is conversant in the ethnic language (local language), because how are we going to communicate if we do not understand them and vice versa? (10:18)*



### 5.7.3 The process of developing questions

The 'capture' dimension in the identities axis also discusses the method of developing interview questions which are used to record groups' or communities' stories. The process of designing questions is usually done by holding a preliminary meeting and through the use of the available literature. Newspapers, letters and books are common and familiar sources of information that can be used to construct the relevant interview questions, as the majority of the oral history practitioners who participated in this research do. An interview guide is then created to list the specific topics and themes that was covered during an interview session and this is used as the basis for the interview questions.

For IR6 and VP1, unstructured interviews are often practiced and conducted in an informal environment. VP1 shared his experiences:

*Usually, for the old generations, we begin with an informal chat. When they get in the mood, we can give a brief explanation about what questions we are going to ask. We can ask for details about the events and how he or she became involved in that event. We can capture their experiences such as founding a village, the events during an emergency and during the Second World War. (2:36)*

IR1, who has previously conducted a group-based project, has a different approach to designing questions. He discusses with his team what issues needed to be discovered. Then IR1 and his team construct suitable questions and make the questions and subjects relevant before beginning the actual interview session. IR1 also did a thorough check of any appropriate books. Compared to IR1, IR6 prefers to make 'off-the-cuff' questions to suit the narrator's experience or knowledge, without preparing list of questions. IR6 believes that by applying this technique, valuable input can be gathered from the narrator.

### 5.7.4 Organisations, institutions and networks

The 'organisation', 'institution' and 'network' levels are related to the organise, curate and pluralise dimensions on the identities axis. Curating, at the institutions level, occurs through collaborations with cultural and other government institutions. The local community associations are invited to exhibit and share their oral history collections at events organised by the cultural institutions and other government agencies. In the pluralise dimension, the 'networks' have been developed among those who have a great deal of interest in oral history

programmes. The Oral History Association of Malaysia has shown its proactive approach by preparing a platform to gather the potential networks together to leverage and expand oral history programmes at the community level.

Concerns about budget allocations for oral history programmes were raised. The funding allocation for this initiative was also affected due to the lack of awareness of the importance of documenting oral history. As highlighted by most oral history practitioners, there are fewer demands from the local communities to preserve their identities and memories. When the communities' demand for the oral history programme diminished, the budget allocation was diverted to other aspects considered more relevant by the government.

All the financing came from state governments. More funds are needed to ensure that active and efficient oral history programmes increase at the local level. EP2 claims the initiative to research his local community through oral history cannot be continued by his division, due to budget constraints. EP3 and IR5 explained the current situation about budget issues.

EP3 stated that,

*Development work must be done collectively. One disheartening or depressing thing in Malaysia is that when we want to organise a programme or a project, the first thing to be asked is its cost. When finance becomes the main constraint, many things cannot be done. (6:15)*

IR5 added,

*Another issue is money. Is the government giving serious consideration to this effort? If the government sends a research officer to do the field work, it will involve costs, right? Again, the constraint is the financial issue. (10:50)*

According to IR5, the level of interest about the importance of capturing oral history, or having sufficient funds, will determine the level of oral history's development and initiatives:

*If they have a strong awareness, they will take the initiative. I do not think third world countries including developed country like Malaysia have a strong awareness, because even to find money to eat is hard. If we go to the interior or rural areas, the villages, will it occur to them to record it, to write all this material, when food for lunch is still not guaranteed? Frightening, isn't it? (10:41)*

A representative from a minority group in the Southern region mentioned that support, in the form of budgets and grants, is shrinking. According to VP4, a local museum could serve as a platform for the community to discuss their cultural development and related activities:

*The private museum is run on a shrinking budget because I don't think we are given any support or grant from the government. (16:1)*

VP4 also expressed his disappointment and sounded upset about the budget allocation for supporting the minority groups to perform and strengthening their cultural development activities. According to VP4, some community programmes cannot be sustained without adequate financial support:

*The community museum at Medan Portuguese (near Melaka city) was set up in 1984. It was supposedly built as a cultural centre; it staged cultural dances for a year, but after one year, no more, because of no budget. (16:14)*

As a consequence, VP4 and other community members took the initiative to seek support from elsewhere. The sponsors will place an advertisement in the local newsletter published by the Portuguese community and pay the cost to the publisher or organiser. The profits from this are used support the initiative to document the local community's history. This helped the Portuguese community in Melaka to continue their efforts to preserve their cultural traditions through organising community festivals and documenting their language.

## 5.8 NARRATIVES

In the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model, the narratives axis is in a shared relationship with the identities axis. Narratives can be considered as how people create or how they identify themselves, what they are interested in, how they are identified within various communities and what values they perceive (Gibbons, 2018). Narratives are also interrelated with how the storytelling is communicated through the media, different genres and other forms (Gibbons, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017). Faulkhead (2017) argues that narratives, either by using text or oral methods, are an important way to transmit, store and preserve information from one generation to the next. In this study, narratives refers to a method of communicating past information, including historical facts, through oral history interviews. The information and knowledge contained in a narrative is developed and goes through the various levels (small stories, signification, domination, legitimation and facilitation).

### **5.8.1 Small stories**

The 'small stories' level in the co-create dimension is also being analysed. A small story could begin from a conversation within a family, as pointed out by EP2. The story could be related to a story about the family tree, the family's migration, the sad and tragic realities faced by a family or individual success stories and previous occupations, as well as parenting techniques. These small stories could expand to small stories within a community. Most of the oral history practitioners believed that those stories can be documented by using oral history techniques, as part of the incremental steps taken before capturing other stories which are significant to a country. This effort is also considered as one way of bringing local communities at the village level to co-create oral history projects. According to EP1, some of the members of the local community preferred to tell their stories as one way to make the lessons learnt available to others, while certain groups of people are willing to share their stories to make people aware of them.

### **5.8.2 Signification**

Signification in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model also means signs and signals (such as the encoding systems in Section 5.6.2) which implies they are a language and present themselves as a process of generating value and allocating meanings to sources. Based on the feedback provided by the oral history practitioners, the methods for the signification of oral history's findings, as practiced and suggested by them, include text published in books, photos, video, and any communicative interaction by television or mainstream media, small groups of workshops or seminars, social media, monographs, articles or magazines, exhibitions and films or movies, all of which will be discussed further in Section 5.8.5 (Facilitation).

### **5.8.3 Domination**

The oral history practitioners asked how one story can become dominant and can be accepted holistically by society, so that it would become the long-term memory of the community, which relates to the organise dimension in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Upward (1997) defines domination as,

*Facilities by which groups and individuals are organised and thereby harnessed to organisational or societal goals. At a macro level this includes organisational cultures; at a micro level it encompasses the actual allocation of resources.*

Based on the data gathered from the interviews, the historical information that gets widely spread through media such as television and radio can be dominant, as this medium can increase the trust for those people watching and listening to it. According to EP1, history with a lesson learned is preferred and has dominated from one generation to the next. It is subject to the acceptance of the audience, who value each story which affects them. EP1 commented,

*If you go to institutions, if the story is not liked by the society, it would not go well. For example, the story of Gerbang Malam (Night Chat)<sup>11</sup>. The story is dominant because it teaches people a lesson. From one generation to another generation, they tell stories. From the learning and teaching perspective it is excellent. The society understands it. (1:15).*

However, VP2 has different views on this. He believes that the domination of community history depends on the influence of the local authority or the government through official communication channels. The government's involvement in how they shape communities has also become a spark that is sustaining community histories. If the government considers that support for the community's activities is high, that sort of history can be dominant in the community. Otherwise, if the community's history is not being given enough coverage through the mainstream media, that story will not become popular and becomes less sustainable. Stories that are being repeated and recorded in written form and officially published by the government and then shared by the diverse communities are more dominant. This aspect will be discussed further in Chapter 7 (Findings and discussion).

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<sup>11</sup>Gerbang Malam is a collection of comic mystery series and contains stories which could provide lessons to readers. Among the title of the books are Dendam Arwah Api, Bingkisan Bonekan Hidup, Korban di Pondokan Pengantin and Seandainya Dia Bukan Hantu. These collections were published in the mid-90s.

#### **5.8.4 Legitimation**

Legitimation is also related to domination. Legitimation in this research context means the acceptance of the record as the true story, especially by a particular group. Based on the interview data, there are two main aspects related to legitimation:

- i. Ethical considerations in oral history.
- ii. The legitimation of the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections.

These two aspects contribute to whether oral history collections are regarded as legitimate in the view of people who listen or access to oral history collections.

##### **5.8.4.1 Ethical considerations in oral history**

This section relates to the level of legitimacy in the curate dimension. As discussed before, there was an issue where some of the documented oral history sources were being questioned for their authenticity and whether they were credible enough to be referred to as reliable reference sources. The problems, such as having insufficient historical information to assist a history teacher with their programme or thinking that the oral history's material is historically unreliable can be minimised by determining the appropriate ethical practices.

In order for oral history sources to be curated, the ethical aspects need to be taken into consideration, thus allowing sources that are authentic and have integrity to be gathered. When documenting oral history, considering the culture of the selected interviewees and choosing the right people to speak on behalf of their community are actions that legitimise the content of an oral history.

Clear and perceivable guidelines for approaching a community are needed as it is crucial to assess the community's preferences and rights. Through the interview process, several ethical aspects and issues may arise, based on opinions from the oral history practitioners. Anyone involved in an oral history programme needs to be suitably sensitive to the community's needs, and have an emphasis on being honest and open. The erosion of trust occurs when there is no mutual understanding between the interviewers and interviewees involved. Discussions with the potential community are required to ensure a smooth transmission; which indirectly maintains an ethical relationship. Below are the strategies that emerged from the interviews with the research participants:

**i. Purpose of documentation and publication agreement**

Ethical considerations include the publication of the oral history's outcomes and how the oral history's recording would be processed in the future. Before the oral history collections are published, decisions about which stories should remain private and not be published need to be comprehensively recognised. Aspects about the publication of the information provided depend on a mutual agreement between the interviewee and interviewer. An interview transcript can be returned to its narrator for correction, as noted by IR1:

*In that case, I will ask the respondent first, if he agrees or not. I will remove (the part) that he requests from the whole transcription. However, if he agrees, I will include everything. I think it is important to know the chronology of his narration. (4:17)*

The purpose of documentation must be explained to any potential interviewees. Sensitive content should be filtered either by the interviewer or the interviewees. Data should only be gathered for study purposes. Reflections about the meaning can be gathered from the narrator to ensure that accurate information is gathered. VP1 stated,

*And he believed that we do not publicise what we have. It is only for academic study. Therefore, we do not open these boundaries, not to be shared or used by others. This is an agreement with them. (2:42)*

Importantly, EP1 pointed out that if any interviewer intends to document the oral history's outcomes, so they are accessible by the public, the author must make sure that he or she produces comprehensive findings with authoritative evidence.

**ii. Culture considerations**

The other aspect to be considered is culture, where people who get involved in oral history need to be aware of differences in the habits, language, traditions, even the gestures, of different people. These elements are also considered as a challenge, since it takes some time to adapt to the customs and rules of a particular place. For example, it is important for people to understand the historical and social reality of villages in Malaysia, as emphasised by Baharuddin (1986, p.15). Disrespecting customs and showing ignorance of the local culture should be avoided when documenting oral history. Experienced oral history practitioners are able to manage the ethical aspects by using their common sense, compared to a new practitioner, as revealed by EP2:

*I think it depends a lot on personal experience. Then, personal belief and personal culture. It is not easy to ascertain. (3:25)*

The interviewer could assess from the readiness of the interviewee whether it is a suitable time to conduct the interview. Importantly, suitable timing and conditions need to be measured, as mentioned EP1:

*There were instances when the people we interviewed were not ready to tell us their story. (1:23)*

IR7 engaged with a suburban community in Sabah and describes that the local community can be easily approached if the government officers use a proper engagement technique:

*In my opinion, the society could be a naive society. It means if there were any, they would not be as bad as the city folks would be. It means the acceptance towards outsiders is very good. Yes, they are approachable. Thus, in my opinion, it all depends on the wisdom of the researcher or the government officer when they approach the villagers or rural folks. These villagers, if we come to them, it is already a recognition to them. (14:62)*

Sensitive questions need to be filtered to avoid any uncomfortable feelings and unnecessary arguments between the interviewees and interviewers during the interview sessions. As highlighted by IR8, an interviewer should be able to differentiate between those issues that may be sensitive and those that are not. According to IR8, when discussing painful memories or unpleasant events, they should also be considered a sensitive topic. In this case, IR8 has conducted a background study to understand the interviewees' preferences for the project's scope and coverage:

*Usually, interviewees are not interested in answering sensitive questions. They might be afraid to provide answers. (15:30)*

IR8 shared her experience in dealing with the Chetty (also known as Chettiar) community in Malaysia. IR8 said it is not easy to obtain information from that community. Some of the members of the Chetty community are afraid that their responses during the interview session will have an impact which may lead to other issues. They prefer not to reveal history which is not on their side. They do not like being labelled as creditors who charged high rates of interest



to debtors a long time ago. Some of the narrators refuse to provide answers that are considered to be sensitive by them.

**iii. Selecting the appropriate people to represent a community**

As the documentation developed from oral history interviews will be spread or distributed to others, the outcome or product should incorporate the correct content to represent the community's historical information. Accurate recording of the facts is essential to reduce or avoid misconceptions about the community involved. Locating the right key speakers to represent the community, those who are well versed in the subject to be discussed, will allow proper and convenient communication between the interviewees and interviewers. VP4 stresses the importance of selecting the right interviewees, especially if the chosen interviewees speak about topics related to the customs, traditions and culture practiced by a specific community:

*Meeting the right person, coming to do such work; it is important to come to the right person. The right person that is chosen maybe not be the right person for the other group. (16:17)*

According to VP4, the sources of the information can be questioned if the selected interviewees are not chosen carefully, which indirectly will create a massive problem for the people involved in the process of preserving the collective memories through a systematic and appropriate technique. He believes that it is crucial to produce reference sources which can be referred to by future generations and researchers.

Involvement with oral history, or any other activities related to community building, can be seen as an ideal way to locate the right person. VP4 suggested,

*Find the suitable people, maybe look through the institutions to see who has been consistent, who has been seriously doing some work over the past couple of years on preserving the language and trying to get groups to become interested. (16:27)*

VP2 highlighted that within a community there would be different political ideologies and internal conflicts. He suggests interviewers verify and carefully select the interviewees as some of them would not be the best people to represent a community and they could create biased points of view. VP2 pointed out some of the interviewees join oral history interview session not because they have points to share but rather to gain people's attention:

*Now people do something to gain popularity. They want to appear on television and in newspapers. Most of the people want to become more glamorous, get people to know them. (11:20)*

However, it is crucial and useful to record divided opinion within a community. VP2 shared his experience of one time he faced some difficulties in gaining the cooperation of community members. According to him, the community members expected some token or returns from the initiatives rather than only volunteering their effort:

*Some of the members of the community do not fully support the effort in upholding local community history. There was one time I went to meet a few villagers, to lend me some of their stuff for an exhibition. They became angry with me. Some of them said they don't have the material; in fact, they do have it. (11:26)*

Based on the interview with VP2, some of the villagers refused to lend their individual or private collections, due to a lack of awareness of the importance of information sharing. The villagers were also afraid that the exhibition's organiser would not take good care of their collections, which they have had for generations.

#### **iv. Appropriate procedures applied**

IR3 shared a different experience when approaching artists for his oral history project. He needed to conduct the interview sessions as a series of interviews, rather than a one-time session. Based on his experience, through several meetings, gaps can be reduced, and the interviewees can become more comfortable providing more input and sharing things to illustrate the whole story:

*The experience that I always had is when I interview musical artists. They do not want us to come just once. That means we have to get with them two or three times, and then they will share their knowledge. (7:13)*

A different way was applied by IR8 where he gave briefings and explanations to interviewees before beginning an interview session. He also practices a set of values when conducting oral history interviews:

*Ethics, while speaking with them, what language could be used. Then, you need to explain to them. If you are making a recording, are you going to edit the content? And how will you*

*transcribe it? We need to inform them. If possible, you give them a draft of the questions before the actual session. (15:28)*

IR8 also prepares interview transcripts and verifies them with the interviewees, to reassure them that what they said during the interview is accurate. This process is vital to avoid reporting a false statement by the narrators and it soon becomes a part of the verification process. IR7 highlighted different points. He emphasised the need to have someone who knows the background of the community, who could explain the culture of the community before any topic is explored, no matter what areas are discussed. This technique is known as preliminary research:

*Before we go to the research site, we need to gain empirical information. We have to understand the theory about the community, the theory related to setbacks among a community, the theory about the boundaries. All these need to be understood. From conducting preliminary studies, in-depth information is gained which is useful to connect other facts together. (14:61)*

Where it is hard for an interviewer to locate or contact the interviewee, an intermediary need to be appointed. Some of the oral history practitioners need to overcome certain difficulties when approaching an interviewee who has very high status or holds a high position, because there are too many procedures or protocols that need to be followed and obeyed. Commenting on this aspect, EP3 said,

*Recently I did an interview with retired General Tan Rei Yaacob Mohd Zain<sup>12</sup>. To do this, we went through a difficult process. That was one of the barriers, the obstacles, causing us too many formalities. However, for others, to access other people, I will go by myself. I will go alone and I like to go alone. I do not like to go in a group because when I go alone, I will obtain lots of information. (6:23)*

Choosing the right people as intermediaries or brokers is essential for identifying suitable people to interview. The formalities or approaches necessary may be different from one narrator to another, and the intermediary acts more as a bridge for any information and research gaps between the interviewees and interviewers. The intermediary also helps in evaluating the interview's approach and the methods to be used.

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<sup>12</sup>Tan REi Yaacob Bin Mat Zain has been the Chairman of the Board of NV Multi Corp. Bhd since 28 April 2000. He is one of the leading business figures in Malaysia.

In any case, proper engagement with the local people is required to gain their support. Good relationships with the local people need to be established in order to obtain greater cooperation from them, and to involve more people in an oral history programme. EP2 said,

*I am also involved with a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). I help them a lot in government matters and with paperwork. Since they know me, it is easy for me to enter their community. They have confidence and trust. (2:26)*

EP2 urged individuals who might be interested in participating in oral history programmes to gain the trust of the selected interviewee. Through EP2's experience, an interviewee usually does not adequately tell all of their experiences to a stranger during their first meeting. Therefore, a clear relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee needs to be defined and managed.

#### **v. Considerations of informed consent and trust aspect**

The research participants also highlighted the legal aspects regarding oral history. Informed consent forms are not used by most of the interviewees. Consent includes the right of an interviewee to know the background to the oral history project, while they are given the right to withdraw from participating in the project at any time (Ryen, 2016). IR4 noted that the legalities of oral history interviews need to be given serious attention. Consent procedures for an oral history project need to be revised to prevent any harm coming to the interviewee and to maintain the integrity of the interviewer. IR4 believes that if the legal aspect is not addressed, there is the possibility of disputes in the future, as the interviewee's or narrator's family members might change their minds about releasing their story to the public or wider audience, without their consent. IR4 reported that

*One of the main challenges is in terms of the legal front. For example, in order for us to display the transcript or make the oral history (audio) accessible, we need to have consent from the respondents or the participants. (8:1)*

IR4 was also concerned about the improper management of the consent agreement forms. In his faculty, the collection was based on the students' oral history projects. The consent forms were not properly recorded and managed. It became more complicated for IR4 and his team when they tried to digitise the available collection in an online platform they had developed. The consent from the interviewees needs to be acquired before pluralising the collection in any platform, either online or offline. IR4 illustrates the challenges:

*We have about a thousand items in the collection. For half of them, we don't have the proper consent form. To make it accessible, we have to find all the respondents involved. That is a very challenging task because some of them have already passed away. Out of 500, we have managed to get 100 consent forms: because they are all over Malaysia. That is very challenging. (8:2).*

EP3 shared his experience of when he conducted an oral history project at Sungai Manik, Perak. He said it was not easy to gain the support and trust of the nominated narrators to share their experiences of living in a climate of fear, or being attacked and devastated by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) in Sungai Manik. He said the trust of society could not be earned in a short period of time and a good rapport should be established between the interviewer and interviewee. In addition, the relationship with the local community needs to be strengthened to gain their support and interest in preserving their local community's history.

#### **5.8.4.2 The legitimation of the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections**

Currently, communities' oral history collections are owned and controlled by the individual or agency that conducts the oral history. That means there are no specific guidelines or policies, developed by the cultural institutions in Malaysia, for the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections. There are different points of view on which party should administrate and possess the communities' oral history collections. In this sense, the points and justification outlined are based on the experience and personal views of the research participants in this study. There were two different points of view on this aspect:

##### ***i. Opinion 1: Ownership and control by the community***

From the interview session, most of the oral history practitioners emphasise the need to revise the strategy or method employed to generate local historical sources, to protect the local community's identity and memory. VP1 has developed a community centre which hosts collections related to Chinese people in the Kajang area. However, he preferred that centre be visited by researchers rather than by tourists:

*I select only those who are interested. Either local or international students, or researchers who are interested in this field. Or other friends who want to make a collaboration, we welcome them. Our resources are limited. Next month, we have a group of professors from*

*China. They will come even though it is not a working day; we welcome them. We are okay with academics sharing our records. (2:49)*

VP1 prefers oral history collections developed by the local community, which are then controlled and owned by the community themselves. This point of view was supported by IR1 who agreed that the community-based collections should be administered by the community, while the cultural institutions (such as archives or other related agencies) just provide support in terms of their budget, training or planning. The cultural institutions around the regional areas could be exponents of the works initiated by the local community. IR4 commented,

*I think the community themselves should own it. Archives or other government bodies should act just as supporters of their efforts. For example, in Selangor itself, there is an Oral History Association that is used by a non-governmental organisation. Indirectly, the government will support their financial, accommodation and office needs and the research project. (4.19)*

EP3 agreed that collections should be owned and controlled by the community. However, he had concerns about future access to the collections:

*I prefer the community to save the collections. I am afraid that if the collections are handed over to institutions, it will become too official and challenging to access them. (6:41)*

VP4 provided some justifications for the reason why he agreed that the community's historical collections are supposed to be controlled and owned by the community:

*I think finally what we have belongs to the community. It cannot belong to an individual. Institutions should just monitor them, to ensure they survive and organise them, but every individual should be given the opportunity to know, to learn the knowledge about the music, whatever they want to know, maybe even about the language. A resource centre is just a body to monitor, to manage, to organise. It is not the sole owner of anything in the community. That's why I say, what we have belongs to the community. The people (community) must be the main players in all this kind of activity. We have to include everybody (community). Especially those who have a very limited education but still show an interest. (16:20)*

However, there were certain limitations if the community controls and owns the collections, as pointed out by IR2. According to him, there are no clear guidelines on how the process of the oral history collections' development can be done. The readiness, in terms of the management

aspects and the level of awareness are considered to be limitations to the community establishing systematic oral history programmes. IR2 said,

*The challenge is how to develop from the sources that we have. That will go back to the community level. Who is the leader? The awareness; need to be redeveloped. Okay, they go back to their original place and try to redevelop it. I feel there are those in the community who are willing to be actively involved. (5:13)*

The government does not prioritise oral history programmes for enriching local content. Consequently, there is a blurred or ambiguous direction to community collections' expansion. According to IR5, financial support becomes the primary concern to the development of a community's oral history collections. The budget distributions are vital for travel allowances or other related financial support which oral history practitioners, especially independent researchers, still lack. The government or related agencies should examine this issue locally. IR5 said,

*The allowance is to go to the rural areas (the countryside which is quite far away) and he or she could not go there for only a day. Perhaps, he or she has to go there for weeks or months to obtain the information or materials. Nevertheless, it is possible. Either you want it or not. Now, we could not see the government's priority, the nation's priority in this aspect. Thus, now it is up to the community. (10:51)*

VP2 is also concerned about financial support to administer the local community's collections and heritage:

*The community itself needs to accommodate and pay the salary and electricity costs. (11:22)*

Attitude plays a significant role in determining what is and what contributes to a successful programme set up by the community. The Chetty community has formed a new committee, as the upholder of local content through oral history. Due to internal politics and the lack of the management's maturity and unclear directions, they are not willing to work as a team.

According to VP2,

*Now we have set up a new committee, but sometimes they do not give full cooperation. That is very hard. They have an envious feeling of jealousy. That is a big problem here. (11:11)*

Even though there was a lot of awareness of the programme, cultivated by the association to explain the direction, the message still did not effectively reach the whole community. Some of the projects are halfway done, but not completed, due to the absence of a spirit of unity. There is also a need for each community to participate in the oral history, so they can be more competent in its administrative parts. VP2 noted that

*People do not cooperate while the administrative skills within the community are not satisfactory (11:16)*

**ii. *Opinion 2: Ownership and control by either the cultural institutions and other government agencies or/and the community***

The other points related to the ownership and control of communities' history are comprehensively highlighted by EP1 and IR7. According to both of these interviewees, the collections can be controlled and owned by both parties, including the cultural institutions and the community. This effort will depend on the ability and capacity of both parties. In this sense, both groups can own and control the collections. EP1 said ownership and control can depend on who records the interviews:

*Those who talk, it is indeed from a certain (segment) of the public but recorded and declared by a particular or specific institution or individual, thus making the records theirs. If by the institution, then the institution owns the record. If by the individual, it belongs to the individual. The question is who owns the content? Indeed, the public own it. (1:11)*

In term of competency, cultural institution professionals have more exposure to the process of managing oral histories compared to the local community. IR7 believes that the cultural institution professionals are more qualified to manage a community's history as they are instilled with formal and informal professional courses compared to the local community. The cultural institution professionals are highlighted as the agents to nurture the community's interest in oral history programmes. IR7 highlights,



*Even though (they; cultural institution professionals) do not have a high academic qualification, it is still higher than the lower community itself. Thus, to me, in the context of community, the institutions need to extract or uplift the local wisdom or knowledge. They are the ones who need to guide to the community involved. (14:44)*

Based on the interviews with expert practitioners, they mentioned that village committees are not exposed to a proper oral history's methodology and were less confident about conducting their own oral history project. The village's people do not have enough exposure and training. While concerned with building a comprehensive oral history collection, IR2 highlighted that some of the community involved in oral history does not have a clear direction of how to locate reliable sources to support their research. IR2 expresses the need to guide the village committees to begin collecting their own oral history projects with the use of an appropriate technique and sufficient guidance by the relevant parties.

Collaborations are needed to ensure the oral history initiatives will be sustained. As quoted by VP1, government funding for cultural and historical related programmes is inadequate:

*In fact, works like these are the government's job or responsibility. If you go to the United Kingdom or Australia, you will see many galleries or museums which are the work of the government. Or if the private sector initiates it, the government will help through funding and supplying facilities. But the working initiatives here are a bit slow. (2:22)*

IR1 emphasised on the need for government agencies and universities to involve in oral history development:

*In my opinion, the government of course. They must support the efforts to collect national history or local history. The higher learning institutions too. Actually, in the Malaysian context, universities are chasing researchers. Thus, indirectly, the university or higher learning institution could not be an exclusive organisation or body. It must be inclusive. Outsiders could also come to acquire the materials. When we put it in an institution, the result or report keeping becomes relevant. People will be confident. There will be no one who says that the university is doing it without any credibility. (4:37)*

From those views, some of the research participants agreed with community based oral history collections being managed and administered by the communities themselves. However, the research participants showed the most significant concern about the capabilities of the communities to manage and administer their own oral histories' aspects. Importantly, the

government institutions and related agencies play the most prominent role, by providing support to this initiative, as suggested by the majority of the oral history practitioners.

### 5.8.5 Facilitation

Facilitation is related to the networked memories level in the memory-making axis which is related to the method to narrate, publish and allow access to oral history collections. Hence, the method of communicating an oral history's insights and findings can be varied. VP2 is currently working on publishing a book about Chetti traditions in Malaysia. According to VP2, more videos and photos need to be captured and should be publicised through television and social media. VP2 said that, in the Chetti community, a small group of workshops or seminars had been conducted as an awareness programme to cultivate their interest and motivation. The members of the community can organise the workshops, with support and guidance from the cultural institutions.

VP4 hopes that any researchers who were studying the Portuguese community could return to his village and share the outcomes with the community there. To date, not so many investigators come back to the village and conduct sharing sessions on the results or findings gained from the interview sessions with the villagers:

*We always ask researchers to do research here. Some are coming back and giving us knowledge, because you see we have a lot of people who want to do a thesis here. Not many come back and give us their research (outcome). That's what we appeal; they do what research they want here, we hope that they come back. We encourage them to make a very informal sharing, maybe at the university level, or at a conference. Like I say for us it is important. We don't know the proper way or how it is supposed to be written. Whatever has been done, at least come back to us. My appeal is any research done on the community hopefully it can come back to us. (16:18)*

Social media, a widely used communication channel among the young generations nowadays is suggested as an ideal medium to communicate oral history outcomes, as noted by VP2. Today's generations are very enthusiastic to learn about another's culture, but it must be represented through an interactive, user-friendly and reachable medium. Based on VP2's point of view, social media is one of the ways to connect with young people and instil an awareness of history in them.

EP2 and VP1 agreed that publicising things through social media is considered an effective way to promote consciousness and whip up interest in widening community local history collections. According to VP1, inadequate staff and unavailable storage space issues can be solved by utilising social media applications. A small group of people can administer the contents of the collections, rather than allocating a tremendous amount of budget resources to maintaining a building.

Other than that, IR7 suggested that documentation, in the form of books, journals and whatever materials that are permanent in nature, can be established. The community centre, such as a small museum, can be developed, so it can act as a platform to share and return the historical information about the community back to the community. Monographs, articles or magazines are possible publication options, other than books, to be used to release the contents extracted from oral history interviews:

*If not, then newspapers. We can extract monographs or articles, but not necessarily books. Books might be harder. An article is possible in a magazine. If not in a magazine, then a monograph is possible. There are many ways. (3:30)*

An exhibition is one of the ways to share the outcomes of oral history collections, as mentioned by EP1. Through a display, the local community can see and access the collections that are already developed, and constructive feedback can be delivered to the exhibitors:

*To approach the society, exhibition is held every now and then. (1:29)*

Films or movies can be documentaries based on oral history. In Sabah, according to IR7, there are many films crafted to suit the local community. Film production is also considered as an effective way of pluralising oral history outcomes, which could cater for different group of peoples.

## **5.9 MEDIATED MEMORIES**

Dijck (2007) defines mediated memories as '*Activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of the past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others*'. (p.21). Tools, local systems, shared systems, collaborative systems, and archival systems, are levels associated with the mediated memories axis. However, this section will explain more about the tools used by oral history

practitioners to co-create oral history recordings. The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) as the medium to manage oral history collections is still not being given serious attention by oral history practitioners, due to budget limitations and storage considerations.

### 5.9.1 Tools

'Tools' is a level associated with the co-create dimension. Research participants were questioned on the equipment used in the recording process of an oral history. While the choices of digital recording equipment are numerous, oral history practitioners co-create oral histories through personal handphones and audio and digital recorders and keep them on their personal storage devices, such as personal computers, compact discs and cassettes which are considered to be local systems. In this case, the tools used are the practitioners' personal equipment and are not synchronised and integrated with oral history collections developed by individuals or cultural institutions. Only selected interviews recordings stored on the practitioners' computers were transcribed, due to time and funding constraints.

EP3 keeps recordings on an external hard disc and plans to send his research outcomes to the National Archives. However, he is afraid that the collections will be difficult to access where access fees will be charged to researchers if the collections are stored in the archives. In the curate dimension, some oral history practitioners curate audio recordings in the form of a processed document such as a transcript or a research paper. Shared systems are applied through social media and websites, as is being practiced by VP1:

*I have Facebook, a website and social media that many have. I publish each piece of research, result or visit. I create my website. (2:14)*

The collaborative systems are important to capture and manage heritage through recordkeeping systems by providing support, technology and knowledge to help individuals safeguard their identities and memories (Gibbons, 2014, p. 121). To date, collaborative and archival systems are not yet established at the oral history practitioners' level. Based on the interviews, oral history practitioners believe that cultural institutions could help to provide a platform that allows for the pluralisation of oral history collections, which would enable users to access, use and interpret collective memory.

## 5.9.2 Local systems

At the local systems' level, most oral history practitioners highlight the difficulties of accessing recordings which they themselves manage, due to improper storage controls. Oral history practitioners agreed that the guidelines on capturing metadata to improve oral history collections' access through systematic ways are needed.

Apart from the difficulties in accessing the oral history collections of cultural institutions, two expert practitioners also shared their experiences of not being able to search within their own oral history collections, which contain valuable research material. According to EP2,

*I do not discard my material. It is just hard to find the material now. There is some here at the office and some at the house that you can see. (3:26)*

EP1 also shared his experiences of searching his oral history collection, which requires more time to retrieve items due to an improper storage and management technique. Therefore, the right advice and guidance on the management of oral history collections are needed by the oral history practitioners to ensure those precious collections can be accessed when needed. Without proper guidelines, oral history practitioners will continue to manage the materials based only on their ability to do so.

Some of the research participants discussed audio recordings which are not appropriately stored or systematically managed. The oral history practitioners are aware that it is a waste if the valuable and precious stories do not have the proper controls and the right medium of storage. EP1 commented that:

*Things like that would not be a problem for certain communities. They do not have problems recording or storing materials in their community. The only thing that arises is how to store it compared to a library or archive. If they just store it, after several years, it will be damaged. Certainly, if the National Archives or a library stores or keeps it, the record will survive. Before the recording deteriorates, they will make a new copy. (1:12)*

IR7 provides his view:

*It (audio recordings) is damaged and we do not have a specific place to keep it (audio recordings). This is a weakness. I try to develop a subject about oral history in my*

*programme, to discuss oral history philosophically, as well as the technology. Perhaps after this we will try to open an oral history unit. (14:51)*

EP1 was not sure whether the tapes he used to conduct interviews are still in good condition. Some of his personal collection had deteriorated due to mould arising from the improper storage of the audio recordings. RE3 also faces the same conditions:

*The hard disc used to store audio was damaged. Only the transcript can be secured. (7:12)*

IR3 is aware that audio recordings should be stored in a secure digital storage medium with multiple copies as a backup. Currently, he uses a few thumb drives to backup the audios which are still accessible. From what has been discussed, there is a need to have a systematic mechanism to manage audio recordings and the oral history's outcomes.

### **5.9.3 Shared, collaborative and archival systems**

It is essential to increase the level of engagement with communities through shared, collaborative and archival systems. EP1 agreed that engagement with society is needed to bring society's attention to the oral history technique:

*It is like what I said before, how much are we going to do to approach society. The word engaging was mentioned earlier, to bring society or its institutions through the oral history method. But, as I said earlier, in other countries, they have recorded oral history for a long time. (1:17)*

The experience of the other research participants' supports the idea that social media's usage could increase the level of engagement and sharing. IR1, a young researcher, preferred to access historical information through social media to gain background information about a specific subject or context. Exposing crucial historical topics or issues through social media is essential to make society or the general public gain a greater understanding of the historical issues raised:

*I follow the historical pages in Facebook. The Patriot, Seriikandi and others. I think indirectly, they play an important role in exposing or revealing the essential issues to the community, but in an academic context. I tell my students, I do not permit them to use it*

*as a reference but as an idea or a background for the idea, and I think it is good enough.*  
(4:22)

The available online contents hastened the retrieval process and helped in attracting young generations to access the local history collections. More discussion on shared and collaborative systems will be included in Chapter 7.

When asked about the preservation methods and techniques, the participants were unanimous in the view that they need more advice from cultural institutions. Research-based oral history collections need to be treated in a better way, rather than scattered and hard to access in the future. EP1 usually transfers his videotaped material onto a compact disc with the help of a computer technician from a shop. EP1 also mentioned that if cultural institutions offered consultation services on the conversion of old mediums of recording to new systems, perhaps many people who are keeping audio records would ask the institutions to help them transfer them to compact disc. EP1 also pointed out that:

*After using it, usually I did not keep it because sometimes it was not necessary. I only used it when doing research. At that time, it was kept. We did not give it to the library because at that time, we only made one copy of the tape. Do not know if it is still good or not. I also have intended to change from tape to CD.* (1:21)

Based on a few expert practitioners' perspectives, support for archival systems from cultural institutions is required. Guidelines and training are needed, especially by oral history practitioners in systematically preserving oral history collections. Shared and collaborative systems are only found within cultural institutions. These will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

## **5.10 TRANSACTIONALITY**

The transactionality axis encompasses the levels of transactions, activities, functions, purposes and designs. The transactionality axis relates to individual acts of communication and the social and business functions they fulfill, and the social purposes they serve (McKemmish, Upward and Reed (2010, 4453). Upward (2001) explains the transactionality with records as being the products of activities (p. 12). Transactionality in this research's context is associated with the time to co-create an oral history project, the activities involved

in the process of capturing oral history, the functions and purposes of oral history, and the process of designing oral history for the purpose of pluralisation.

### **5.10.1 Appropriate time for co-creating oral history**

This section relates to the transactions' level, under the co-create dimension. For this research, the term transaction refers to the time where an oral history project can commence. There were two suggestions or outlines proposed by the oral history practitioners, which are either based on the requirement for it, or immediately after an event.

#### ***i. Requirement or ad-hoc basis***

Only a few respondents suggested that an oral history project should be conducted based only on the need or the requirement for it, so it does not depend on any rules or specific time. This section elaborates on how to choreograph the story. VP1 outlines his opinion on this aspect:

*The project being conducted depends on the requirement (condition) and time. In the beginning, the centre was open; it was desperate to develop the collections. We did a lot of interviews with the elderly, for a start. Then, it depends on the project. (2:46)*

IR9 also agreed with conducting oral history interviews based on a demand, due to budget limitations. She suggested prioritising on the projects that have a valuable impact on the community and country.

#### ***ii. Immediately after the event***

Most of the oral history practitioners suggested conducting oral history interviews soon after historical events happened. According to EP1, in certain cases, oral history needs to be conducted immediately after an event occurs. The oral history project needs to be performed as often as possible as there is still much valuable history to be recorded, including in Sabah and Sarawak. Then EP1 continued to describe his understanding of oral history and the appropriate time to use the technique in his research. He suggested capturing oral history sources immediately after an event occurs, to keep track of the interviewees' feelings at the time:



*Thus, when we need to interview, as I said before, if we wait until an event has occurred, how about the feelings of the narrators? It would not be fun. We have to see the suitability. (1:31)*

IR1 suggested that it is essential to conduct systematic and well-planned oral history projects. An effort to conduct an oral history should be consistent and focused. Dedicated times or timelines need to be allocated to complete one oral history project. Other side jobs need to be abandoned or left alone for a while:

*Like me, if I do an oral history, I need to take a sabbatical or research leave so that I could focus. For example, if in the morning, we go to the office and then we want to do an oral history project, it will influence the emotion. Then, we will be rushed. Perhaps, we will overlook certain essential things due to the workload. We need to discover the feeling. I mean, let say (we set) three months to do an oral (history), that is good enough. No need to squeeze it in between because it is difficult. (4:34)*

### **5.10.2 Activities**

'Activities' is located at the second level of the capture dimension and refers to all the processes involved in capturing an oral history. Planning is one of the crucial phases for an oral history project. As discussed in the previous axes, there are several activities involved in an oral history's creation process. These include all the activities involved with the co-create dimension, until the pluralise dimension, on each axis. Other than conducting interviews with the narrators, the oral history practitioners also prepare the necessary paperwork before any oral history project begins; to make sure the project is organised and systematically conducted. Some of the oral history practitioners start their project by doing background research and compile a bibliography to determine what information is available and what is lacking. Among the oral history practitioners, the expert practitioners and independent researchers are more concerned about the initial preparations before any interview takes place compared to village persons. Village persons are giving more priorities to the outcome of the oral history interviews, whether the products could be used as local community reference sources in the future.

Interview outlines, specific topics and themes are developed as a basis for the interview questions. VP1 admits that he needs professional training to improve his note-taking activities in his research diary during an interview session. He believes that through systematic note-

taking, the interview's contents could produce additional contexts, such as the emotions and facial expressions of interviewees. EP1, EP2 and IR2 also use note-taking to keep track of essential points, not only during the interview but even after the interview session. IR2 also collects and refers to important supporting materials such as letters and pictures that can provide a clearer context to the captured audio recordings. The products of all such activities also need to be captured.

### 5.10.3 Functions of oral history collections

As highlighted by some of the oral history practitioners, the Malaysian people are often still unaware and uninformed of the importance of capturing oral history, and some of the researchers still think sceptically about oral history as being historically unreliable. IR8 thought that the lack of knowledge about local history causes Malaysians to be less patriotic and lack feelings of self-belonging and ownership. According to EP2, awareness of the importance of preserving local history does not receive people's full attention and consideration as they cannot see the value of it. Currently, income generation is the main priority of Malaysian society, and its heritage aspects or perspectives are undervalued. EP2 also revealed that these significant efforts were not accepted and not highly regarded as important initiatives for preserving local history and its contents. The comments below illustrate the current scenario: EP2 said,

*We (Malaysians) don't understand. We still don't understand why we need to know about the nation, about our community. Everyone now just wants to make money (to earn a living). (3:31)*

IR5 commented,

*One thing that I observed is the government is not serious about oral history programmes. It will consider them if there are some monetary returns. For example, the preservation of culture for tourism purposes (10:45)*

IR7 provides his view:

*Firstly, we should view this from the development of society itself. For instance, in Sabah or in Malaysia, our local wisdom or local knowledge. Knowledge about the importance of history has still not been developed. (14:42)*

Another challenge is instilling consciousness in the younger generations about the importance of preserving local content. Commenting on this, IR2 said,

*Thus, the biggest constraint is actually to create awareness, in order to attract today's youth to observe traditions. How to instill an interest or awareness in people today, so they will participate again in that context. (5:5)*

All the quotations provided above indicate the points of view of oral history practitioners on the need to develop a strategic oral history programme in Malaysia. The way to attract the young generation to become involved in an oral history programme needs to be revised. The awareness of the importance of preserving valuable history should begin in schools, as suggested by most of the oral history practitioners. A suitable programme needs to be planned and implemented, in collaboration with the Malaysian cultural institutions and the Ministry of Education, as pointed out by IR5, EP5 and IR9. Oral history collections have multiple functions and benefits, as outlined by the research's participants. Based on the practitioners' feedback, oral history functions in two primary ways:

***i. Counterbalance the evidence of official documents***

Oral history balances written history and acts as a crucial contribution to memory itself. Memory-making through oral history represents the other side of history, which sometimes supports the existing written sources, although some of them contradict the recorded history. Oral history sources will assist researchers and their related audiences to assess the sources and balance the existing recorded history against the generally accepted version of events, indirectly renewing societies' attention to history. According to IR1,

*In my opinion, memory is at the other side of history. I give one example in the Malaysian community itself. We have one opinion that states Chin Peng<sup>13</sup> was a destructive*

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<sup>13</sup>Secretary-general of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Reference: Hooker, V. (2003). A short history of Malaysia: Linking east and west. Crows Nest, N.S.W.

"Chin Peng was born on 21 October 1924. He was a communist who, having played a key part in local resistance to the Japanese occupation, led the struggle against the post-war restoration of European colonialism". Reference: Stockwell, A. J. (2006). Chin peng and the struggle for Malaya. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 16(3), 279-297.

*communist. A bad thing. However, research that other historians have done about Chin Peng's stated things differently. Thus, it is the other side of history. The other side of history is the key contribution of memory itself, other than the existing source. If we depend too much on British sources in writing Malaysia's history, we will become British-centric. Thus, our writing will be pro-British. Therefore, the memory will balance the history writing's centrality. Indirectly, it means it will assist the researcher to become more objective. (4:39)*

Oral history sources can explain details which are not always recorded in conventional and current records or other written documentation. Through oral history, research participants can evaluate the validity of the existing written documents and provide a broad perspective for the research being undertaken. This could contribute to fact-based answers which help practitioners to have an accurate interpretation of the facts gained. IR1 shared his experience:

*I like to explore. In other words, I love to do research. Why do people say this, and not that? I like to assess old documents because people do not know everything. Once I have obtained the result or discover new findings, these indirectly become a contribution to the community. For the oral itself, this oral record helps me to interpret the document. (4:9)*

EP2 stated that through oral history, more facts could be gained which indirectly will increase the number of historical facts documented. According to VP1, oral history provides evidence which contributes to bridging the literature gap, which could address the shortfall in the literary and other written sources:

*In our historical writings, there were so many sources that were still not written down even though the records are classified as official sources. We have to fill it with oral records. Also, for written history, if we have the oral record, it becomes more interesting. We follow anyone's narration that we have. (2:47)*

Information which is kept in the human brain will disappear over time. To maintain the accuracy of the data, the information captured by oral history recordings should be preserved accordingly. IR3 believes that through oral history, more contributions could be made to expanding and producing new research areas:

*Those oral history collections will become an inspiration for others to explore new research areas. We will also make a comparison to avoid repeating the exploration of the same research areas or topics. (7:5)*

The expansion of oral history collections can help researchers, local communities and other group of people to broaden their research context and content.

**ii. Maintain historical consciousness**

IR3 pointed out that through oral history, interviewers can enhance their knowledge and become a resource person for the subject or topic explored. These groups of resource persons, who are considered to be the pioneers of information, could help readers to understand the components of history. This point was supported by IR8 who became a resource person or an expert in historical data relating to the Chetty community in Malaysia, since she was the first Malaysian to do her PhD on that community. According to IR8,

*Original and local history collections can be actively produced by applying oral history techniques. (15:9)*

One of the interesting points highlighted by EP3 is about the nature of history. As some of the oral history practitioners question the accuracy of oral sources, EP3 emphasised that his research, which was based on oral history, was accurate, based on the sources that he used. If other researchers explore their research by using sources other than oral history sources, this might be another discovery and set of findings which have to be respected. He noted that

*But we must remember the nature of history is alive. The research that we do, we need to accept that until the research is written, up to now, this is my research and my research is correct or accurate, based on the sources that I use, including the oral sources. However, if tomorrow there is other researcher who obtains another source, write with some other method, it is another discovery. We need to respect every researcher's knowledge field. (6:10)*

Besides, few of the respondents found that oral history assisted the cultural institutions to get closer to prominent figures. Oral history acts as the enabler for active involvement where the relationship between cultural institutions and the narrators can be established for documenting valuable information. EP1 stated that intellectual payoffs would arise through more collaboration with the oral history programme:

*But, from the situation today, I see that the activities could make the figures closer with the archives or other relevant institutions such as libraries. So, we can store valuable information. (1:5)*

### **iii. Enrichment of historical accounts enrichment**

Oral history sources can examine the reliability of historical sources and can be considered as significant bases to enrich historical facts. This vital point of view was pointed out by VP2, and IR8. The Chetty community is well-known as moneylenders, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1957 (the year the Federation of Malaya became an independent nation) and it has made vast contributions to the socio-economic activities and helped the economic operators in Malaysia (previously known as Malaya). During that time, the Chetty community's business structure operated by providing loans with high interest for maximum profit, as reported by Suppiah, (2014). This situation caused dissatisfaction among the other moneylenders and indirectly caused inappropriate perceptions of the Chetty community in general. Therefore, a suggestion has been made by VP2 to explore their community histories to avoid incorrect judgements about the minority groups in Malaysia. He intends to produce a narrative that lets others understand their stories more clearly.

Moreover, through identifying the right subject to be documented through oral history, history syllabi can be strengthened by enriching them with local historical sources, which was pointed out by IR8. Oral history's documentation may allow for the effective delivery of historical information to students. Audio and video recordings of former leaders, using oral history's methodology, which can be heard/seen to provide a better sense of them, can improve the capacity of the listeners or audiences to visualise the past events. The limited number of references about local history affects the teaching and learning processes, both in the schools and higher learning institutions. IR8 commented,

*There are a lot of constraints. We do not have any other choice than textbooks, even though the textbooks have some historical pictures which teachers can use when teaching. The lack of resources on the market or the lack of supplies of PdP (teaching and learning) resources from authorities such as the MoE (Ministry of Education) make teachers rely heavily on historical textbooks. This is not right because when using so many textbooks with limited content and knowledge, this causes the students to become bored and the lesson tedious. (15:31)*

IR8 hopes the Malaysian Ministry of Education could add more value and historical facts to the current history textbook used at schools, to increase the students' understanding of community identities and national history and indirectly reduce the gaps and absences of significant local history sources.

#### 5.10.4 Purpose of an oral history programme

This section discusses the motivation for documenting oral history as a memory-making process. Self-satisfaction, an awareness of preserving local traditions and ethnic languages and because of an enthusiasm about doing something that is beneficial to the community are the primary drivers for practitioners who are involved in oral history initiatives. Most of the research participants interviewed mentioned that their involvement in oral history is because of their attempts to satisfy their curiosity. One of the reasons for the respondents to collect their local history is due to their awareness of the need to capture the story about their locality and they are conscious that oral history provides them with the ability to give a voice to people who would otherwise never have been heard. This can be illustrated briefly by VP1:

*Early on, I have suggested and it crossed my mind, this place needs some writings and history recorded so that it would not disappear just like that. (2:1)*

Even though VP1 did not receive any formal or direct training in documenting oral history, he is very enthusiastic about anything related to community building, as he believes that the oral history programme is a practical and useful programme for a community's development and empowerment. Through oral history, VP1 could learn and discover fascinating new stories:

*I myself do not have history training. I am a biology graduate from USM (Universiti Sains Malaysia). I am a teacher. I once worked in a centre in Kuala Lumpur, the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies. There I was exposed to plenty of academics' research work. In addition, I'm not only doing history work, but more inclined to community building. (2:4)*

On the other hand, VP2 found that the Chetti community's way of life and cultural practices differ from others in Malaysia. He realised this from his informal participation in oral history programmes within his community. Due to this reason, VP2 became interested in documenting the history and other related information about his community's cultural practices and traditions:

*I have been involved in this field since 1991. I became interested in preserving the heritage of the Chetti community, which is unique compared to other communities. (11:1)*

A representative from the Portuguese community in Melaka has emphasised the importance of retaining ethnic languages that have slowly disappeared due to modernisation. VP4 highlights this,

*We elderly see that the community needs help to preserve the community's languages.  
(16:6)*

During the interview sessions, the research participants were passionate about oral history programmes. This is one of the important factors to ensure that oral history projects are completed once they start.

VP1 also highlighted the issue of insufficient local content for reference sources. On his visit to the National Archives, he found insufficient sources related to his research subjects. In this sense, VP1 was motivated to conduct further investigations about the community where he lives:

*In my experience, I found that even the National Archives lack reference material. Thus, I have to set up a centre to collect written material or notes in order to make this centre like a local archive. (2:3)*

IR8 shared her challenges in locating reference articles related to the Chetty community during her PhD. She focused on the socio-cultural contributions of the Chetty community, as well as their trade relations with Southeast Asia. Due to the inadequate number of reference sources, IR8 was required to visit other countries to retrieve evidential information to support her PhD research:

*I went to Singapore, London or anywhere to get (it). Thus, when I took the Chetty as my topic, my supervisor said, 'Eh, this topic is difficult. Nobody has done it, you have no sources'. My literature review was one, two articles, one brochure. (15:11)*

According to IR8, even though the Chetty community has been based in Malaysia since the 19th century, there were no direct reference sources related to it, developed by either the cultural institutions or historians. IR8's PhD research therefore marked her as the pioneer in developing the Chetty community's history perspectives through the oral history technique:

*There is no source on the Chettiar (Chetty) in Malaysia. My work is an original work, a comprehensive work. (15:12)*

Other than a limited number of oral history sources, IR8 noticed that the historical sources available in cultural institutions were not enough to assist a history teacher carry out his/her



programme. In a similar fashion, EP2 stated that oral history practitioners and cultural institutions need to initiate and support local community-based projects. EP2 said,

*The time has come for us to have more projects studying the local community. Here, we have stopped. Previously, when I was in charge, they did this. Now it has stopped, they do not do it anymore. (3:16)*

Oral history sources are collected for multiple purposes and have continuing relevance to individuals and the community. Based on the explanations provided, oral history practitioners (mainly people in villages) become involved in oral history to preserve their memories, identities and valuable experiences. They agreed that oral history is a useful vehicle for communication and interaction with future generations.

#### **5.10.5 Oral history programmes' designs**

Design is associated to pluralise with the dimension. Oral history projects can be developed to make considerable contributions to society. IR8 highlighted the importance of existing local associations being developed to preserve and enriched local collections and actively promote oral history techniques to society. She believed that through the associations, community-based history could be captured on a large scale while the contents of oral history interviews can be authorised or verified by cultural institutions. Meanwhile, IR7 agreed that social questions could be answered through oral history and this would be able to open a new dimension to the debates in a disciplined way. In addition, IR7 also agreed that oral history can be designed as a vehicle of communication and act as a repository of experiences between one generation and the next.

A small number of those interviewed alluded to the notion of promoting information through social media, to increase awareness and maximise the local community's participation in enriching oral history collections. EP1 mentions that the Malaysian community's participation in oral history programmes is limited to academics and information professionals, with much less involvement from laymen or the general public. Since social media is considered to be an interactive medium and preferred by society today, more promotion or publicity needs to be carried out to increase the level of engagement through digital or electronic interactions with society, as suggested by EP1. Furthermore, most of the oral history practitioners suggested producing a collaborative medium to attract more people to appreciate and utilise oral history collections.

As mentioned before, the current oral history collections are limited in scope and do not really attract their users' participation or increase the level of acceptance of oral history as a reliable source. Presenting the transcripts in a digital environment will offer new ways to allow people to co-create and collaborate. VP1 illustrates his efforts in getting oral history interviews published in a book, which is very useful for his community:

*Only one has been published. The book is with my students' collaboration. It has been published in Chinese. (2:55)*

As oral history recordings can only be accessed by using equipment, supportive tools to make the oral history's sources interactive are needed. This is in conjunction with the lack of a culture of reading among Malaysian society, as pointed out by IR1. Malaysian society is more interested in interactive mediums for locating information they need. IR1 is quoted as saying:

*I think the challenges are big. It is because in the Malaysian context itself, the reading culture is inadequate and to me personally, a bit inadequate. However, it is important to convey to the community information about oral history. Just the medium needs changing. We should maintain/retain originality but the delivery medium needs changing. (4:20)*

In relation to the above, IR1 also expects that cultural institutions could provide a well-documented transcript with an organised index system, as stated:

*However, how do I acquire the oral source, I prefer the perfect transcript so that we do not need to see the edited one. The original one. It is much better if the transcript is documented. For example, on page one, page two already noted issue A. Page three onwards, issue B. It has been indexed. Thus, the time to examine it will be shortened. I have already done a transcript and I have experienced its difficulty. Nevertheless, at the end, as a result or outcome, I obtained satisfaction. (4:6)*

EP3 suggest to publish oral history collections:

*Published, but to what extent do the community want to read a book, even though we feel a book is the most enjoyable thing. The satisfaction of reading a book is there, but to what extent today, the community wants to access (information) using a book? An oral source, is it appropriate if he want to listen to two hours of recording? People do not like it. How do we change these two hours of recording into a resource for the community to access? (6:45)*

Almost all research participants proposed that the cultural institutions should review the current methods used to retrieve and disseminate oral history collections. Comprehensive databases with customised and user-friendly interfaces are needed to store and retrieve oral history collections in a systematic way. The cultural institutions or related agencies are urged to support the efforts to collect national or local history and provide vast electronic databases for its storage and retrieval purposes, hence offering the opportunity for the Malaysian community to search the information thematically. The systematic approach to storing documentation, containing the appropriate metadata and resources, including the details of the interviewer/s or the topic, need to become the primary priority. Oral transcripts or oral audio can be stored, and it will help to show different interpretations, as suggested by IR1. A centralised database which is interconnected between the cultural institutions is highlighted by IR5 as an essential medium to allow easy access to oral history collections.

## **5.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has examined the current oral history practices by oral history practitioners. The issues and challenges related to developing and managing community oral history collections were discussed. Common pitfalls and difficulties in accessing oral history are one of the main aspects highlighted by the oral history practitioners. The oral history practitioners' points of view on how the cultural institution professionals could improve oral history services were also discussed. Indicators of the support required were emphasised.

This chapter highlighted the findings based on five dimensions, twenty-nine levels and six-axes of the mediated recordkeeping: culture-as evidence model. Through the analysis that has been carried out, the results give some illustrations and guidance for the process of developing local community collections which are currently practised by the oral history practitioners. One of the key points in this chapter is that multicultural understanding is needed for developing a local community's oral history programme.

The oral history method is still considered as an underappreciated role and needs more attention from the relevant bodies. Oral history programmes could have an impact on the wider community in Malaysia. It was found that the people living in the villages are very keen to be actively involved in oral history and they are comfortable enough discussing the issues that arise in an oral history programme. More open dialogue needs to be established between the community of practice, the cultural institutions and other related parties to co-create oral history projects at the village or community levels.

The oral history practitioners' input is essential to determine the areas where oral history's management requires improvement. Strategies to transform oral history services were obtained during the interviews, which became an essential part of the foundations for the oral history protocol which will be presented in Chapter 7.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, this study also aims to investigate how cultural institutions can reframe and transform themselves to enrich their local communities' oral history collections. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **MALAYSIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS' INVOLVEMENT IN ORAL HISTORY**

#### **6.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

Cultural institutions play a role in enriching communities' oral histories. The current practices used for oral history in Malaysia, from the perspectives of the cultural institution professionals, are also crucial to this study. The input from them will shape the Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol, which will be presented in Chapter 7. This chapter outlines the profile of the research's participants, the background of the cultural institutions involved in this study and the current situation regarding the development and management of oral history collections. The discussion in this chapter focuses on the practices of the cultural institution professionals when involved in oral history initiatives. The structure of the reports in this chapter are the same as those in Chapter 5; where the data have been analysed and illustrated, based on the dimensions, levels and axes in the mediated recordkeeping: culture as evidence model, which are memory making, evidentiality, identities, narratives, mediated memories and transactionality. The findings of this chapter add to our understanding of how the cultural institution professionals' practice, develop and manage the oral history collections in cultural institutions. This chapter presents the key findings in order to answer the research questions, primarily RQ1, RQ2, and RQ2SQ2.

**RQ1: What are the current oral history practices in Malaysia?**

**RQ2: How can cultural institutions reframe or transform themselves to facilitate their local communities' oral history collections?**

RQ2SQ2: How can cultural institutions contribute to the development of their local community's oral history collections?

## 6.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES

Eleven cultural institution professionals from nine cultural institutions were interviewed for this study and the data were collected from five different regions in Malaysia. The cultural institution professionals consisted of two archivists, eight librarians and a curator from the various Malaysian cultural institutions; they are also involved in conducting and collecting oral histories. In this research, these professionals are distinguished from the oral history practitioners. The inputs from the interviews conducted with the cultural institution professionals represent the current oral history practices by the cultural institutions.

A simple coding system was used to describe the interviewees who are identified based on the codes developed; cultural institution professionals: IP1 to IP11 (See Table 7). Detailed information about them can be found in the Appendix 2.

**Table 7: Cultural Institution professionals' demographic information**

Interviewee	Code	Respondent Position/Acronym	Region	Sex	Years of experience in oral history
1	IP1	Senior Assistant Librarian	Central	F	5 to 10 years
2	IP2	Director of National Archives	Central	M	More than 10 years
3	IP3	Head of Reference & Multimedia Unit	Northern	M	Less than 5 years
4	IP4	Assistant Librarian	Southern	F	5 to 10 years
5	IP5	Head of Archives Management Division, Sarawak State Library	Borneo	F	5 to 10 years
6	IP6	Assistant Librarian	Central	F	Less than 5 years
7	IP7	Assistant Curator	Central	F	5 to 10 years
8	IP8	Head of Local Collection and Digitals Unit	East Coast region	M	Less than 5 years
9	IP9	Librarian, Sarawak State Library	Borneo	M	5 to 10 years
10	IP10	Deputy CEO Sarawak State Library	Borneo	F	5 to 10 years
11	IP11	Librarian, Collection Development Unit, Perdana Library	Central	M	More than 5 years

### 6.3 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS' DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE CULTURAL INSTITUTION PROFESSIONALS

The cultural institutions in this research context are the National Archives, seven libraries and a museum in Malaysia. The cultural institutions are located in the central, northern, east coast and southern regions of the Malaysian Peninsula and in Borneo. Table 8 describes the areas where the cultural institutions are located.

**Table 8: The division of institutions based on regions**

Region	Cultural Institutions
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. National Archives</li> <li>ii. Selangor Public Library Corporation</li> <li>iii. Perdana Library</li> <li>iv. Petaling Jaya Museum</li> <li>v. Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) Hypermedia Library</li> </ul>
Northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Kedah Public Library</li> </ul>
East Coast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Terengganu State Library</li> </ul>
Southern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Melaka State Library</li> </ul>
Borneo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Sarawak State Library</li> </ul>

#### 6.3.1 Cultural institutions from the Central Region

This section describes the background of the cultural institutions as data collection sites. Eight of the cultural institutions involved in this study have their own oral history departments which are responsible for undertaking oral history projects and managing their oral history collections. One cultural institution that took part in this study does not have an oral history department in place, but plans to set one up in the future. The descriptions of the cultural institutions are derived from official websites and data from the interviews with the cultural institution professionals.

**i. National Archives**

The National Archives of Malaysia, previously known as the Public Records Office, was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1957. It is located at Jalan Duta, Kuala Lumpur and is currently administered by the Ministry of Education. The National Archives aims to acquire and preserve the nation's heritage, to popularise the archives and national heritage and to make the National Archives a national resource and research centre<sup>14</sup>. Based on the National Archives' official website, one of the objectives, as stated in the clients' charter, is to produce high-quality documentation to fill the gaps identified in the records held, from any available sources. One of the ways of doing this is by organising a parallel structure of historical narration sessions every two months, to conduct oral history interviews with potential interviewees.

**ii. Selangor Public Library Corporation**

Selangor Public Library Corporation, commonly known as the Raja Tun Uda Library (PPAS) was established on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1988. One of the goals of this institution is to reduce the digital divide between the urban and rural communities by providing comprehensive facilities to both communities<sup>15</sup>. Oral history projects at the Raja Tun Uda Library officially started in 2014. Before that, it had begun organising workshops and seminars on oral history together with Majlis Pengarah Perpustakaan Awam Se-Malaysia in 2013. In 2014, the library's director officially made oral history a compulsory programme to be conducted by the Collection's Development Division of PPAS to increase the number of primary sources, especially regarding the State of Selangor.

**iii. Perdana Library**

The Perdana Leadership Foundation is a non-profit organisation which was previously funded by the private sector. It was chartered in January 2003 to support research into Malaysian leadership and nation-building. The Perdana Library is a research library set up to *'Provide information and references on Malaysia's leadership history for local*

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<sup>14</sup> National Archive of Malaysia website (2018): <http://www2.arkib.gov.my/english/visi.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Selangor Public Library Corporation website (2017): <http://www.ppas.gov.my/index.php/mengenai-kami/mat-obj>.



and international researchers, as well as the Malaysian public'<sup>16</sup>. This institution intends to become the central resource centre for national stewardship and a platform for intellectual discourse and idea sharing<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, the primary objective of the establishment is to acknowledge the contributions of past Malaysian Prime Ministers. The Perdana Discourse Series facilitates knowledge sharing among Malaysian leaders.

#### **iv. Petaling Jaya Museum**

Petaling Jaya Museum was established in November 2007, and is administered by Petaling Jaya City Council. For the first two years, before the establishment of the museum, the officers in charge started to collect data related to the local history of Petaling. The officer involved in oral history just collected data related to the oral history collection's development including the way to set up a museum to store the local collections. In 2008, the appointed officers began their data collection by deciding what to collect around Petaling Jaya city and most of the initial documents and records were retrieved from the National Archives of Malaysia. Currently, the museum has five appointed staff in the oral history unit.

#### **v. Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) Hypermedia Library**

Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) Hypermedia Library has operated since December 1998. It is categorised as a public library and a yearly fee is applicable for those who would like to become a member. One of the services provided by this library is access to relevant local history sources. However, there is no dedicated department or oral history unit established in this library. Despite this, the library is starting to outline their oral history programme and beginning to collect memorabilia such as trophies and photos of events which have happened.

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<sup>16</sup> Perdana Library website (2017): <http://www.perdana.org.my/index.php/perdana-library/welcome-to-perdana-library>.

### **6.3.2 Cultural institutions from the Northern Region**

#### ***Kedah Public Library***

Kedah's State Library is located in the Northern Region of Malaysia. The Kedah series consists of a collection of information that is posted, printed, written and collected by the State of Kedah. Among the eight divisions under the Kedah series' section are the local collections, the private collections and the oral history collections. The oral history division, which was established in the 1980s, is responsible for conducting interviews amongst Kedah's state figures, either for their personal experiences or historical occasions. In Kedah, the initiative for capturing local information is not limited to one particular field but includes a wide range of stories. Music, culture, economics, literature, local history, specific historical episodes, politics, legends, medicine, drama and the biographies and autobiographies of distinct personalities are among the subjects covered by the oral history projects. To date, the oral history team at Kedah Public Library has interviewed between 150 and 200 individuals from various fields.

### **6.3.3 Cultural institution from the East Coast Region**

#### ***Terengganu State Library***

Terengganu Public Library Corporation (PPAT) is a State Statutory Body which was established under the Terengganu Public Library Corporation's Enactment No.7 of 1974. The Terengganu Public Library Corporation started its services on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1979. Since then, the Terengganu Public Library Corporation has proliferated into a network of library services in Besut, Kemaman, Hulu Terengganu, Dungun, Marang, Setiu and Pekan Kerteh districts. The Terengganu Public Library Corporation also established the Mobile Library and Rural Library throughout the state, to provide services to local communities.

### **6.3.4 Cultural institution from the Southern Region**

#### ***Melaka Public Library***

In the fifteenth-century, Malacca (now known as Melaka in the Malay language) was a cosmopolitan city, with traders from all over the world residing there (Reid 1995). There is a long history behind the Melaka Public Library. It was established in 1881 and was previously known as the Henry Gurney Memorial Library, located in Stadthuys, Banda Hilir. In 1996, the library was relocated to Jalan Bukit Baru, Melaka. The oral history collections in the Melaka Public Library were developed based on different themes, such as the arts including documentation about musical instruments, politics and historical buildings.

### **6.3.5 Cultural institutions from the Borneo Region**

#### ***Sarawak State Library***

The Sarawak State Library aims to provide information and to preserve Sarawak's intellectual heritage, especially for the Sarawak communities where more than 30 ethnic groups have been identified. The oral history collection started on a project basis in 2008 and was managed by the library's Technical Services Division. If there is a publication by the government, or publications by individuals or organisations or publishers, they have to deposit five copies with the Technical Services Division as per the legal deposit ordinance. In 2015, the project aimed to network with individuals and associations that have vested interests in Sarawak to acquire material on Sarawak through either purchases or bequests. The oral history project has also reconnected with the British officers that served in Sarawak during its time as a British Crown Colony (1946-1963) together with their families in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as volunteers that served in Sarawak. In 2016, the aims shifted to documenting the experiences and life histories of Sarawak State Secretaries and communities and volunteers in Sarawak.

## **6.4 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS**

There were a range of cultural institutions investigated by this study. This section discusses the general findings gathered from interview sessions with the cultural institution professionals. Most of the cultural institutions involved in this study develop their oral history collections based on allocated funding from the federal and state government budgets. The majority of the cultural institution professionals conduct meetings with the advisory board to get approval before undertaking any oral history projects. The professionals identify potential interviewees based on their contributions and achievements at the national and international levels. They also make contact with villagers' representatives as part of the process of selecting someone to be interviewed. Digital recorders are widely used to record the oral histories.

Audio recordings which were captured before the advent of digital recorders are generally stored on compact discs and cassettes. Currently, there is no standard metadata being developed and applied by the cultural institutions for managing their oral history collections. Currently, only a few of the cultural institutions manage their oral history collections by developing portals and databases which allow direct access from the platform. The rest of the cultural institutions organise their oral history collections by developing manual catalogues, log books and oral history summary lists. The outcomes from their oral history interviews are usually presented in forums, seminars, exhibitions and are published as books and oral history project reports.

The following section provides an in-depth explanation of the practices used for oral histories by the cultural institution professionals, based on the interpretation on the dimensions, levels and axes in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Similar to Chapter 5, the six axes of the model (memory-making, evidentiality, identities, narratives, mediated memories and transactionality) are used as the main themes for discussion.

## **6.5 MEMORY-MAKING**

As discussed in Chapter 4, memory-making is an important process for preserving important and valuable information, which allows individuals or the community to recall their memories in the future. Similar to the data gathered from the oral history practitioners, there are four interlinked areas identified as being under the memory-

making activities gathered through the interviews conducted with the cultural institution professionals:

- i. Recordings and transcripts as 'traces'.
- ii. Oral history's context and subject identification.
- iii. Community memories and collective memories.
- iv. Networked memories.

### **6.5.1 Recordings and transcripts as 'traces'**

To recall, 'traces' relate to the process of forming a memory and witnessing something. In the archival field, records are the outcome from traces (Upward, 1997). Oral history is one of the techniques used by cultural institution professionals to identify lost information or find the gaps in historical collections in Malaysia. As mentioned in Chapter 5, audio or video recordings and transcripts are the 'memory' and 'archival' traces in oral history's context. The audio and video recordings and transcripts produced are used for a variety of purposes. According to those we interviewed, not all sound recordings are provided with transcripts. Some cultural institutions only record oral history interviews and do not focus on creating transcripts, as they believe that if users are relying on the content of the transcripts, the meaning of the recorded interview cannot be assessed accurately.

According to most of the cultural institution professionals interviewed, the effort of producing transcripts is subject to the capacity and resources of the organisation, including the availability of its human and financial resources. The common reasons for providing transcripts highlighted by the cultural institution professionals are to emphasise the relevant contents of the audio recordings and to facilitate oral history users to skim over the contents in a written form, rather than having to listen to the audio or video recordings. Cultural institution professionals such as IP1, IP2 and IP11 believe that hard copy interview transcripts are still needed, as they are aware of the risk of losing valuable historical information when the sound recordings' medium is not accessible, due to obsolete technology and the complexities of the digital world. The next section will discuss the process involved in identifying the context and subjects of memory traces.

### **6.5.2 Oral history's context or subject identification**

Tracing at the co-creation dimension and personal memories at the capture dimension in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model are important to understand the process involved in the development of oral histories' records. In this section, the types of oral history subjects recorded by cultural institution professionals are discussed. There are various methods used to identify the oral history's context. Most of the cultural institution professionals indicate that they prioritise recorded information that is of precious historical value which is not yet recorded in a written form. Oral history collections can include, but are not limited to, the following examples of significant events:

#### ***i. National events and their trajectory***

Significant historical events have been recorded in the National Archives of Malaysia. Based on the interview with IP2, the National Archives have conducted oral history interviews with a range of interviewees, including political figures, government officers, soldiers, journalists, religious leaders, and officers from the land office, making approximately more than 700 recordings available. The lives and experiences of the narrators who have been selected relate to historical events such as during the Japanese occupation and the Emergency, the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation, the opposition to the Malayan Union. The life histories of former Malaysian Prime Ministers such as Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, Tun Haji Abdul Razak bin Dato' Hussein and Tun Hussein bin Dato' Onn are also recorded.

Most of the oral history projects undertaken by the cultural institutions record oral history from the perspectives of the state leaders and government officers. The experiences of government officers are recorded using oral history to fill the gaps in the available historical data. The historical events related to the state, biographies of local leaders, the volunteer force, the civil service, the history pertaining to political parties such as UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) are also being recorded by the Kedah Public Library as highlighted by IP3. In Sarawak State Library, the history related to the formation of Malaysia is being captured through oral history, as noted by IP10.

According to IP1, the Selangor Public Library Corporation's emphasis is on an initiative to develop local collections related to the State of Selangor. IP1 seeks to

enhance the collection about Selangor by adding cultural and historical aspects and becoming an information hub for Selangor. As a starting point, IP1 and the other project members have interviewed a few figures, who are responsible for the administration and management of the State Treasury. Another oral history project was conducted with close family members and friends of Raja Tun Uda (one of the Malaysian statesmen during the country's struggle for independence) to record his prominent life and experiences.

***ii. Aspects of culture, arts, heritage and historical places***

Other than collecting historical information related to national events, IP4 and IP5 also capture oral history at the village and family levels. However, this initiative is still limited and not consistently conducted. IP4 and her oral history project team have developed collections related to the Malay, Chetty, Peranakan Baba-Nyonya, Indian as well as the Portuguese communities. In Sarawak, the rich ancestral traditions and histories of the Bidayuh, Iban and Melanau communities have been recorded by the Council for Customs and Traditions, Sarawak, as pointed out by IP5. The way the indigenous people use their land for survival, their cultures and traditional practices were compiled using oral history methods.

Film actresses and musicians are among the figures being interviewed by cultural institution professionals. In Melaka, the culture, arts and heritage related to the local community are also being recorded. IP3 and the oral history team in Kedah Public Library also record information about historical buildings and mosques since there are no written records that currently exist. IP7, from the municipal museum, is developing an oral history project related to places around Petaling Jaya, to provide references for secondary school students.

The public library in Terengganu is focusing on developing oral history collections related to the arts and handcrafts found in Terengganu. The personal life of individuals involved in the arts and the continuity of traditions such as Malay woodcarving, traditional Malay houses and boat building in Pulau Duyong are examples of the subjects that have been included in oral history collections. In addition, history related to places such as Bukit Besi, where iron mining activities happened, is also being recorded using oral history techniques.

### 6.5.3 Community memories and collective memories

The respondents emphasised that a community's memories and its collective memories are interrelated. In this research, community memories relate to historical events, experiences, cultures, traditions or stories that are reminisced about by the community, while collective memories relate to the historical events and information that are represented in history books and taught in the schools' and universities' syllabi. Collective memories also relate to learned social practices and shared values, which are also part of cultural identity (Gibbons, 2014). It was challenging to achieve a reflective response about the methods for organising and curating community and collective memories from the cultural institution professionals. The answers provided by the interview participants were more on their hopes rather than what has been practised to date. Several of the professionals thought that community and collective memories were organised through television and radio documentation and curated through books, magazines and journal publications. Nearly half of the cultural institution professionals view oral history as one of the techniques to be employed in organising and curating community and collective memories.

Two oral history professionals stated that community and collective memories can be organised and managed through documenting students' assignments, which is done by employing oral history techniques and organising forums and seminars. In the Kedah Public Library, the community's members were invited to speak at a forum organised in conjunction with Malaysia's Independence Day. IP3 stated that forums and seminars are organised as one way to preserve the community's memories and the collective memories. Different themes and topics are discussed during the seminars and forums, which were documented on video. However, according to IP8, people from the villages are less interested in attending these formal seminars. Therefore, IP8 highlighted the need to find other alternative and interactive mediums that can be used to pluralise oral history's findings, to attract the villagers' or local communities' involvement in the oral history initiatives.

IP10 shared the initiative undertaken by Sarawak State Library in preserving collective memories other than by using oral history programmes. The development of this platform is helpful to the oral history initiative:

*Looking at what we're doing at Pustaka, oral history is only one small part that we are doing. We move slowly. What the community can do is to get involved in*



*pictorial collections. We have already started a programme called "Friends of Archives", on going back to our pictorial collection, and getting people to identify those pictures. We have started that. So basically, I would say a multimedia collection. Not only photographs, but also some recordings, those kinds of things.*  
(10:1)

According to IP10, the "Friends of Archives" programme is able to invite individuals who are interested in learning about their ancestral roots, traditional practices and culture. Those individuals contribute their insights by providing content and context to selected photos in the cultural institutions, based on their experiences or witnessing of historical events.

IP1 recounted that the Selangor Public Library Corporation took the initiative in 2015 to apply oral history as one of the techniques to preserve local history. Indirectly, this initiative has helped secondary school students to be able to locate the information they require and get the necessary advice about the method for conducting oral interviews, in order to meet the Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) or form three assessment requirements; which is a secondary school-based assessment system. In 2014, a new format of assessment for secondary school students was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The students who are sitting for the PT3 assessment are required to fulfil a coursework requirement, practical tests, as well as undertake projects. For the history subjects, students need to produce a portfolio which is related to their local history, containing oral interviews and references to library materials. They will be assessed and graded based on their submitted task. This assessment is designed to help students to master critical thinking.

What has been argued by IP2 is related to the task assigned to students who sit for the Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) assessment. IP2 suggested that the Ministry of Education could give more serious attention to the methods used to preserve oral history by selecting some of the students' assignments and making a compilation of reference sources, which can be done at the schools' level, for use in the future. Indirectly, a variety of community and collective memories can be organised and curated in a systematic way.

Every year IP11 and his team outline a plan related to oral history. A series of workshops pertaining to organisational memory's preservation are conducted for individuals and organisations at the Perdana Library. The main aim of this kind of

programme is to encourage organisations to organise and curate the valuable tacit knowledge held by people who are rich in experiences, through an oral history technique.

#### **6.5.4 Networked memories**

Networked memories relates to the method of providing access to and connecting oral history collections to wider groups of people, including through networks enabled by technology. Oral histories and other local collections are not only located in Malaysia, but are also being shared and accessed by academics and researchers from other countries. IP1, IP2, IP3, IP4 and IP5 are aware that the method of pluralising oral history needs to be improved.

Currently, information seekers and researchers still need to physically visit a library to access oral history collections held by cultural institutions. IP4 said there were numerous researchers who came from many countries to access the local content in the Melaka State Library. According to IP4, the researchers from overseas were satisfied when they found the reference sources they required. To improve services to information seekers, IP4 suggested the need for cultural institutions to prepare computerised retrieval systems to improve the networked memories and allow better communications and connections with information seekers all around the world. Improvements to the networked memories are also required to reconnect the oral history collections available in Malaysia with other oral history centers, including those overseas.

Some of the cultural institution professional mentioned the role of local television programmes and social media in connecting a community's memories to the relevant sources of information. Through the production of local television programmes, which are also being co-produced by the cultural institutions, Malaysian society can be linked with major historical events. Furthermore, the seminars organised by cultural institutions also contribute to connecting the memories of the diverse communities in Malaysia. Through organised seminars, people who have the same interests in similar topics or collective memories can be linked and connected.

## 6.6 EVIDENTIALITY

For this research, the evidentiality axis is interpreted as how the evidence aspects related to oral history are understood. On the evidentiality axis, the levels such as traces, evidence, encoding systems, organisational and community warrants and mandates were explored. There are four aspects that relate to the evidentiality axis:

- i. Evidence in audio recordings and transcripts.
- ii. Encoding systems.
- iii. Audio recordings contents' curation and sharing techniques.
- iv. Mandates.

### 6.6.1 Evidence in audio recordings and transcripts

Most of the cultural institution professionals agree that the information contained in the audio recordings that have been collected needs to be verified before being published. However, there are certain kinds of information that cannot be verified because of the absence of reliable or authoritative information sources, or witnesses to certain particular events.

Evidence is a critical aspect in assessing the value of records. As highlighted by McKemmish (1996),

*Without reliable evidence set in a rich context, memory becomes bogus, false, wishful thinking, or is transformed into imagination, fiction, ideology. (p. 105)*

Evidential aspects can be established through the verification of the content in audio recordings and transcripts. Cross-checking information with the right people is also considered as a significant effort for verifying information. Such people might be the interviewees' family members, as indicated by IP8:

*We can refer to their family members or their close friends if there is an incredible or important part of their story that needs to be clarified. (8:29)*

IP1, on the other hand, locates supporting material or reference sources before the actual interview process starts. She ensures that all the documents and articles that are used to provide evidential information are in place. IP3 and IP7 use photos to

support the findings and locate participants who are reliable and can tell and narrate from the pictures. IP3 said,

*These pictures are all old pictures. Thus, to acquire the collection of old pictures, we have to find someone. This search is to find the names of figures that keep the pictures. (3:7)*

IP7 mentioned that,

*Then, we keep the report for this (oral history project details) and the pictures as well. (7:61)*

Other than that, local newspapers and broadcast agencies such as the New Straits Times, The Star, and Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) are a few examples of references in a local context that can be referred to. Other relevant sources that can be accessed include the National Archives and other government agencies, which have been used by IP1 and IP7. They went to various government departments to acquire data and compared them with the contents obtained from their oral history interviews:

*We will try to obtain evidence from the archives, the library, or any state government records from the state government's office. (1:35)*

*There are times when we went to government departments to find the information. (7:17)*

IP 7 added,

*After the interview, we would compare the data we obtained and find it somewhere other than from the internet, such as from the archives, and compare it to what we found from the interview. (7:52)*

Interview sources or data gathered from oral history interviews, supported by evidence, will add meaning to oral history sources. Verifying information with relevant and trustworthy evidential sources is necessary for producing credible and high quality oral history collections. Based on IP3's experience, an interview with a diverse range of communities might produce some contradictory findings or views. There is a need for the interviewer to cross-reference what he or she is told before releasing the outcome

from an oral history interview. Based on interviews however, very few of the cultural institution professionals that were interviewed referred to manuscripts, diaries, or other related reference sources for the oral history projects conducted by the cultural institutions. Newspapers and photos are the primary material sources used as references to support an oral history's findings. More than half of those interviewed were unable to outline different kinds of artefacts clearly and encountered difficulty in gathering those sources as evidence to support their oral histories' findings. In this sense, when relevant, artefacts can be used to illustrate connections between what has been produced in written histories and what has been recorded orally.

### 6.6.2 Encoding systems

In this research, the encoding system relates to the process of converting the outcome of an interview into meaningful information. The outcome from an oral history interview must undergo a transformative process; tools and knowledge are needed for decoding the information stored in the community's memory so it can be understood. The local language and dialects are two of the elements which have been highlighted by the cultural institution professionals as being of concern during the encoding system. Based on the experiences of the cultural institution professionals, the language and dialects used by the narrators in Malaysia varies and are different, depending on the region or area they live in. The language and dialects need to be understood by people who access oral history collections. IP7, IP5 and IP2 shared their experiences in managing the complex language aspects. According to IP7, not all the interviewees can speak and understand the Malay language fluently:

*We have language issues when doing this. Sometimes they could not speak Malay or English that well. Thus, they have to bring along someone that could translate back to us. The old traders are more comfortable to converse in Chinese. Thus, we have to bring along someone that could translate it to us. If for the Indians there is no problem. They still could (converse with us). If it's an old Chinese person, it is difficult in terms of language. (7:32)*

IP5 stated that the interview session became more complicated when the interviewee spoke in his/her local dialect. She suggested that anyone who is going to conduct an oral history interview session should consider the narrators' preferred language. IP5

also believes that, by communicating through the language preferred by the potential narrators, more in-depth and rich information can be recorded by the interviewers:

*Each ethnic group has its dialect, and if we speak in Malay, they would not be comfortable. (5:16)*

IP2 highlighted the need to find interviewers who could speak the correct foreign language when conducting interviews with foreigners or interviewing Malaysian citizens located in other countries. The suggestion was made based on his experience in the process of capturing oral history related to the Japanese occupation in Malaysia:

*We have to find the interviewer that speaks Japanese. (2: 41)*

IP11 was also concerned about the language aspects. He had difficulty when interviewees spoke languages other than Malay. As has been highlighted by IP11, transcribing the interview became the most significant challenge and can significantly affect the outcome of any interview. A solution proposed by IP11 is that an email could be sent to the interviewees for further clarification of any points of confusion. In addition, it is essential to have someone who is meticulous in producing interview transcripts:

*Pre-editing interview transcripts for language checking is essential, including the vocab. This work needs a high level of commitment. We need to avoid any disruption when doing this. (11:16)*

IP3 and IP8 believed transcripts could aid the users to access oral history's information in a better way, especially by providing better context and content. A comprehensive transcript could increase the understanding of the audio recording's contents and reduce any misinterpretation of the information, as noted by IP8:

*That is why we have transcripts; we are concerned that people would not understand the interview in that dialect. (8:23)*

Based on the interviews, the process of transcription, which involves translating speech into text, needs to be considered at the encoding system's level. It is important

to encode transcripts into meaningful content and contexts, as this will increase the level of the users' understanding of the recorded interviews.

### **6.6.3 Organisational and community warrants**

Organisational and community warrants can be described as a shared cultural narrative and being accepted by a larger group of people. This section will discuss the aspects related to the management of community oral history collections which include access rights, space and storage, as well as human resources, as this aspect is related to the community level.

The public can access the oral history collections in cultural institutions. However, cultural institutions have the exclusive right to determine whether the oral history collections recorded can be used or copied by others; which depends on consent from the interviewees. Currently, there are no specific degrees of access rights determined in the cultural institutions involved in this study. However, users are only allowed to access the contents of audio recordings and transcripts inside the cultural institutions, to protect the cassettes, tapes and transcripts from damage and loss. Equipment is provided to enable the users to access the audio recordings on cassettes. Cultural institutions use consent forms to get permission from the narrators when the oral histories they supplied are exhibited or published, so they are accessible to the general public.

There are some challenges and obstacles highlighted by the cultural institution professionals in managing oral history collections. IP9 stated that there is insufficient space and storage to store audio collections in the Sarawak State Museum and a proper storage area is needed to manage the audio recordings it possesses. The majority of cultural institution professionals are concerned with the need to refresh the old format of cassettes by transferring the stored information onto a new medium. According to IP2, IP8 and IP9, the National Archives, Terengganu State Library and Sarawak State Library are planning to move the records stored on deteriorating cassettes and tapes onto a digital and integrated platform.

There are a few aspects which are considered to be obstacles in delivering comprehensive oral history collections. Completing projects with a minimal number of staff has been mentioned by most of the cultural institution professionals. Every

employee has their daily tasks and job to complete. However, there are no dedicated staff who can consistently manage the transcription process which causes a backlog of material, as noted by IP4. IP4 also shared her experience of the editing process. She needed to come out with a storyboard to produce a video as one of the oral history's outcomes. The workload was carried out with minimal assistance. There is no specific oral history team, while the project depends on staff from other departments. IP4 highlights her concerns:

*We record and then we transcribe that is all. However, when the new boss comes, perhaps they will be more adventurous; it means that the way they want to do the oral collection is like a documentary, so we could sell it. Thus, it will be a pressure on us. (4:5)*

*My superior wants me to come up with six oral history projects yearly. I cannot achieve it because we have no staff, we have no group and we have to depend on other staff who have their own work. I have to look at their schedule to see whether the interviewees are available or not. There are plenty of obstacles that we have to overcome, it is hard. (4:64)*

IP6 and IP2 also highlighted the issue where some of the younger staff were less interested in oral history projects. Inconsistent effort when conducting an oral history project is considered to be another challenge encountered by oral history project teams, which then causes a lack of progress in the oral history project. IP6 mentioned that:

*We have started it for a while, it is just we do not publish it and we do not do it consistently. (6:1)*

The process of curating organisational and community warrants is subject to the initiatives undertaken by the cultural institution professionals. Access rights problems, limited space and storage and human resources are three critical aspects to be considered in curating audio recordings, which also can be referred to curate organisational and community warrants.



#### **6.6.4 Mandates**

In the context of this research, 'mandates' is related to individuals or the relevant authorities who are given the responsibility to select, record and manage oral history projects related to communities. The people chosen to speak as the representatives of the communities and who will be given priority to own and control each local community's oral history collection are also a part of the mandates level, as marked in the pluralise dimension and on the evidentiality axis.

The majority of cultural institution professionals agree that mandates in developing oral history collections usually depend on the financial support of the relevant state government. Cultural institution professionals also agreed that interviewees should be carefully selected as the information or stories gathered from them will become long term community memories. After the process of selecting the interviewees, the process of managing those oral history collections should be considered. The discussion about mandates is also related and linked to other levels and axes. The criteria for choosing a narrator as a community's representative will be discussed when the discussion of these findings shifts to Section 6.7.2 (Interviewee identification). Section 6.8.4.1 (Ethical considerations in oral history) and Section 6.8.4.2 (The legitimization of the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections).

#### **6.7 IDENTITIES**

One of the functions of oral history, which was discussed in Chapter 2, is to preserve the identities of individuals and communities. As emphasised by Upward (2000), the identities aspect relates to the authorities who create and keep records, such as archives. Identities are one of the crucial aspects in oral history records' creation. In the Malaysian context, oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals are the two main groups undertaking oral history projects to preserve communities' histories.

The oral history collection that is developed reflects on the actors involved in the oral history project. What follows is a discussion related to oral history's co-creators, the process of identifying the interviewee, the process of developing the oral history's interview questions, and the aspects related to the levels of the organisations, institutions and networks involved.

### 6.7.1 Oral history co-creators

Oral history involves a continual process of interpretation and begins when someone decides to set up an oral history project. As discussed in Chapter 4, the co-creation process is part of the memory-making activities and is placed on the traces level; this process may involve a different group of individuals participating in an oral history project. Based on the interviews conducted, most of the research's participants agreed that the process of co-creation requires support from a diverse range of parties including the public, government agencies such as the cultural institutions, local councils and state leaders.

The project's initiation, the selection of interviewees, its topics, when to conduct the oral history and the questions' development process are among the types of activities co-creators get involved in. Based on the experiences of several of the cultural institution professionals, some interviewees were not willing to share certain information with them as the interviewees were afraid that the input they provided might be manipulated or misused by the interviewer/s. Concerning this, some communities want more control over the outcomes from the interviews. The co-creators of oral history collections and the aspects that are related to them are described in this section.

#### *i. Village committees*

In the Malaysian community, there is still a lack of awareness of the need to preserve local content and the value of conducting an oral history. IP7, from a local council library, said every time she and her team organise an event to bring people's attention to preserving local history, only a few groups will participate. According to her, the residents who live in Petaling Jaya are more interested in entertainment programmes:

*Actually, number one is awareness, because nowadays people are not interested in history. I admit that. Even the students do it because they have to do it to pass the exam. Therefore, the awareness actually comes internally, as a municipal council; we have to make an effort. Establish a museum, create awareness, and conduct programmes. Indirectly it will attract people to get to know history. (7:46)*

IP7 felt the issue of the lack of awareness could be addressed at the school level, where teachers can play a role and instil an interest in their students about the

importance of preserving historical information. This was supported by IP4, who pointed out that society was not clear about the value and importance of documenting oral history. IP7 also shared his experience where some of the interviewees were not keen to share their valuable information or any evidential information during the interview. The culture of information and knowledge sharing is still low and is one of the barriers to enriching the local collections, as noted by IP7:

*Sometimes, I deal with respondents who are not willing to share. They said "I have to keep it and cannot give it to others". They have information about history, but they refused to provide the information. Sometimes, even a copy is not possible because it is considered private. We could not do anything. (7:27)*

IP2 pointed out the need to co-create oral history collections with the community associations, but that will depend on the community's willingness to share. This is back to the awareness issue of the importance of documenting local history. IP2 said,

*Therefore, if we want to say which party is the more effective, it is hard to state in this aspect. However, the village committees could do it if they wanted to conduct oral history with local people and others. However, it depends on the openness in doing this. (2:11)*

Similar to what IP9 pointed out, the people in the villages could be engaged and approached to become co-creators in documenting oral history. IP9 intends to develop a better communications platform to invite the wider community to participate and give some input pertinent to the historical information around them, which has not yet been documented elsewhere:

*I suggested doing it on the website. Thus, everybody could register as contributors and they could seek people out in the villages, and try indirectly if they want to. I think we have to develop new technology to quicken this. (9:12)*

IP5 suggested that individuals with high levels of integrity could be given proper training and could be part of the oral history programmes' conducted by the cultural institutions. This could have a more significant impact on increasing the awareness among villagers of the importance of developing oral history collections. IP5 highlighted this,

*The community from this area or that (area), who do we want to train there? We should find within the community someone that we could trust, that we could train to conduct interviews. (5:30)*

By identifying the right people to be trained, more people can participate and practice oral history rather than just relying on the cultural institution professionals to initiate community oral history programmes.

**ii. Government agencies**

IP2 also suggested that oral history should be initiated by certain government agencies, such as the Department of National Heritage, since the National Archives focus is on national history. The components of culture, lifestyle and customs could be co-created by the Department of National Heritage, which is not limited to any performance aspects or their management, but would cover the intellectual aspects and the preservation of the socio-cultural aspects of a community as part of its responsibilities. Other than government agencies, the oral history projects can be co-created based on partnerships between government agencies, as noted by IP2 and IP8:

*Even the National Archives sometimes can undertake project-based (work). We have done this with the Malaysian Institute of Integrity, documenting the oral history related to the police, the army. I remember that they wanted to research Lahad Datu. They teamed up with us to conduct oral history recordings with people involved with the Lahad Datu incursion<sup>18</sup>. Thus, there were some but that was just what we managed to do. It means that it was a historical event, which we try to tell. (2:26)*

IP8 stated,

*The museums, archives and the associations, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), should collaborate to further develop oral history. (8:20)*

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<sup>18</sup>Around 180 followers of Jamalul Kiram II claimed to be Sultan of Sulu. They sailed from the southern Philippines and took part in an armed incursion into Tanduo village from 12th February to 10th April 2013 to press their claim to the Malaysian state of Sabah. During the assault, nine members of the Malaysian security services were killed. Reference: Hooker, V.M. (2003). A short history of Malaysia: Linking East and West. Singapore: Allen & Unwin.

Support from the top state leaders is essential and can have a big impact. In the Malaysian context, if the direction comes from high ranking leaders, the initiative to document oral history will be given a higher priority, which has been emphasised by IP1, IP5 and IP7. Without strong support, the oral history programme will be treated as unimportant and not bringing any value to either the organisation or the public. IP2 suggested that city and local councils take part in documenting their local histories and not just provide core services to their communities:

*In a developed nation, the local councils will keep historical materials in document form or recorded form. That is why, in a developed country, they can trace back their history for hundreds of years, because they have established records. Our city councils or local councils should make documenting oral history one of their agendas. Not just to collect money, door tax (property rates) and what not. The communities or areas that they cover should be elevated and encouraged to do something that they can be proud of. (2:34)*

State government support is crucial for an oral history collection's development programme. IP4 highlighted that some of the state governments' officers do not see the effort of preserving heritage as an important initiative. The state government officers are usually not aware of the importance of preserving local heritage, as pointed out by IP4:

*We did not gazette it through the state government because the state government does not appreciate it as we do. I think they do not appreciate old heritage. He (referring to one of the state government's officers) once said that even if there is no library, the government still can survive. This was because the person at the top could not see the relevance of the library. (4:54)*

According to IP4, the government officers did not see the value of preserving local history and assumed that with the technology available, everything could be published through social media platforms, such as YouTube:

*They (state government officers) said that even if the library does not exist, it is okay, we now have multimedia with YouTube and all that, we could obtain information as it is now just at our fingertips, something like that. (4:55)*

IP4 also emphasised the need to follow up on a project once it is released. She gave an example of a case where an initiative had not been completed:

*Previously, the government asked us to develop a portal for each village. All the information was entered in the portal, but there was no follow-up on the project. The government only provided a one-time budget. (4:81)*

### 6.7.2 Interviewee identification

The process of identifying the interviewees is related to the actors on the identity axis. Through our interview sessions with the professionals from the cultural institutions, three main strategies, which are commonly applied, were identified: develop contacts with villagers, engage with rural libraries and other government agencies and identify senior people or retirees.

#### *i. Develop contacts with villagers*

The process of selecting the potential narrators begins with socialising and contacting the people in the villages and this is usually conducted through an informal process, as highlighted by IP3:

*It starts with socialising or mingling. If we want to start something, we have to be kind to others, the method is easy, make it simple, be kind to all the community members. They may help us find out about our topic, about history, about the name of the place. (3:27)*

IP2 is aware that it is not easy to locate appropriate interviewees. IP4 also agreed with the need to have a gatekeeper or intermediary to approach a community. IP4 suggested that any researcher, or person, who intends to conduct an interview, especially with a rural community, needs to locate someone who is familiar with the local settings, culture and languages spoken:

*It is tough unless we know someone, we could acquire input. If you go there, they will not help. Or if like me, I go to a Portuguese village, then to a Chetty village. If I ask lots of questions, they don't like it and are not willing to collaborate. (4:34)*

What IP2 and IP7 have practised is a bit different. To document community histories at the regional level, they have approached retirees who are part of a mosque's community. IP2 and IP7 believe that these groups of people have useful and up-to-date historical information and could provide insights into the residents' historical information, since they meet with each other on a daily basis to worship at the mosque. At the same time, they exchange information and discuss the current issues when they meet. IP2 stressed the importance of getting in touch with a representative within the community. Therefore, developing strong connections with the community's representative, such as the village chief, is essential to acquire general inputs:

*The villagers usually refer to their representative. It would be easier to go to the representative because they typically have an in-depth understanding of their community. (2:33)*

IP2 mentioned that maintaining good connections with a community's representative will also ease the process of identifying potential interviewees.

**ii. Engagement with rural libraries and other government agencies**

Engaging with district or rural libraries also helps to locate potential narrators, since the librarians working in the rural libraries have more extensive connections at the district level, as stated by IP8:

*We will be going to other districts, in every region; we ask for the cooperation of the district library. Perhaps the district library has some recommendations on related figures; then we could collaborate. (8:12)*

IP8 also plans to engage with government agencies:

*We are looking forward to working with other agencies such as the state secretary's office or religious commissioner to locate figures who have exceptional achievements and someone who has vast knowledge about traditional carving in Terengganu. (8:18)*

IP4 mentioned that potential interviewees can be identified based on their active participation in community projects. Members from the different ethnic communities, for example, those who can contribute a lot to the development of oral history, should

be approached and engaged regularly. These groups of people are usually quite old and there are getting to be fewer and fewer of them left in society. However, they are aware of the subjects which need more attention and should be urgently documented.

**iii. Identify senior people or retirees**

Age is one of the criteria applied by IP1, IP5 and IP7 in their interviewees' selection process. They believe that the age factor provides an impact upon the interviews' outcomes. They prefer to interview a group of senior people, including retirees or people who are considered to have experience of the subject or context being explored. The achievements and expertise of the identified interviewees can be verified based on information obtained from the head of their village, intermediaries, feedback from the public, connections with collectors of old-books and located in old newspapers. However, the right approach needs to be considered when setting up an interview session with old people. Some of them are not ready to be recorded on video or by a camera. IP5 stated

*The government wants to do (that), they said this reason. We explain to them. I have observed that with the elderly, we have to be smart when approaching them because sometimes when the elderly see the video equipment that we bring, they do not want to talk. (5:7)*

Other additional criteria that have been proposed by the cultural institution professionals for the process of selecting an interviewee include identifying who has a broad knowledge of the events or the relevant field, has balanced and unbiased views, a sharp memory and is someone who is trusted by the members of the community and is identified as someone who has had success in the subject matter being investigated. As oral history requires people to recall certain events, dates and facts, an interviewee who has a problem with his/her memory should not be selected, as noted by IP4:

*Sometimes, we feel when we refer back to their friends or children or wife, that the information is not parallel or aligned, then, we would not take it. (4:34)*

Based on IP4's statement, an individual with a poor memory will make the interview lose focus and direction. Due to the financial constraints, IP4 emphasised the need to reduce unnecessary tasks.



### 6.7.3 The process of developing questions

The 'capture' dimension on the identity axis also discusses the method for developing the interview questions to be used to record groups' or communities' stories. The process of designing the questions usually starts with a preliminary meeting and the use of the available literature. The interview questions' development process also relates to the *traces* level in the co-creation dimension. Questions are developed and subsequently put to the interviewees; their answers may have a significant impact on the oral history's content and contribute to the 'memory traces'. Newspapers, letters and books are common and familiar sources of information which are used to construct relevant interview questions, as confirmed by the majority of the oral history practitioners who participated in this research. An interview guide is then created to list the specific topics and themes that will be covered during an interview session and this is used as the basis for the interview questions.

The flow of the interview depends on the questions asked by the interviewers and the answers provided by the interviewees. The cultural institution professionals who participate in oral history collections highlighted that the questions need to be filtered before being used in the actual interview session. This usually happens if the selected interviewee comes from a high ranking professional group. The session will be more formal compared to a session with a layman.

Basically, the process of designing questions is based on inputs from both the interviewees and interviewers. Interviews will be conducted based on predetermined questions. A set of questions is prepared before the interview occurs. This is the usual practise of IP4, IP5, IP7, and IP8. In some instances, the set of questions will be sent to the interviewees before the actual interview takes place. IP5 stated that, for the interviews she conducts:

*We have prepared all the questions that we want to ask, and we have set them all up. Then, we give them to the person we want to interview. Does he agree when we ask about this? There are those who say, "Oh, I want to change a little bit". Thus, he will change it by himself. After that, he will say, "If it is like this, then it is okay". It is like that. Thus, our approach is to give them all that we want to ask them. All the aspects concerning their social life, family, politics, everything that is related to the subjects. (5:57)*

IP1 approaches an intermediary to finalise an interview question:

*From our side, we are the ones who create the questions. In the meantime, we will discuss with the intermediary the suitability or appropriateness of the questions that will be asked. (1:41)*

On the other hand, IP7 is dedicated to developing a different set of questions to be asked to different interviewees, which will be based on their expertise and field of knowledge:

*We have developed and separated the questions based on a few categories. If the study is related to buildings, these are the questions. (7:64)*

The set of questions that are developed might be useful to guide a new interviewer, or the members of an oral history project team, to frame the direction of an oral history project.

#### **6.7.4 Organisations, institutions and networks**

The organisations (in the organise dimension), institutions (in the curate dimension) and networks (in the pluralise dimension), are interrelated to each other. All of the cultural institution professionals were asked how they organise organisations, curate institutions and pluralise networks in the context of oral history. The connection between organisations, institutions and networks is described simultaneously. There are four strategic methods to be considered concerning organisations, institutions and networks, as part of the effort to expand local communities' collections:

##### ***i. Professional development***

IP7 and IP5 agreed that benchmarking activities could help cultural institutions to refresh their thinking about their oral history initiatives. The main objectives of benchmarking are to learn better practices from other organisations and to improve their own performance in managing oral history collections, including finding the areas where improvements are needed.

They conduct excursions or visits to other cultural institutions, to learn the processes they use for managing their oral history collections. IP5 noted that the practices from other international institutions had contributed to the development of the oral history collections kept in the Sarawak State Library, even though the initiative had begun without a clear guideline. The staff who are involved in oral history matters there had visited the New South Wales State Library to gain different experiences and strategies from another country, including better transcription methods. IP5 shared,

*In New South Wales State Library, I saw many people who came to research their family history. Every day I saw them (library users) come to find out about their ancestors. In fact, such as in here as well, I have seen someone who wanted to cooperate with the information department. That is why we want to approach the information department (in New South Wales State Library) further, especially the one that keeps the records on Sarawak around the early time of Malaysia. (5:47)*

IP7 mentioned that she usually welcomes other librarians from local council libraries to visit the Petaling Jaya Museum for the benchmarking process. During such visits, both parties could exchange ideas, concepts and knowledge to help develop comprehensive oral history programmes.

## **ii. Strengthen the collaborations**

IP8, IP2 and IP4 mentioned the need to collaborate with the national oral history association, researchers from universities and the local council. Maintaining professional and warm relationships with other oral history associations will allow the cultural institutions to gain access to first-hand information gathered by local historians. Researchers from universities need to be invited to involve them in oral history, as one of the efforts to enrich the local communities' oral history collections. IP11 and IP4 believe that researchers from universities could produce more comprehensive outcomes and collections of oral history, as they know how to conduct rigorous research.

Local councils are considered to be one of the critical agencies to collaborate with in the development of local history collections. According to IP2, there is no official engagement between the cultural institutions and the local council. However, IP2 stated that he always encourages the local municipal council to participate by informing them about any oral history related activities that are being organised. He also plans

to collaborate officially with the local council when recording oral history on a regional basis:

*We have indeed made an engagement, and we have encouraged them to inform us about the thing they want to emphasise or record (through oral history), however, that is not official. (2:37)*

IP5 also stated that Sarawak State Library planned to actively collaborate with the local council on its oral history programme in the future:

*Pustaka enforces by writing a letter or something similar to the (local) council since they have been given an oral history course. We want to have a plan for each (local) council in the whole Sarawak. (5:38)*

Oral history programmes can become more active with support from different agencies, as each agency could contribute their expertise and skills. IP2 said,

*For example, the day we went to Sarawak. In a part that is bordering Indonesia. We intended to conduct an oral history recording with the local people there. Thus, we have collaborated with various agencies in our ministry to organise the programme. Some concentrated on the photography aspect, the artwork and Arkib Negara focused on the recording of oral history. (2:10)*

IP2, IP3 and IP5 have highlighted the importance of collaborating with internship students from universities. In some Malaysian public universities, final year students are required to fulfil tasks under an internship programme, in order to gain work experience and satisfy the requirements for their qualification. The internship students will be given jobs or tasks that usually relate to either the agency the students are attached to or a specific industry where they work, sometimes without pay.

The internship students will be assessed by relevant reviewers or officers based on their performance and other relevant criteria. For university students who choose oral history as the area for their internship programme, places for them are usually available in public cultural institutions where they are required to work alongside the cultural institution professionals to complete special projects, which can include conducting and managing oral history collections. These internship students will then be given the

task of undertaking some oral history project based on a specific theme outlined by the cultural institution professionals. IP2 said,

*We are also willing to engage with associations or universities and for university students to conduct oral histories on our behalf. We can provide a topic for the students. However, there will be no payment. This is the problem nowadays; everyone needs to be paid. (2:49)*

A similar approach has been used by IP5:

*We use the students' services as part of the oral history programme. (5:34)*

IP1 also received support from university students:

*Internship students for oral history projects are the ones who will mostly come. Thus, we have to collaborate with them for it. (1:32)*

IP4 emphasised the need for unity among museums, archives, memorials and other cultural institutions, in order to curate oral history collections:

*It does not matter if the museum keeps it, because of course, as a museum (they would want to keep it). Perhaps their method of keeping things is not similar to ours. Probably, they would be replicas or something different. As I said nowadays, the problem is when we (the library) keep books, the museum also holds books. We manage the same thing but in a different place. Is this wasteful? To me it is wasteful because museums have their own (unique function), they should do that. They should display something like replicas or rock, the stele or something similar. Thus, I said that they are greedy; everybody wants to hold the same thing. For example, Institut Kajian Sejarah (IKSEP), they do the same, they keep it as well. Imagine that they tried to keep (sources collected by the library) materials, they came to me, and they photocopied the article, wanted to keep it in the museum. For what? Right? We already have it all here. Why should they copy all the reference materials and placed them in their library? (4:67)*

From the points raised by the cultural institution professionals, collaborations and partnerships between organisations are crucial for preserving the identities of local groups or communities in Malaysia. Clear directions from the top management and

valuable inputs from diverse individuals can help to improve the process which relates to organisations, institutions and networks.

**iii. Follow-up after giving training to the community**

The cultural institution professionals can locate people who are interested and can be trusted and get them involved in oral history programmes, which was highlighted by IP5. Those people can be taught how to become a good interviewer, by providing the necessary skills they need. Cultural institution professionals can act as the trainers and are also able to locate people who have good communication skills and perhaps could speak and understand the diverse dialects or ethnic languages. However, this process has to be consistently performed and followed-up on by the person in charge. The outcomes from an oral history project could be in the form of an educational seminar, which can be organised at a village center.

There was a workshop conducted to train people to capture oral history at their family level. Nevertheless, there is no progress on this, due to the absence of any sort of follow-up from the cultural institution professionals. IP5 highlighted this,

*I conducted a workshop on family history in 2012. So far, we do not follow-up with them, we only encourage them. We do not force them to do it. If we want them to do that, we need to give them equipment. (5:40)*

IP6 suggested cultural institutions should proactively and continuously invite the local community to participate in oral history projects. Volunteer organisations, such as the Friends of the Archives or the Friends of the Library are considered to be good platforms for engaging with the local community. IP5 noted that through community programmes, users are allowed to contribute their skills or expertise:

*Last time, I called users who have the expertise to make a description for the newspapers. We do not know about the Mandarin language, so we seek someone who could describe it. (5:49)*

Information professionals should sharpen their skills, including their managerial and interviewing skills, as stated by IP11. He believes that by having excellent skills, the cultural institution professionals could contribute to the expansion of local community

collections. Without proper and adequate skills, an oral history programme will be less progressive and less effective.

## **6.8 NARRATIVES**

The narratives axis consists of the small stories, signification, domination, legitimation and facilitation levels. In this section, the researcher includes how narratives that are captured orally can be dominant. This section will also further discuss the ethical aspects which need to be considered in the process of capturing oral history, which is closely related to the legitimation aspect. Other than that, the aspect of facilitation on the narratives axis will discover how the memories that are captured can be pluralised in a network environment.

This section discusses the following:

- i. Small stories.
- ii. Signification.
- iii. Domination.
- iv. Ethical considerations in oral history.
- v. Control and ownership of communities' oral history collections.
- vi. Facilitation.

### **6.8.1 Small stories**

To recap, small stories, as defined by Gibbons (2014) are, 'The smallest interactions that contribute to the creation of social narratives'. According to the cultural institution professionals, awareness of the importance of oral history could be enhanced by instilling the understanding at the family, village and district levels. One of the professionals suggested beginning by capturing oral history at the family and village levels. This will allow the ordinary family to study their family's historical experience and their ethnic background in a detailed and systematic way.

At the village level, historical information about the formation of the area can also be explored. In Melaka for example, there are many unique village names and much historical information which is very interesting to discover, as highlighted by IP4. From the interviews conducted with the cultural institution professionals, it was generally agreed that the participation of the local community can further contribute to enriching both the community's memories and the collective memories.

### **6.8.2 Signification**

In this research, this signification level in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is described as the method to expose oral history collections to various contexts. Based on the responses provided by the cultural institution professionals, the ways to bring out the meaning of oral history interviews are by producing transcripts, reports, monographs, exhibitions, documentaries and publishing books and articles on the nation's history in local magazines and newspapers. As part of their engagement activities with their local communities, forums and seminars, excursions to cultural institutions and encouraging local people to volunteer to help with history projects have all been organised by the cultural institutions selected as part of this research's sample. However, this sort of effort needs to be executed consistently and opened up to the wider community to increase the numbers of participants and users. A more detailed explanation will be included in Section 6.8.5 (Facilitation).

### **6.8.3 Domination**

Domination relates to the organise dimension in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. The points of view of the cultural institution professionals about the different types of dominant historical accounts or sources in Malaysia were also collected. Most of the cultural institution professionals agreed that the official national discourse was still dominant and has a significant influence in Malaysia. The domination of historical sources also depends on the role of the federal and state authorities in shaping the collective memory.

The history related to a country's national identity, which can provide long-term lessons to be learnt, is the dominant one, as viewed by a majority of the cultural institution professionals. On the other hand, IP5 believes that the domination of each piece of historical information depends on the user's or audience's choice. IP5 believes that the process begins when the elders in a family prefer to narrate a particular story. The history shared with the family members includes personal stories or the nation's history. When those stories cascade down and become widely accepted from one generation to the next, the stories will become dominant, compared to other historical accounts which also supported by Wertsch (2002). In summary, the cultural institutions promote official stories as the dominant narrative compared to other stories. This is



influenced by the direction of the government and the available written records in the cultural institutions.

#### **6.8.4 Legitimation**

There are two aspects of legitimation which related to the oral history development and management from cultural institution professionals' perspectives.

- i. Ethical considerations in oral history.
- ii. The legitimation of the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections.

##### **6.8.4.1 Ethical considerations in oral history**

Communication skills are essential for dealing with people, especially the potential interviewees. There are many possibilities when dealing with interviewees. Some of them might be less friendly and have a different personality than others. This scenario is considered to be one of the challenges for the interviewers.

Evidence from the face-to-face interviews revealed that the ethical aspects are significant for building oral history collections. Background research about the proposed interviewees is one of the important aspects to be considered by the interviewer before any oral history project is conducted. Identifying the background of an interviewee will contribute to greater engagement during the actual interview session. The results from the interviews also showed that considering the interviewee's preferences when setting up an oral history session is crucial. Oral history as a one-to-one experience is usually preferred by the interviewees rather than being interviewed in a group, as some of the interviewees are rural folks from rural areas where they are not exposed to holding formal conversations in a big crowd.

Some of the members within a community, who are chosen as interviewees, are afraid of being misrepresented and feel insecure if they provide information to someone who they are not familiar with and consider an outsider. IP4 pointed out this issue:

*They (the interviewees) act like that because they think we are going to manipulate their heritage information or exploit them. That is why it was hard for them to cooperate. (4:44)*

IP10 said courtesy and maturity are two crucial individual characteristics that an interviewer needs to possess. In addition, trying not to argue with the interviewee, especially during a difficult conversation or interview session and having the ability to communicate ethically with a professional approach, are key ingredients for dealing with interviewees, as highlighted by a few of the cultural institution professionals.

Most of the cultural institution professionals agreed that judgements about what remains private or public should be made by the interviewee. Sensitive information which may be highlighted by an interviewee must be filtered before releasing what was collected to the general public. The contents must be reviewed and checked by the interviewees and the oral history committee set up by the cultural institution. This consideration is made to protect the interviewee's rights, especially if they provide some sensitive information. In dealing with ambiguous statements, IP1 stressed the importance of verifying the information provided by the interviewees. For her, accurate information needs to be presented before publishing any reference sources from oral history interviews.

IP1 said that with the right interview technique, the precision of the information provided by the interviewees can be improved and indirectly this will increase the reliability and trustworthiness of oral history sources. Corrected assumptions, erroneous dates and speculative thoughts could be explored with a systematic oral history interview technique. IP1 adds that

*People can doubt the source from them. People can argue. Thus, we have to provide the accurate and exact facts. (1:26)*

The sources constructed based on comprehensive contexts and contents will allow oral history collections' users to access and expand their searching for information they are looking for.

#### **6.8.4.2 The legitimization of the control and ownership of communities' oral history collections**

The cultural institution professionals were asked about the ownership and control of community oral history collections. Their opinions on this aspect varied, as they

provided advice based on their experiences and personal points of view. In principle, the cultural institution professionals agreed that the communities' historical information should be owned and controlled by either the cultural institutions, the local authorities and/or the communities themselves. However, the cultural institution professionals believe that the local communities need more guidance if they want to take control of the collections.

IP4 and IP8 agreed that oral history collections can be owned and controlled by both the cultural institutions and the local community. IP4 stressed that, for example, with the minority group in Melaka:

*I think both sides (cultural institutions and the local community) play essential roles. Few researchers have time to go on-site. We have the Chetty, Portuguese and Baba Nyonya areas. Certain people, especially researchers from abroad, would not have much time. Thus, I think every ethnic group has to preserve their historical information. However, we (the library) should also have it, because we are the pillar of knowledge. (4:65)*

IP4 argued that if the local community manages the collections over a long-term period, there is the possibility of an inconsistent effort because the local community has many other activities. IP4 said:

*By hook or by crook, we should have it because it is a heritage that we need to preserve. We do not know if the community, at the time when all the elders have gone, would the children preserve this thing? I think, perhaps, there will be a time when Kampung Portuguese will disappear, because they marry the Chinese and then migrate to somewhere else. Thus, the library should keep the records. Indeed, it should be in the library. (4:66)*

Due to a lack of awareness of the significance of local history among the local community, IP5 believes that cultural institutions and other related agencies should take ownership of and control the oral history collections:

*In Pustaka we preserve the history. Not just for reference, but we want to preserve it so it will not be lost, such as weddings. There are not so many now in the community who still follow their wedding customs. However we preserve them, so future generations can refer to them here. Thus, we have to publicise it. If everyone*

*keeps it themselves, we could not know if the future generations will continue keeping it. Sometimes the children, especially if they migrate, they possibly will throw it into the dustbin. (5:45)*

IP5's views were supported by IP10, as she urged every party to play their roles in preserving the community's identity through oral history. IP10 believes that through a strategic plan, both the local community and the cultural institution could build a constructive engagement. IP5 is confident that if the customs and traditions are being preserved appropriately, the information related to cultural heritage can be accessed in the future. Like IP7, IP6 prefers the management aspect being taken by the relevant local authorities instead of the local communities themselves. She assumes that they are still not ready to manage their collections, due to their inconsistent efforts:

*I feel better with the authorities because if it's in the community, sometimes when the community is not active, it will be wasted. (7:71)*

A lack of the appropriate oral history skills will have an undesirable impact on oral history endeavours. The main areas where there is a lack of staff are in the transcribing and editing processes, since they require more time to complete. IP5 stated that

*However, if he needs to transcribe it, it should be done by many people because to transcribe one transcript takes a lot of time. (5:23)*

The cultural institution professionals who are involved in oral history need to adopt a different set of skills. Skills for interviewing someone are crucial as they allow the interviewees to provide relevant and accurate responses. As highlighted by IP4, she does not know if what is being practised is the right way since there is a lack of proper guidance. The initiative will be stunted and slowed, due to the lack of integration and understanding of oral history's methodology, techniques and principles:

*I am not sure if I am practising the right techniques because we do not have any expertise. Even though we know the principles, they are not comprehensive. The directions for oral history projects also changed once the library director changed. (4:3)*

IP7 noted he did not know to handle interviewees who cannot keep to the point. He was unable to handle the situation when this happened during an interview. This issue

is related to a person's skills and competency when dealing with a difficult interviewee. IP7 shared his experiences:

*Then when we met, we asked one thing and they replied with another thing. (7:20)*

It is therefore important for an interviewer to learn the techniques to keep an interviewee focused on the actual topic being discussed during an interview session.

### **6.8.5 Facilitation**

The usual way to share the audio recordings held by cultural institutions, in this research's context, is by producing transcripts. Some of the transcripts are turned into books to share the content more easily. The process of sharing also relates to what is discussed in Section 6.9 (Mediated memories), where the central platforms for sharing the outcomes from oral history interviews are by conducting forums and seminars.

The outcomes from oral history interviews are shared through reports and some of them are documented using more attractive methods, as noted by IP8. An exhibition is considered to be one of the effective ways to promote the oral history related programmes held by Kedah Public Library. Since the new assessment known as Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) was introduced by the Ministry of Education, many schools have begun to invite cultural institutions to introduce their services, primarily related to their local history collections' development. The excursions to the library can be valuable for students from primary through to secondary school age, to expose them to heritage documentation and other related activities. IP3 stated:

*We organise history narrations at the departmental level. We also arrange educational forums. We do it frequently. When we organise something, we will invite the schools, the public, the non-governmental organisations and we publicise from that aspect. (3:36)*

The outcomes of oral history help enrich the local collections and school students who are sitting for Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3). IP3 stated that there was a high demand from secondary school students, located in rural areas, to access the oral history collections. Therefore, rural libraries could play important roles as

intermediaries between the students and the state library, to ease the process of accessing the information they needed:

*The students come from places that are far away, from secondary schools in Baling, from Gerik, Perak. The rural libraries play an essential role, by publicising oral history collections to the schools. The students can inform the school teacher; the school teacher will come, choose the research materials, such as an interview transcript and other written materials, apart from the transcript, then supply the sources to the students. (3:37)*

Based on the interview sessions, audiobooks, animations, websites and social media are the future platforms or products to be used by cultural institutions for transmitting the contents of oral history recordings in the future.

## **6.9 MEDIATED MEMORIES**

In terms of the mediated memories, more effort needs to be expended by cultural institutions as this is an important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration to ensure that the oral history collections can be fully utilised by those who wish to use them. It is a waste if the collections are kept without ever being accessed, especially when financial and other resources have been allocated to capture the oral history. There are five levels which are related to mediated memories:

- i. Tools.
- ii. Local systems.
- iii. Shared systems.
- iv. Collaborative systems.
- v. Archival systems.

### **6.9.1 Tools**

This section discusses the tools used by cultural institutions to records oral history. The majority of the cultural institutions use audio and video recorders which record onto either cassettes, tapes or a digital version (MP3). More extensive and complete equipment is found in the National Archives and private funded libraries, such as the Perdana Library. This library is also equipped with studios for recording interview sessions as well. However, based on the interviews, some of the research participants

noted that they have an issue with trying to maintain an environment that is conducive for long-term preservation purposes. In the future, the cultural institutions in this research sample will shift to digital technology where compact digital equipment and flash drives are used to replace the bulkier cassette tapes. The storage capacity influence and shape what memories are accessed and interpreted. Memories captured by audio recorder can be interpreted by listening to audios or by reading interview transcripts. Cultural institutions that use video recorders as tool allow the reader or the oral history users to interpret and understand the facial expressions of the interviewees.

### **6.9.2 Local systems**

The majority of the cultural institutions use Network-Attached Storage (NAS) to store the original and backup copy of their audio recordings. However, only one cultural institution has uploaded video and transcripts to their website for the public to access. The rest of the cultural institutions only allow access to their oral history collections in their own offices. The cultural institution professionals who participated in this study are still planning for a suitable method to mediate oral history's audio and video recordings. They are aware that the capacity to store oral history collections has become a primary concern, at the managerial level. The current plan by the Selangor Public Library Corporation is to produce short audios and videos as previews of their collection, which will be uploaded to the official website. The oral history's index and catalogues and summary lists are used to present the metadata related to the oral history collections held in most cultural institutions. A portal was developed by Perdana Library to store oral history collections while the rest are relying on manual systems.

### **6.9.3 Shared systems**

This section discusses the platforms developed by a few of the cultural institutions that act as shared systems. These shared systems' platforms are designed to share the oral history collections with users. Terengganu State Library has developed an official library website and displays a few collections related to the state's local history (<http://www.trglib.gov.my/index.php/home/koleksi-tempatan>), to allow users or researchers to access the transcripts. However, the collections which are available on the web are either not up-to-date or are incomplete, since 2010 was the last time a transcript was uploaded.

In the Melaka Public Library, some of the selected video recordings have been published in compact disc form and distributed to local councils and secondary schools to be shared. However, there is a way to improve the shared systems of the cultural institutions. Official library websites can be utilised to share the available collections developed through oral history. IP4 noted that on the Melaka Public Library's website, only collections related to history books are uploaded:

*To date, I have not inserted it. The one I have added on the website is about history books. I have not uploaded oral history collections to the web, not yet. (4:48)*

According to IP11, the Perdana Library has developed a better platform called the Perdana Podcast where the audio is uploaded to the website to let people know the various views and experiences of past and present national leaders. The Perdana Library also collaborates with a few libraries around the Klang Valley, which is centred on Kuala Lumpur, to provide historical information needed by users or researchers.

#### **6.9.4 Collaborative systems**

It is not clear how the cultural institutions will plan for collaborative systems between individuals, local communities and themselves, as part of the initiative to link with the multiple platforms, media and technology outlets. Most of the cultural institution professionals highlighted the need for collaborative systems which enable the successful integration of audio, video and transcripts in a networked technology platform. However, budget constraints are a major issue for implementing the collaborative systems.

Support from the relevant parties is important in ensuring the continuity of the local content's development. IP4 highlighted the need to have continuous support from the state government and the relevant authorities to ensure that what has been started is being consistently managed. Previously, portals which store information about villages in Melaka have been developed, as part of the effort to locate relevant information from local perspectives:

*In the beginning, they (the state government) have created a portal. They provide funding. So, we find the information and then we include all the information (related to the village in Melaka). So, every village has its portal. However, a couple of years*



*after the portal's development, we find it is not consistently managed due to the lack of a budget. (4:81)*

In term of the access and management aspects, cultural institutions also have constraints in their efforts to develop a centralised database. IP2 stated that he tried to come out with a centralised database which could integrate and link all the oral history collections in Malaysia but is still unable to achieve it. The economic aspect was also highlighted by IP6:

*It means that the intention to do it on a grand scale is there. We have a plan to establish a gallery. To establish a more specific storage area, storage with details about what is in there and perhaps we want to open it to the public, however it is still in the planning stage because we have budget constraints. (6:4)*

According to IP7, users preferred to access oral history through digital collections, compared to obtaining the information they sought from paper-based systems. Cultural institutions should be ready with new innovative digital technologies to fulfil their users' needs. IP7 argued that cultural institutions should ensure that suitable information technology platforms are developed, with the users in mind, since nowadays users demand easy and quick access to information:

*For example, now if people come to do research, (they would say), "Madam, could you please e-mail the information?" (7:28)*

From what has been shared by IP7, a quick access medium is needed by oral history's users and researchers. Other important points were emphasised by IP4, who pointed out there was a lack of integration between agencies when it came to the development of oral history collections. Based on the points highlighted by IP4 and IP7, the lack of integration is related to the personal attitude of some professionals within the cultural institutions. Related agencies which conduct oral history projects lack coordination. This scenario can be seen when two or three agencies interview the same people or conduct the same oral history topics, which then leads to duplication and overlapping efforts:

*We in Malaysia have a problem; we are greedy. We do not want to collaborate. Actually, to me, the oral collections such as in the Melaka Art Gallery, various archives, the Proclamation of Independence Memorial and the historical*

*association, they (the officers) could sit down together and discuss, because we do not want this heritage to be lost. All these people have distinct and unique expertise. Thus, if we collaborate, we will acquire plenty of better oral collections than we have today. (4.51)*

IP2 also highlighted a similar issue on the integration between institutions. According to IP2, there was a time when a committee was set up by the cultural institutions and the local universities. However, the committee was not successful and the planned agenda and programme not performed adequately:

*I think all parties need to sit down together and discuss on how we can improve our capabilities in oral history. (2:21)*

IP2 also intends to establish an oral history committee at the national level, to oversee and collaborate in managing, developing and strengthening the oral history field in Malaysia.

### **6.9.5 Archival systems**

Archival systems are developed to allow users to access the information they require and offer valuable functions to multiple user groups. As cultural institutions develop their audiovisual and digital collections, new and improved ways of organising and providing access to the collections can be created. To facilitate the collection of oral history in a digital and networked information environment, the National Archives has developed a portal for accessing digitised pictures and documents. However, oral history collections cannot be accessed directly from this portal. According to IP2, some of the oral history collections have been used in documentary videos and infotainment programmes. The majority of the cultural institution professionals believe that oral history collections could be pluralised in a better way, through the development of dynamic and distributed archival systems.

### **6.10 TRANSACTIONALITY**

The levels involved on the transactionality axis are transactions, activities, functions, purposes and designs. In this research, those levels relate to the timing of a recording of an oral history and the activities involved in the process of collecting it, the purpose

of developing oral history collections and the aspect of an oral history programme's design. This includes:

- i. Timing to co-create an oral history.
- ii. Activities.
- iii. Functions of oral history collections.
- iv. Purpose of oral history programme.
- v. Oral history programme designs.

### **6.10.1 Timing to co-create an oral history**

This section is related to the transactions level in the co-create dimension. The time to capture an oral history is subjective and depends on the available budget and top management's support. The time might be after an event occurs. According to IP5, an oral history team needs to be more proactive and avoid waiting for an extended period to begin an oral history project. The historical events to be documented and their associated information should be captured as well. Most of the cultural institution professionals agreed that the ideal way to conduct oral history is immediately after an event occurs. The process should be a continuous process and not limited to only one cycle of the oral history process, which reflects records continuum thinking.

### **6.10.2 Activities**

The *activities* level is associated with the *capture* dimension. The interview data that have been discussed on all the levels are related to the activities level when developing and managing oral history collections. Conducting a preliminary planning meeting to discuss the project is among the most common activities practised by cultural institution professionals who have participated in capturing oral history. Initial planning is a central activity where the themes or topics, a pool of possible narrators and the project's budget are determined. Activities are also related to the process of capturing information which is relevant to the process of managing oral history collections. For example, based on the interview data, most of the cultural institution professionals manage their oral history collections by producing catalogues and indexes for the interview transcripts and audio and video recordings to allow better access to their collections. IP11 outlines some of the activities undertaken by Perdana Library:

*We also collect and conduct a few activities such as digitisation and a few academic series related to the policies chosen by former leaders. (11:43)*

Other crucial activities are conducting additional research to ensure the accuracy of the facts, such as the name of a road or other related information. IP11 shared what has been done:

*An example of the transcribing process is when I listen about Princess Road. Now Princess Road is known as Jalan Raja Muda Abdul Aziz. A new generation like me needs to do more analysis to gain accurate information. (11:7).*

Transcription activities are undertaken in most cultural institutions. However, the transcribing activities are considered to be a tedious task by the majority of the cultural institution professionals. For example, oral history programmes were established around 1997 in Terengganu Public Library. However, when asked about the statistical information of the produced transcripts from the programme, IP8 believes that only about 10 to 15 transcripts have been produced and are available, due to insufficient staff.

### **6.10.3 Functions of oral history collections**

The enormous potential of oral history collections was emphasised by the cultural institution professionals. The benefits of these oral history sources were highlighted by the professionals. In their view, oral history collections are not only useful for society, by preserving historical events and valuable experiences, but also by acting as a source where people can reference, clarify and verify knowledge or facts. They are also important research centres and contribute to the professional development of the cultural institution professionals.

#### ***i. Preservation of historical events and experiences***

Oral history collections are recognised as repositories of experience by the majority of the cultural institution professionals. IP8 believes that oral history collections are useful sources for preserving valuable local history and information on legacies from the past, for the future generations. The majority of cultural institution professionals are aware that without the oral history programme, future generations will be unable to locate

historical information recorded in any form other than the written one. IP1, IP3 and IP8 argue that oral history collections are essential as a source of primary information; they are a means to recapture those societies' stories which have received little attention. They believe that oral history sources are necessary for assisting with research. IP1 also agrees that oral history collections can contribute to the preservation of heritage and the arts since the collections relating to items with local content in the Selangor Public Library Corporation are limited. IP1 noted that:

*Sometimes researchers ask for materials that are beyond our reach. Often we find from the list of existing documents that the book they want does not exist. So, we chose this oral history method as one of the ways to add to the existing resources. (1:4).*

Other responses to this aspect include that of IP2, who mentions oral history as being a technique to preserve the identity, working culture, thoughts and self-belonging of the local community. Furthermore, IP6 values oral history as an important technique to preserve corporate memory. IP6 plans to conduct an oral history with retirees from the local council who have agreed to share their considerable tacit knowledge.

Most of the research participants commented that people who access the different sources of historical information are able to broaden their view and thoughts about an issue. Oral history sources allow people to increase their knowledge, especially in the local context, as pointed out by IP7. The narrative related to the formation of a country during a difficult time will enable people to be more appreciative of what they have today. Valuable lessons can be obtained from oral history collections. In addition, IP3 and IP7 also discuss the potential of oral history contributing to the tourism industry in Malaysia. They believe the information recorded through oral history can provide a better understanding of the local settings and regional basis for what happened.

## **ii. Source of reference, clarification and verification**

Most of the cultural institution professionals are aware that the interviewees feel appreciated when they are selected to participate in an oral history. IP6 is an assistant librarian at the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) Hypermedia Library, which aims to engage with the public through oral history by providing historical information related to the resident's area. IP6 will begin by interviewing retirees from the municipal council, as a starting point to increase the number of primary and reference sources.

IP2 and IP3 were noticed that oral history collections could increase the number of primary reference sources. IP2 said oral history acts as a prompt for information which is not recorded in written records. Recording oral history is essential to provide information about historical events which are not documented elsewhere and serves as a tool for helping individuals to understand the past. On the other hand, IP3 said, through his experiences, oral history allows people to follow-up on, clarify and verify statements recorded in written records. IP7, who is an assistant curator, felt that oral history is a useful source and future reference to describe the community's programmes and events organised in Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

Based on IP9's experiences, oral history can provide historical facts about minorities which were previously incorrectly stated and then eliminated from textbooks. By understanding history, an understanding and appreciation of racial and cultural differences can be strengthened among the Malaysian community as a whole, as noted by IP4. IP4 also emphasised that oral history sources can contest the dominant accounts of the colonial era. She strongly believes that oral history is one of the methods to reconcile the memories from these dominant accounts and seek more accurate sources. Self-identity and the rights of local communities can be better sustained through capturing communities' oral histories, as noted by IP4.

### ***iii. Research method***

IP3 and IP8 agree that oral history is an important research method to preserve history. IP6 reported that oral history is a vital reference source for future generations as it can describe in detail the stories and events that happened at certain places, which includes the documentation of how places, cultures and the thoughts of communities have changed. For IP3 and his team, oral history is a useful technique to locate community memories and related collections. IP3 also applies the snowball technique to determine the narrators for the oral history projects he conducts.

By conducting oral history interviews, local historical collections can be enriched, as the identity and memories of the community can be preserved in a systematic way, as has been highlighted by IP7, IP9 and IP10. IP7 believes that the cultural institution professionals who are assigned to conduct oral histories will gain more knowledge about the local history and will be able to help students who seek reliable and authentic reference sources to complete their school and university assignments. For IP1, oral

history has grown in acceptance by university researchers as a source to provide historical accounts.

**iv. Professional development enhancement**

Several cultural institution professionals reported that oral history programmes made library staff more confident and feel closer to their local community, when the oral history of the small local community in their area was recorded. According to IP1, the sceptical thinking of the community towards the library was slowly changed through the oral history programme. Previously, the cultural institution professionals were just known as the custodians of information or collections in the institutions. But with the oral history programme, the role of the librarian has grown, as they become a bridge between the library and the local community.

**6.10.4 Purpose of the oral history programme**

The various motivational factors for creating oral history programmes were identified from the responses provided by the research's participants. The motivations also varied, depending on the organisation's directions and goals. According to IP1, by developing oral history collections, the state's local history collections can be enriched and the cultural and heritage-related information could be preserved. As for personal motivation, IP1 aims to contribute comprehensive information to the Selangor Public Library Corporation. This is similar to IP7, who hopes that, through the development of the Petaling Jaya Museum, the centre would perform as an information hub and be able to provide references to the public.

As pointed out by IP3, through the introduction of the new assessment system (PT3) for secondary school students, the Kedah Public Library aims to provide the relevant reference sources to the students. In that sense, the Kedah Public Library is helping to guide the students who come to them. However, the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) Hypermedia Library, which is yet to have any oral history programmes in place, is more motivated to begin by collecting biographical information about their top management and ex-staff who have contributed to the organisation. IP6 stated that,

*The oral history collections will be opened to the public. We want to open it to the public and especially for the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) staff who*

*perhaps have retired and probably one day they want to look back at what they have contributed to. (6:29).*

The National Archives view oral history as an important component of the historical aspects of the Malaysian community. At first, the National Archives collected essential records and documents in their physical form. At one stage, the National Archives reviewed their collection and found that there were many documents and records that they still did not possess. To find out the missing facts and knowledge or information about a particular event, the National Archives conducted oral history programmes. Through these oral history programmes, the oral history committee identified figures and individuals that were involved in a specific event and they recorded his or her experiences to gain more information about the event. The National Archives view is that they need to enhance their work recording oral history, due to the lack of information contained in the available physical records. IP2 stated that:

*Take World War II for example. We do not have many records about this war. Even though we were occupied by Japan, to find records depicting the situation at that time, we have nothing, we can say almost nothing. We find ways to locate information during that period through pictures and other sources. Obviously, the Japanese army rode bicycles and walked, but the experiences or events that happened, the records do not exist. (2:16)*

IP2 also admitted that collecting oral history records is a crucial method to discover and allow society to learn from history, due to the limited written sources:

*Oral history is significant. In Malaysia if you want to find the official records from 1950 or before, there are very few. This includes during the Melaka period and other events. Where to find it? If we do not have any oral history and do not record it from now onwards? (2:45)*

The respondent from Kedah Public Library provides an example where, after an oral history project had been conducted in Sedim, Kedah, the people became more aware of the undocumented event. From the oral history's documentation in Sedim, knowledge was shared with the wider Malaysian public. Furthermore, the cultural institution professionals could engage more effectively with the local community because of the oral history project:



*For example, that place like the Sedim event<sup>19</sup>. We do not know what it is. Some people if they are far away, they would not know what happen in Sedim. With this oral history project, we can be closer to the local community. Sometimes even the local villagers do not know what happened there. When we conduct an oral history, they get to know about the event. (3:10)*

According to IP3, an oral history project which begins at the small community level can contribute to broader oral history initiatives at the national level. This significant effort will increase the current local content available in the Kedah Public Library.

### **6.10.5 Oral history programme designs**

The designs level is connected to the pluralise dimension. Oral history programmes designed by the cultural institutions aim to ensure that national history and memories are collected and retained as a matter of public interest. Most of the cultural institution professionals that were interviewed are aware that the oral history collections currently available in the cultural institutions cannot reach and attract broader groups of users interested in accessing the outcomes from oral histories. Some of the other professionals stated that the oral history collections that have been developed are not often utilised and referred to, as it requires more time to provide the requested information. As an example, IP4 said users are more interested in accessing digital transcripts which can be found using a keyword search function, rather than reading the physical transcripts. Nearly all the cultural institution professionals highlighted the importance of developing databases for managing the oral history collections, as one vital move to improve the pluralisation of, and access to, the oral history collections.

## **6.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Through this chapter, the practices that the cultural institution professionals use for collecting oral history have been discussed. The background and contextual

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<sup>19</sup>Sedim incident (1941): Tunku Abdul Rahman kidnapped Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (1882-1943) during the Japanese invasion of Kedah in December 1941. The incident occurred on Monday, 8th December when Japan dropped bombs at Sungai Petani, Kedah. Tunku decided that his father deserved to be with the people at that time and prevented the authorities from bringing his father to Penang.

Reference: Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Kedah [http://www.memori-kedah.com/page\\_pengenalan.php?p=2&idstopic=34&idskandungan=148&id=502&mtopic=4](http://www.memori-kedah.com/page_pengenalan.php?p=2&idstopic=34&idskandungan=148&id=502&mtopic=4).

information about each of the cultural institution professionals that were interviewed presents a better understanding of the current oral history initiatives employed. The responses of the cultural institution professionals to the issues and challenges in managing oral history collections and the methods to develop and expand the local communities' oral history collections are outlined.

Findings from the interviews explain the current techniques being used and the oral history initiatives undertaken by the cultural institutions. The efforts undertaken by these cultural institutions will determine the future landscape of oral history's development and management and the creation of an inclusive societal memory. The areas where oral history's management requires improvement are also being highlighted, based on referring to the dimensions, levels and axes in the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. The discussion of the findings of Chapters 5 and 6 will be presented in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 7

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 7.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This section discusses the results in terms of the research questions and revisits the research objectives. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has been applied as a way to understand and to map what is happening with the development and management of oral history in Malaysia. The model was also used to inform the development of interview questions and broaden the research's discussion, within the oral history context, through diverse perspectives. These research findings are organised and arranged by answering the three main research questions and two sub-research questions to meet the research's objectives.

#### **RQ1: What are the current oral history practices in Malaysia?**

##### **Overview**

Currently, the number of Malaysian oral history practitioners is relatively small, in terms of their context and topic coverage. There are three sub-groups of people who fall under the oral history practitioners' group: expert practitioners, independent researchers and people from villages. Twenty oral history practitioners in Malaysia were interviewed, to gain an insight and understanding of their current oral history practices. Based on the interviews' data, audio recordings by oral history practitioners are conducted on a small-scale and on an ad hoc basis.

Data were also collected from the cultural institution professionals at nine cultural institutions; the National Archives, Selangor Public Library Corporation, Perdana Library, Petaling Jaya Museum, Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) Hypermedia Library, Kedah Public Library, Terengganu State Library, Melaka Public Library and Sarawak State Library. The National Archives, Perdana Library, Kedah Public Library and Sarawak State Library are among the cultural institutions that have huge oral history collections, compared to the other cultural institutions. Those cultural

institutions have the strength, in terms of their human resources and financial support, to develop oral history collections compared to the oral history practitioners trying to work alone. Kedah Public Library and Melaka Public Library have a wide range of oral history collections relating to the local traditions and culture, compared to some of the other cultural institutions that participated in this study. Perdana Library is well advanced in terms of providing facilities that allow easy access to and the retrieval of oral history collections through podcasts, which are accessible through the Perdana Library's website. Based on the interview responses, most of the oral history projects conducted by the cultural institutions focus on developing the collections which showcase the nation's history, which mostly record political leaders and public figures. The gaps in the oral history collections, highlighted by the research participants, include memories related to local communities which also impacts on the development of the national history collections in Malaysia.

Some of the oral history practitioners have connections with the cultural institutions by being the co-creators of oral history projects and trainers at the workshops organised by the cultural institutions. Nearly half of the oral history practitioners we interviewed are members of the Oral History Association of Malaysia. According to Rashid (2013), this association aims to cooperate with other agencies in recording oral history, it organises oral history training through workshops and courses and promotes awareness of the significance of oral history techniques to the wider community in Malaysia. The Oral History Association of Malaysia also collaborates with local and international oral history practitioners from Thailand and Indonesia to organise and stage oral history seminars. The rest of the oral history practitioners participate with ethnic community associations and public and private universities in the creation and management of community oral history collections.

The type of oral history practiced varies across all the research's participants. The practices involved in developing an oral history depend on the experience the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals have in conducting such projects. Some of the research participants received formal training from universities, the National Archives and the Oral History Association of Malaysia, while others rely on their personal experiences from being part of an oral history project team. The cultural institution professionals, the expert practitioners and the independent researchers proved to be more active participants in the development of oral history collections compared to people from the villages, typically because of their job requirements.

On the other hand, the village people usually participate in such programmes, normally as part of the oral history team, but they are not the primary initiators. Most of the villagers who participated in this research have also played the role of an intermediary and facilitator, who can draw out the general background information for the interviewer about a subject that could have previously been ignored. The villagers believe this process can increase the quality of the context and the richness of the content in the recorded interviews that relate to the different groups or communities. Only one of the village people we interviewed consistently collected oral history sources, since he received voluntary support from college students to help develop the collections. The rest of the villagers stated that they have constraints, in terms of the budget they have, limited skills, limited time to conduct an oral history and difficulties in producing the outcomes from the oral history's interviews, such as getting the results published and exhibited.

Most of the community local history collections, which relate to a community, are owned and controlled by the individuals or institutions that recorded them. Only two out of the six research participants we interviewed own and control their oral history collections. They develop their community's museum or association as a space to store historical collections related to their community. This effort is in line with what Flinn (2007) highlighted; he emphasised that the local community should be allowed to control their own identity, including their culture and voice, through the development of community archives or related spaces. Flinn has also stressed the need for communities to actively participate in preserving their local history. However, based on the data from the interviews, the readiness of some of the research's participants to manage and control their community's oral history projects is still poor. A majority of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals stated that Malaysian society does not see the long-term value of oral history collections.

The following section outlines the practices and related issues, which are the main themes developed from the interview data and were conceptualised based on the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. There are five themes identified from the interview data.

- i. What to collect?
- ii. Oral history project co-creators
- iii. Interview practices
- iv. Supporting documents and distributed collections
- v. Uses for oral history

***i. What to collect?***

Most of the oral history practitioners interviewed were motivated by the desire to help communicate the past and to contribute to connecting individuals and local communities with their identity and valuable untold stories. Oral history practitioners are also passionate about being actively involved in oral history projects, in an attempt to satisfy their own curiosity about historical information. On the other hand, the cultural institution professionals aim to enrich the cultural and heritage-related information and provide related reference services to the public.

Mandates to record local communities' oral histories in Malaysia depend on the proposed projects and the funds available to be allocated to them, especially from the state governments and related ministries. Funds are normally allocated for a short-term period; usually three to six months. Cultural institutions such as archives, libraries and museums are among the parties given a mandate to collect historical information that has a great deal of value and importance to the nation. From the interviews conducted with the oral history practitioners, oral history projects related to a particular community are framed, based on the government's direction, interests and agendas. People from the community are often appointed by the cultural institutions to support their oral history projects by providing relevant information and identifying potential interviewees.

Oral history practitioners are aware that oral history projects can focus on the reasons for a community's development. People in the villages are more concerned with recording the oral history related to their culture, language, music and skills. They want to ensure that their family traditions and what has been passed down by previous generations can be retained, and that valuable knowledge can be practiced by today's generation. Villagers believe that their community's oral history needs to be collected, to gain better perspectives and appropriate perceptions about minority groups, who have traditionally been disregarded by conventional histories. On the other hand, nation-building and historical facts are the contexts which are considered crucial by the expert practitioners, independent researchers and cultural institution professionals.

Major historical events and the culture, traditions, arts and artefacts related to a community are examples of community memories. Other than developing oral history programmes at the community level, the celebration of traditions and festivals are also part of the initiatives to help organise community memories. Some of the research

participants consider that oral history can be organised through students' assignments. A number of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals proposed selecting high quality, comprehensive assignments by students and including them as reference sources in public and rural libraries, which could be particularly useful for school students. However, this initiative requires clear direction and permission from the Ministry of Education and other related agencies.

In summary, it can be seen that most oral histories focus on the government's priorities rather than those of the communities or villagers. As a result, insufficient oral history has been collected so it is not yet truly representative of the local people's stories and alternative voices. The interviewee identification approach needs to be more inclusive and consider broader community groups. What has been practised in Australia through the Australian Generation Projects, led by Professor Alistair Thomson, can be an exemplary model (Holmes et. al, 2016). Communities can be invited to send an expression of interest if they wish to become part of the interview process. From that process, the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals can filter and select the interviewees to participate in an oral history project.

#### ***ii. Oral history project co-creators***

The level of co-creation is subject to the scope of the particular oral history project and the financial support available from the project's sponsors. Seven oral history practitioners were working together with some of the cultural institutions and the Oral History Association of Malaysia on the same oral history project, which was related to various topics such as the nation's history, ethnicities, arts, culture and languages. However, the oral history projects undertaken in Malaysia do not conform to a fully participatory approach. Most of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals think of oral history projects' interviewees as information providers, rather than as co-creators. From the responses during our interviews, the co-creation process is not happening yet. The interviewees have little or no involvement in the development of the interview questions, the content or the outcome of the oral history project.

The interview responses highlight the need for intensive collaboration between the co-creators to obtain historical evidence from an oral history interview. An oral history project that aims to enrich the local community requires the participation of and support from a diverse group of people. Based on the research participants' perspectives, co-

creators can be school or university researchers, cultural institutions, village committees, community members and other government agencies.

Currently, oral history techniques are not widely practiced among the Malaysian community. Documentaries related to ethnic communities are being produced mostly for local television or radio programmes. Based on the input from the oral history practitioners, small stories (the smallest interaction among individuals that can contribute to a social narrative) might begin by creating and capturing family histories. An individual's experience and knowledge and the history of his/her family's ancestors are examples of small stories that can be collected. However, small stories, such as village-initiated oral history projects rarely occur in Malaysia, even though the villagers have the opportunity to initiate them. In Sarawak for example, a few members of the local ethnic communities have been trained to become co-creators and provided with the necessary tools to conduct oral histories. According to two cultural institution professionals from Sarawak State Library, this effort was not continued as the people there rely on the institutions to initiate and manage the projects for them.

### ***iii. Interview practices***

There are two main approaches to the timing of collecting oral history: the first is based on a required or ad hoc basis and the second by conducting oral history immediately after an event. Most of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals prefer the second approach, but it is subject to human resources and budget allocations. Nevertheless, several cultural institution professionals stated that the appropriate time to capture oral history is subjective and depends on the urgency, direction and support of top management.

As emphasised by Gibbons (2014, p.248), it is crucial to consider diverse and multiple contexts, including counter-narratives and contested memories in recording narratives and memories. In choosing interviewees, oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals identified elderly veterans and villagers as potential narrators, due to their experiences of the subjects to be explored. Other essential strategies outlined by the oral history practitioners include recognising the interviewee's credibility and approaching potential interviewees in an unpretentious and straightforward manner. When approaching potential interviewees who come from groups or communities, the oral history practitioners prefer to find a casual and natural setting to use, because some of the interviewees are not comfortable when the session is



conducted in a very formal environment and this may affect the answers they provide. This finding is in line with the guidelines for approaching an interviewee written by Bryman and Bell (2003), which emphasised the need to interview the respondents on an informal basis to get the best possible answers.

The majority of expert practitioners and independent researchers agreed that choosing suitable people as intermediaries or brokers is essential for determining the potential interviewees. However, there were no specific criteria for selecting the intermediary or broker highlighted by the research participants. The intermediaries or brokers who are usually selected are individuals who have some knowledge of and are familiar with the interview subject. However, the appointment of an intermediary does not guarantee that all the voices or opinions from the wider community are included. The intermediary might only suggest the people who they know and like.

Some of the oral history practitioners preferred to prepare their questions before conducting any interviews, while others preferred to generate some questions spontaneously during an interview session. Three research participants emphasised the need to consider the input from the potential interviewees during the formulation of the questions. The process of developing questions is usually done during a preliminary meeting. Interview questions are primarily developed by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals. There is limited involvement by the potential interviewee in developing the interview's questions.

Oral history practitioners use audio recorders and mobile phones to record oral history. Cultural institution professionals use audio and video recorders which record onto cassettes, tapes and digital storage systems (MP3). According to the cultural institution professionals, the selected oral history narrators will be invited to come and be interviewed at the oral history studio in a cultural institution, if the project has been initiated and led by the institution.

Ethical procedures when conducting interviews were considered to be important by all of our research participants. The oral history practitioners' focus is more on the rights and procedures to use when approaching local people, while the cultural institution professionals outline the need for ethical communication with the interviewees. A critical aspect that needs to be considered by both the oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals is the need to produce legal release forms for the interviewees. Consent from the interviewees is needed before any oral history

interviews are conducted with them. Andrew Flinn from University College London, has experience in conducting oral history projects with local communities and communities of ethnicities as well as communities of occupation (personal communication, September 5, 2016). With that experience, Flinn emphasised individuals who involve in oral history to give attention to consent and ethical aspects. Besides, Flinn highlighted the need to record interviewees' feeling to understand the elements which affect their memories.

Metadata, which is used to describe the contextual information and the content from the audio recordings, is developed in the cultural institutions. However, from the oral history practitioners' side, they do not have any standard metadata to follow, compared to the cultural institutions, as they think what they currently have is adequate. Some of the oral history practitioners do not understand the importance of developing metadata. Oral history practitioners provide short notes about the content of the recordings they make. However, it seems there is little opportunity to provide detailed notes in archival systems.

#### ***iv. Supporting documents and distributed collections***

Documents, diaries, images, letters, books and newspapers are a few examples of the artefacts that are used as evidence in an oral history. Even though the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals who participated in this study were aware of the importance of verifying the information gained during an oral history project, only a few know and understand the techniques to gather reliable historical evidence and where to locate it. Most of the participants only rely on the audio they record and report their findings based on the interviews they conduct.

Some of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals prepare transcripts to provide meaningful context to the interviews they conduct. The transcripts are important when their interviewees speak in different dialects and languages to the Malay language. Expert practitioners, independent researchers and cultural institution professionals usually provide a description in the transcripts they produce to explain the meaning of the terms, dialects and language. Several cultural institution professionals reported that they seek help from someone who might understand other languages to provide context and meaning during an interview session, as well as to verify the translation in the transcripts.

The majority of villagers who participated in this study agreed that they need physical space to present and preserve their collections. One community museum in Melaka has valuable collections that hold a wide range of unique heritage items. A villager from the Portuguese community believes that the initiative to develop a community museum is considered to be a better way to organise the community's memories and further contribute to their collective memory's curation. A villager from the Chetty community shared his photos and artefacts during an exhibition organised by a cultural institution, as one way to let the public access information about that community.

#### **v. *Uses of oral history***

The oral history recordings and their outcomes, developed by the oral history practitioners, are stored in their personal storage systems, such as on cassettes, compact discs and external hard discs, as well as in written forms. On the other hand, the collections developed by the cultural institutions are managed and organised by their audiovisual departments. The hardcopy interview transcripts are available in the cultural institutions, which can be accessed by the public. Users are required to make a written request to the relevant cultural institution to get either a copy or some other form of publication of their oral history collections.

The majority of the oral history collections developed by the cultural institutions are stored and can be accessed in those institutions. Of the nine cultural institutions involved in this study, the Perdana Library has provided podcasts to allow users to access and listen to the recordings of interviews, regardless of where they are accessed from. The other cultural institutions produce in-house electronic and manual catalogues as aids to help users find the records they want.

Based on the oral history practitioners' points of view, an oral history can balance the written history with the use of the oral history's sources and help maintain the historical consciousness of the community and its collective memories. On the other hand, the cultural institution professionals consider that oral history sources are useful for verifying the data in the written records and providing reference sources for users who are producing books or articles and organising exhibitions.

It is generally agreed by the cultural institution professionals that organising forums and seminars can help to pluralise the collective memory. In Kedah for example, local community members were invited to speak at a forum organised in conjunction with

Malaysia's Independence Day celebrations. Different themes for the topics were discussed during the seminar and the forum was documented on video. In addition, oral history practitioners use social media, books, newspapers and seminars to connect with people who share an interest in any particular oral history collection.

### **Summary of RQ1**

In summary, most of the oral history collections in Malaysia are developed based on specific requirements and on an ad hoc basis. The involvement of villagers or the members of a community in oral history projects is important, as they enrich the local content. Resources and financial support are significant factors which influence oral history project initiatives in Malaysia.

From the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model's perspective, the process of co-creation should not happen in isolation. Therefore, both the interviewer and interviewees have an active role in developing oral history collections. The oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals take a fairly traditional approach, where the villagers or local communities have little input into the process of developing and managing oral history collections, they tend to be viewed as participants who have few rights; consequently, there is a lack of alternative perspectives in the histories being developed. The interviewees should be encouraged to offer additional or different perspectives or comments if they choose.

Eric Ketelaar (Emeritus Professor at the University of Amsterdam), highlighted on the privacy of and access to community oral history collections. He said,

*You have to be very careful in explaining what the purpose of the project is, what you as archivists are doing. To what extent will you give access to outsiders, with or without the permission of the interviewee?*

(Ketelaar, personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2016)

In the interviews conducted during this research, only a few of our participants mentioned copyright, privacy and the degree of access rights. These aspects have not been given sufficient attention. For several of the cultural institution professionals, the oral history collections available in those institutions are open for public access since they have consent forms signed by the interviewees. However, according to almost

half of the oral history practitioners, interviewees are allowed to control the use of the oral history collections. The oral history collections available in the cultural institutions are open for research and the general public's use. Written permission is required if users plan to publish and make copies of these oral history collections.

In cultural institutions, the collected audio recordings are organised as audiovisual collections (such as tapes, compact discs and videos) while the transcripts are held and organised in the local collections' department. A few cultural institutions have developed shared systems, such as websites and podcasts, to manage their oral history collections. Nevertheless, more effort needs to be made by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to organise their oral history collections to increase the access to them and the retrieval rate. Metadata standards need to be developed to allow greater access to oral history collections and to get systems that can share them between individuals and the institutions. Most of the oral history practitioners create their own reference or metadata systems, but in a less systematic manner. On the other hand, the oral history collections in the cultural institutions are indexed and catalogued to allow for an easy retrieval process. Contextual rights and provenance metadata are developed to manage oral history collections and these are being maintained by the cultural institution professionals such as librarians.

**RQ2: How can cultural institutions reframe or transform themselves to facilitate their local communities' oral history collections?**

To date, only a few cultural institutions have taken the initiative to assess what their local community requires for its oral history programmes. For example, in Sarawak State Library and the Melaka State Library, a programme called 'Friends of Libraries' is used as a platform to gather together and communicate with the local communities. Based on the interviews, most of the cultural institutions still use conventional approaches whereby their oral history programmes are designed by the management or the professionals in the cultural institutions, with less focus placed on what is required by the local community. To improve the current services, there are two main areas that can be transformed, revised and improved. These aspects include the roles of the cultural institution professionals and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a facility to support oral history services to the users.

The following sections discuss two research sub-questions. RQ2SQ1 reflects the views of oral history practitioners while RQ2SQ2 reflects the outcome based on the interviews' data and its subsequent analysis using the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

**RQ2SQ1: What are the relevant oral history services, programmes and activities that oral history practitioners expect from the Malaysian cultural institutions?**

The study found the oral history practitioners raised eight expectations about the future services, programmes or activities to be provided by the cultural institutions, including:

- i. Connection with oral history practitioners.
- ii. Prioritisation of oral history projects and scope.
- iii. Sources for collecting oral histories.
- iv. Language support.
- v. Establishment and strengthening of voluntary assistance.
- vi. Preservation or migration services.
- vii. Applications of oral history.
- viii. Funding support.

***i. Connection with oral history practitioners***

The majority of the oral history practitioners agreed that collaboration between the cultural institution professionals, academics, researchers, students and villagers can bring greater benefits. Currently, the collaboration between cultural institutions and oral history practitioners forms only a small part of an oral history project; mostly it involves locating potential interviewees and organising seminars related to the oral history. Based on the responses from the oral history practitioners, the collaboration between them and the cultural institutions needs to be expanded, by taking in the process of creation until the pluralisation of the oral history collections is achieved. Expertise, ideas and knowledge sharing are highlighted as key and important elements in the collaboration process by the research participants, a viewpoint which is also supported by Dayton-Wood et al, (2012).

Allessandro Portelli, an Italian scholar and oral historian, emphasised the roles of cultural institutions as dynamic places to continually engage people and information:

*An archive needs not just be a place for you to store the materials but also a place that provides answers.*

(Portelli, personal communication, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016)

Portelli encourages individuals who are involved in oral history collections development to refer to the cultural institutions by checking the literature and establishing a relationship with the sound archives, when producing quality oral history interviews.

The majority of oral history practitioners urge cultural institutions to provide sufficient guidance to the local communities to find and decide on their individual community history projects. Several oral history practitioners, who are quite well exposed to oral history projects, thought that alternative voices or perspectives that differ from the official view were essential and must be recorded. Collaborative partnerships between oral history practitioners and cultural institutions are needed to address critical gaps in history and to create inclusive community oral history collections. These collaborations can also be widened by working with universities which have valuable experience in enlightening students to the benefits of conducting oral history, as highlighted by Topping, Duhon and Bushardt (2006).

Mark Wong, a Specialist at Oral History Centre in National Archives of Singapore, (personal communication, September 28, 2016) stressed the importance of recording the different ranges and scope of oral history, which covers diverse fields such as education, legal system, medical history, political history, social projects, economic and business matters. Mark Wong also mentioned that the cultural institutions in Singapore provide training and work closely with the Ministry of Education to cultivate and train students to apply oral history techniques and refer to oral history sources as primary reference sources.

## ***ii. Prioritisation of oral history projects and scope***

Paying attention to oral history projects is a part of the effort to enrich the local community's collections. The research participants suggested starting by capturing oral history at the village and family levels. In Melaka for example, there are many unique village names and much historical information which is very interesting to explore. The research participants emphasised two aspects that need to be prioritised, namely: national events and their consequences or unforgettable tragedies which had

an effect on certain aspects of the local culture and heritage, including local historical places. The villagers emphasised the need for collections by minority ethnic groups and those about local cultures and traditions to be given equal attention. These findings are in line with what Flinn (2007) emphasised, that the fragile historical resources within these communities need to be preserved.

The preservation is not a single act but is conducted accross time and space. Ketelaar (personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2016) stressed the importance of conducting oral history across time and space (temporality). Indicating that an oral history programme should be reviewed, reassessed and revisited at regular intervals such as every 10 or 20 years. Preparation before any oral history project begins is emphasised. One of the critical points highlighted by Ketelaar is where information professionals need to play roles such as an anthropologist, historian, or sociologist and work closely with a specialist; they must display a sense of professional discipline and seek out particular incidents and phenomenon when recording oral history collections. Cultural institutions can play an active role in expanding the scope of oral history collections. Cultural institutions can empower their local communities by providing advice and equipment and letting the communities themselves decide what topics or scope to be included in the interview. Instead of just being a partner of the community, information professionals are encouraged to become members of the community. When the community is ready and able, with the skills and knowledge to conduct an oral history, they can establish and maintain their community's archives.

### ***iii. Sources for collecting oral histories***

Our interviewees' responses highlight a need to assist school students and researchers to identify the relevant reference sources to support the interpretation of and provide directions for new and creative oral histories. Multiple data sources need to be referred to, to enhance the reliability of the recorded oral history sources and assist in providing an accurate context for understanding the oral histories, as emphasised by Topping, Duhon and Bushardt (2006). Other than the National Archives and museums, rural libraries were highlighted as important spaces and information hubs for the rural communities, such as villagers or individuals outside of the cities or urban areas, as suggested by several of the oral history practitioners. Librarians from rural libraries can become agents for oral history programmes. The cultural institution professionals can upgrade their knowledge and skills to promote oral



history and make sure their local communities are aware of the importance of contributing to developing oral history collections of their own.

From the oral history practitioners' perspectives, the cultural institution professionals, such as reference librarians, can assist the oral history practitioners by determining authoritative reference material to support evidentiality sources. Cordes (2016) suggests that cultural institutions such as libraries can make connections between the historical collections in a library, to allow the users to discover and access primary source reference material.

If cultural institutions become information hubs, as highlighted by Ahmad Murad Merican, a professor in the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CENPRIS) at Universiti Sains Malaysia (personal communication, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016), they can emphasise the need to preserve local histories, including the history of places and the background of the local community. He further suggested that cultural institutions should produce a map or history timelines to assist the Malaysian community in understanding their local and national history. In addition, cultural institutions can encourage each family to preserve their family's ancestry and the history of places in Malaysia. He also suggested that cultural institutions should produce more publications to show the outcomes from oral history interviews, to attract different groups of readers who can hopefully gain some benefit from the contents. Flinn (personal communication, September 5, 2016) has a similar point of view. He mentioned the need to produce a better platform for accessing oral history collections through information technology.

#### ***iv. Language support***

Oral history practitioners, especially the independent researchers, identified a need for support and advice in terms of language, since the Malaysian community encompasses diverse ethnic groups, races and religions. More significant help in this area is needed. Rural libraries, which are geographically close to their local communities, may offer accurate translation services for the oral history practitioners, especially for interviews delivered in the local ethnic language or dialect. This type of support is particularly important during and after the interview process. Language support is significant as it can create new reference sources from the audio recordings. The content and context of these sources can be more accurately established with the appropriate interpretation from a translator or interpreter. Furthermore, the cultural

institutions can recommend individuals who have expertise in these minority languages.

**v. *Establishment and strengthening of voluntary assistance***

Cultural institutions can be involved through the development of voluntary service systems. The formation of voluntary services is needed to overcome the issue of the limited human resources for oral history's development. At the moment, the volunteers are usually school and college or university students. They can be trained to master the techniques to conduct proper and systematic oral history interviews. Group of volunteers can also be trained to transcribe the interview recordings accurately, as one of the ways to increase the utilisation of the oral histories recorded by the cultural institutions. Wong (personal communication, September 28, 2016) suggested a way of dealing with a small or insufficient budget when transcribing oral history interviews, which is a problem faced by most of the cultural institutions. Wong highlighted an initiative, the Citizen Archivist Project, which was developed by the National Archives of Singapore to overcome the shortage of volunteers to transcribe oral history interviews. Through this programme, the backlog of audio interviews, which had not yet been transcribed, has been reduced; a similar project could be introduced to Malaysian institutions.

Furthermore, volunteers can also be exposed to the techniques to conduct professional and high quality interviews and run the equipment in an appropriate way (Boyd; 2014 and Cordes; 2016). Portelli (personal communication, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016) also emphasised the need to get an activist or volunteer; either a young anthropologist or a retiree who wants to become actively involved in oral history projects. The development of a community's oral history requires passion and this comes from personal motivation or interest in the matter.

Standards can be produced by the cultural institutions, which would provide a framework to guide the volunteers in producing valuable oral history collections, including the methods used for publications and media productions. The standards developed can encourage the volunteers to understand the principles, rights, ethical considerations and professionalism involved in conducting and managing oral history collections.

**vi. Preservation or migration services**

Oral history recordings are bound to emerging technologies. In general, oral history practitioners store audio recordings on such things as cassettes, while digital formats are stored on hard discs and thumb drives. However, some audio recordings have been damaged due to the deterioration or obsolescence of the audio's storage format. Therefore, more consideration needs to be given to the preservation of the audio files. Oral history practitioners require training on the right method to produce quality audio files and how to keep audio recordings in an appropriate format, including the process of migrating analog and unprocessed interview collections to digital and online collections.

**vii. Applications of oral history**

Boyd (2014) emphasised the need to empower users to explore and connect oral history collections effectively and affordably. Oral history practitioners suggested that the oral history collections can be presented in various forms, such as books, photos, videos, and communicative interactions with television documentaries or mainstream media, small group workshops or seminars, social media, monographs, articles on the nation's history in local magazines and newspapers and exhibitions. Through the production of these products and platforms, oral history collections can be distributed to the wider society.

In addition, oral history practitioners also suggested that oral history can be mediated through interactive platforms. Nearly all the oral history practitioners stated the need to develop gateways and portals to allow easier access and fast information retrieval and improvements to the networked memories. With a digital transformation, oral history can be reproduced in other forms such as novels, short stories, films and the theatre.

**viii. Funding support**

Financial support is one of the critical challenges faced by oral history practitioners, which is not addressed by the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Oral history practitioners seek financial assistance for conducting interviews, ongoing technical support and finally the publication of oral history interviews. There is a need for the cultural institutions to evaluate the resources required to develop a better, more

fully informed understanding of their key user groups. They can seek collaborations and sponsorship, especially during times when obtaining funding is difficult and they should evaluate the resources they require to develop more comprehensive oral history programmes.

Based on the data gathered, insufficient funding imposes significant constraints upon oral history practitioners in collecting and managing oral history collections. The majority of the oral history practitioners expect the cultural institutions to allocate finances to help with developing the communities' oral history projects. Smith and Rowley (2012) suggested that libraries and local councils conduct systematic checks to evaluate the costs which need to be considered when preserving local and national heritage. With sufficient financial support, the scope and volume of the oral history collections can be enriched.

### **RQ2SQ1 Summary**

In summary, the oral history practitioners suggested that the cultural institutions should consider various inputs from their users when providing oral history services, and that the cultural institutions should offer more guidance and support for new oral history projects. A strong engagement between the oral history practitioners and other related parties could create greater opportunities for developing more inclusive planning for the development of community oral history projects.

Oral history projects can be designed by considering the wider community's perspectives, rather than from an institutional perspective, as highlighted by Flinn (2007). This would give further support to diversifying and democratising the nation's cultural heritage. The oral history collections that have already been developed need to be re-balanced, so they represent the wider community who have made considerable contributions to Malaysia's development. The valuable historical sources and collections related to the community at large should be given priority, if they are at risk. The priority can be determined by the oral history practitioners, local communities and the cultural institution professionals.

Oral history practitioners expect the cultural institution professionals to collaborate with them in developing and managing oral history collections. Assessments need to be conducted to determine which areas of a community's history need to be prioritised and recorded through oral history. The cultural institution professionals are also

expected to provide guidance to assist students and researchers in determining related reference sources, which is vital for oral history collections' development. Language support, voluntary assistance, preservation and migration services are all needed by oral history practitioners. In addition, financial aid and appropriate methods or platforms to produce and display oral history collections are also vital aspects that are needed to allow the transformation highlighted by oral history practitioners to happen.

### **RQ2SQ2: How can cultural institutions contribute to the development of their local communities' oral history collections?**

Like other multicultural societies, Malaysia is comprised of a complex mosaic of communities constituted through intertwined bonds of locality and language. The term 'local communities', in this research's context, refers to Malaysian citizens, who belong to one or more communities. This section is not only constructed to present an analysis of the responses from the research's participants but has also been developed based on the interpretation, knowledge and best practices from the literature review and insights or interpretations based on the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

An analysis of the responses proposes that there are five strategies to develop and expand local communities' collections through oral history. These proposals were made by the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals:

- i. Strengthening collaboration.
- ii. Community engagement.
- iii. Development of standards or protocols.
- iv. Professional and skills' development.
- v. Distribution systems.

#### ***i. Strengthening collaboration***

The cultural institutions must recognise the need for improvements or reformation, including in the forms of collaboration between the government and non-government agencies and oral history practitioners. Most of the oral history practitioners agreed that engagement and collaboration are effective ways to widen the boundaries of the oral history collections in Malaysia. Rather than oral history collections being initiated by each cultural institution, collaboration can be further enhanced by engaging with people in the community, the local and national oral history associations, oral

historians, university researchers, internship students and the local councils. Long-term engagement depends on the enthusiasm and commitment of individuals (Stevens, Flinn and Shepherd, 2010).

As suggested by a number of oral history practitioners, local councils can be critical agencies to collaborate with in the development of local history collections. The information professionals who work in cultural institutions could work with the oral history practitioners in more creative and practical ways, especially in promoting oral history sources to the wider society (Dayton-Wood et al, 2012). The idea of co-creation based on the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model clearly indicate that an initiative does not occur in isolation (Gibbons, 2014). Collaborations between co-creators of oral history are required to ensure that inclusive community oral history collections can be developed.

## ***ii. Community engagement***

Different strategies can be applied by cultural institutions to connect and collaborate with their local communities. Our interviewees indicated that cultural institution professionals can locate people who are interested in participating in oral history programmes. Those people can be trained in how to become good interviewers by providing them with the necessary skills. The cultural institution professionals can act as trainers, can locate people who have good communication skills and perhaps might speak and understand the diverse dialects or minority languages. Intensive training and skills' development can be provided by the cultural institutions if they invite experts in the oral history field to deliver training to those involved in oral history projects.

In relation to this, Mohd Samsudin from the School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2016) emphasised the need for cultural institutions to enrich their activities and open up more opportunities for the public to be involved in oral history. He added that oral history programmes need to be more structured and interactive. More exposure and education for primary and secondary school students, where they could participate in the related activities, needs to be outlined and developed by the cultural institutions.

According to the majority of our research participants, oral history techniques are still not widely promoted to the local communities. Currently, the projects undertaken by the cultural institutions have little involvement from the wider group of communities.

The invitation or promotion medium can be improved by getting more people to participate in oral history programmes. By involving more people in oral history, there is a better chance of developing a community-based oral history programme, which would allow the community's interests and priorities to grow. Assessments can be undertaken by surveying the different groups of users or communities, instilling awareness in the general public about the oral history programme and improving the engagement level with the local community. In this case, social media can be used as a platform to seek feedback on the services needed by the local community. The responses from oral history practitioners also suggested that the awareness of the importance of oral history may perhaps be enhanced by instilling an understanding of this at the family level followed by the village and district levels.

### ***iii. Development of standards or protocols***

Based on the feedback gained from the oral history practitioners, the cultural institutions need to provide support for the oral history practitioners, in terms of the procedures and tools used to record oral history interviews. They also need to recommend better and more efficient storage and transfer procedures for the audio or video recordings. Hence, in order to produce credible outcomes from the oral history interviews, such as books, documentaries, or exhibitions, clear guidelines are needed to develop an understanding of the issues and problems involved in obtaining evidence from recorded interviews. Guidelines for producing transcripts can also be developed, as it is important to help researchers interpret the audio records. A systematic approach to storing documentation containing the appropriate metadata and resources, including the details of the interviewer/s, interviewee/s and the topic discussed needs to become one of the primary priorities, which ultimately will help to preserve important information about the oral history collections. Different types of standards that can be developed include standards or protocols for:

#### **a) Engagement with local communities**

An alternative way to engage with the local communities needs to be formulated. As highlighted by (Cox 1993), the cultural institution professionals, such as archivists, need to engage with the public in the preservation of collective memories. The Australian Generations Project, for example, invites the public to send an Expression of Interest (EOI) to participate as an interviewee in an oral history project. Cultural

institutions can outline the appropriate way to reach the potential interviewees by considering the local community's setting.

### **b) Conduct interviews**

Since Malaysia consists of a diverse background of communities and generations, guidelines for conducting interviews need to be developed. The proper techniques applied during the interview will determine the outcome and quality of the audio recordings. The ethical aspects also need to be considered, including questions of privacy and the security of personal information.

### **c) Technology's use**

Guidelines on the selection of the audio technology and transcription tools to be used, the procedures to operate the recording equipment and techniques for preserving the audio storage platforms can all be developed. Archivists and oral historians need to enhance the access to oral history interviews by using tools which allow automated access, such as web-based digital tools, which are able to integrate the audio and video collections (Boyd, 2014 and Thompson, 2016).

### **d) Metadata development and recording the context of the interviews**

Supportive tools to make the oral history sources interactive and well-documented transcripts with a well-organised index system are suggested components to be enhanced (Boyd, 2014). It is important to develop better metadata standards, to connect users and listeners to the oral history collections. Metadata is a critical tool to expand the discoverability of the oral history collections' contents. Summaries, thesaurus and controlled vocabulary and keywords need to be developed and linked to an appropriate storage platform. In addition, a protocol to develop more appropriate systems can be constructed.

### **e) Language procedures**

Language is an important aspect to be considered before, during and after an interview session takes place. As highlighted by Okorafor (2010) and Tough (2012), an interviewer needs to either speak a language that can be understood by a specific community and which is appropriate to that district; or involve an intermediary who can



speak that language. Procedures to translate and interpret languages and other terminologies into official language and meaningful context require context-specific language skills.

#### **iv. Professional and skills' development**

Based on the interviews we conducted, the cultural institution professionals need to be more proactive in finding diverse interviewees, by considering the community's setting. As an information professional, it is crucial to understand the expectations of the key informants or users before providing any service (Smith and Rowley, 2012). Oral history practitioners suggested that the cultural institution professionals should provide training to their local communities on how to record oral history interviews and also on how to manage, curate and pluralise oral history collections. Outreach programmes, especially to the younger generation, to get them to appreciate and become involved in developing community oral history collections, are required. Standards and strategies can be properly disseminated by the cultural institutions.

Benchmarking activities can help the cultural institution professionals to refresh their thinking about oral history initiatives. A benchmark is, 'A standard or reference against which something or some process can be measured or compared'. (Pearce-Moses, 2005). For example, referencing other international and local institutions has contributed to the development of oral history collections in Sarawak State Library, even though the initiative began without a comprehensive guideline or a clear direction. To gain different experiences and strategies, the staff conducted a visit to the New South Wales State Library in Australia. Through that effort, the cultural institution professionals involved in the oral history project at Sarawak State Library recognised vital strategies to enrich and manage their local collections, acquire new skills and revitalise their existing knowledge. Collaborative partnerships can provide new strategies which result in the publication of policies, standards and procedures (McKemmish and Gilliland, 2018).

#### **v. Distribution systems**

The independent researchers who participated in this study suggested that cultural institutions need to improve the process of the retrieval and dissemination of oral history collections. Oral history practitioners hope the cultural institutions can provide access to both community and collective memories through comprehensive databases

and provide sufficient guidance on evidential sources. The cultural institutions or related agencies are urged to provide vast electronic databases, adequate for storage and retrieval, hence offering the opportunity for the independent researchers to search resource grouping information thematically. As highlighted by the majority of the oral history practitioners, centralised databases with customised and user-friendly interfaces are needed to store and retrieve oral history collections in a systematic way. Furthermore, archival systems should also be developed to support a more diverse group of users.

### **Summary of RQ2SQ2**

In summary, while the cultural institution professionals play crucial roles in contributing to the development of the local communities' collections, they should be more proactive in providing support for these local activities. The utilisation of information and communication technology can contribute to better access, retrieval and pluralisation of oral history collections. The strategies applied by the cultural institutions to develop local communities' oral history collections need to be reviewed. Various ways to develop a local community's oral history collection can be utilised and revised.

### **RQ3: In what ways can the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model be used to develop a protocol for community oral history collections in Malaysia?**

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model (Figure 6) was used in this research to explore and examine the current practices of oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals in Malaysia. The model was used to form the interview questions and examine how the cultural institutions could facilitate the development and management of local communities' oral history collections. In this way, the model has been used as a tool and a guide to interpret the data.

The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has been useful in shedding light on the vital components in oral history's practices. The five dimensions of the model segmented the different phases involved in an oral history's development and management. The six axes are useful to provide insights into the different perspectives of an oral history collection's development and management while the twenty-nine levels in the model were applied as a detailed checklist to assist the

researcher in answering the first two research questions. This research has demonstrated that this model is suitable for studying non-linear ways of managing records across time and space.

A unique feature of this model concerns the contexts of the creation and management of oral history, used in and through spacetime. Through the spacetime concept, the meaning and interpretation of oral history collections can change over time. Topping, Duhon and Bushardt (2006) have stated that:

*Through the use of multiple data sources, understanding and meaning can be derived from different accounts of events by different narrators. This is an essential part of the process of interpreting the oral narratives and preserving them for future researchers. (pg 159)*

This model can be used as a checklist to identify the gaps and components involved in oral history initiatives, which could assist the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to revise their strategies for implementing better oral history programmes. In addition, training and education programmes related to oral history can be developed, based on insights gained from using the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model. Different approaches can be taken into account by using the model as a theoretical lens. The process of evaluating the model requires interpretation of the terms used in the levels and axes of the model. The model provides multiple contexts and critical insights through the lens of the continuum.

Oral history is not just a method for generating interview data. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model offers pointers on how to work with oral history. It caters for and supports the provision of multiple perspectives when considering the meaning of oral histories. There is a range of aspects in the model that can be used to interpret oral history. For example, this model has emphasised the co-creation process as one of the primary steps in tracing records. This research demonstrated that collaboration between various parties, including the oral history practitioners, cultural institutions, local communities and local councils, is crucial for collecting oral history. Further improvements can also be made by oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals to increase the participation of the diverse communities in developing oral history collections. Through the capture dimension, the method of verifying oral history records with other reference sources was identified. Even though the process of the verification of oral history sources is

essential, there is still room for different interpretations, which interviewers or co-creators could develop by applying the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

There are two main findings relating to the model. First, as a theoretical lens, the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has provided important aspects in the context of oral history's development and management. These aspects include the process of recording oral history as a memory-making process and the evidentiality, identity, narratives, mediated memories and the transactionality in oral history collections' development and management. However, the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model requires further definitional development of its dimensions, levels and axes to clarify the terms used in the model (especially in the 'levels') for oral history practitioners to benefit from it; for example, at the encoding systems level in the organise dimension. In some cases, oral history interviews are conducted in multiple languages; in order to produce a clear and appropriate context for the oral history collections, the different languages need to be translated, interpreted and encoded before they can give the actual meaning. In addition, artefacts and relevant metadata (including contextual, rights and provenance metadata) used as evidential sources for audio records, also need to be encoded into meaningful content, to assist users in using and accessing oral history collections.

Second, there are some relevant aspects of oral history's practices that this model is not designed to address. Even though the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has provided a range different dimensions and levels for managing records, certain other aspects such as the financial and other related resource considerations are outside the scope of the model. The model can be used to provide insights and suggest priorities, but these would then also need to take into account the resources they required before an action plan or programme could be expand.

## **7.2 COMMUNITY ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS' DEVELOPMENT PROTOCOL**

Based upon the findings of my fieldwork, this Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol is developed as a guideline for oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to create, manage and expand community oral history collections. This protocol provides a general framework for guiding the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to apply a professional approach

when recording community oral history projects. This protocol, which has been constructed from the practical experiences of expert informants, oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals, can be used as a guide to determine the areas which need to be given attention. Furthermore, this protocol can also help cultural institution professionals to strategise oral history training programs and revisit their policies and standards in community oral history development and management. There are seven areas under the Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol.

- i. Co-creation
- ii. Subject identification
- iii. Interviewees
- iv. Evidence
- v. Encoding systems
- vi. Legal and ethical issues
- vii. Engagement

***i. Co-creation***

Co-creation is a core process of creating oral history which includes a diverse group of individuals who get involved in an oral history's creation, development and management. It is an interactive process which does not occur in isolation. It requires a shared responsibility between the interviewer and interviewees to ensure the oral history's interviews are conducted systematically and are able to achieve the project's objectives. It is necessary for oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals to assemble a team to carry out the required tasks well and hence implement successful oral history programmes and plans.

1. Collaborate, where possible, with local universities, cultural institutions, local councils and other relevant government agencies in each state to document the oral history about the places and the local communities that live there.
2. Coordinate with the headman or village chief to co-create and determine the scope of the oral history project and encourage members of the younger generations to be involved in co-creating oral history projects.
3. Promote appropriate oral history techniques to the local community or individuals who have an interest in becoming co-creators in the project.

4. Apply a variety of appropriate channels to invite the community's participation in oral history projects, such as by using local radio, television and social media.

## **ii. Subject identification**

The context and subject of oral history are both important aspects of the oral history's creation and development. It is crucial that for oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals are the drivers of projects to ensure that comprehensive oral history collections are developed. Oral history related to national events, from the local community's perspective, can be recorded to fulfil historical gaps. Oral history practitioners and cultural institution' professionals should ensure the following elements are considered when identifying subjects.

1. Identify the subject for an oral history project from diverse groups of people.
2. Record broad ranges of oral history content, such as the path of the nation's development, culture, language, music, skills and parenting methods.
3. Locate village chiefs or their representatives, eyewitnesses and individuals who are prominent in society in the oral history's subject identification process.
4. Invite local community members through a formal process, to suggest important topics that can be recorded using oral history's techniques.
5. Consider the timing of the interviews. They should be immediately after an event if evidence is the aim. Or later if long-term impact or meaning is important. The recording of oral history sources should be a continuous process and not limited to just one particular project.

## **iii. Interviewees**

Interviewees need to be carefully selected before conducting the actual oral history interview sessions. The interviewees chosen will determine the content and context of the oral history's interviews. The selection of inappropriate individuals can waste time, the budget and other resources allocated to the project. Therefore, the process of choosing the interviewees should not be taken for granted. Individuals who have made significant contributions to the development of oral history should be approached and engaged regularly to provide consistency and sustainability in undertaking an oral history project.

1. Develop contacts with villagers, retirees, community representatives and village chiefs to locate potential interviewees.
2. Apply a combination of formal and informal approaches for locating potential interviewees.
3. Engage with the rural libraries and other government agencies to identify active participants for a community's oral history project.
4. Identify a range of individuals, including retirees or those with considerable experience in the subject or context to be explored to ensure a diversity of views.
5. Identify potential interviewees based on the information provided by the village head, intermediaries, feedback from the public, connections with collectors of old books and locating people through old newspapers.
6. Identify individuals who have a broad knowledge of events or the particular field of interest, balanced points of view, a sharp memory, and are trusted by the members of their community.
7. Conduct background research about the interviewees before any oral history project is undertaken.
8. Consider the interviewee's preferences when setting up an oral history session is crucial. For example: conduct the oral history interview as a one-to-one session, not in a big group.
9. Consider the readiness of the interviewees who come from rural areas, as they may well not be familiar with oral history interview sessions.

#### **iv. Evidence**

Conducting oral history is not just recording what has been said by the interviewees. Using artefacts and different sources of reference materials that are contextually appropriate to the oral history project can be helpful to support the oral history being collected. Documents, diaries, images, letters, manuscripts, books or newspapers can be used to support, accompany and supplement the descriptions contained in an interview. For example, evidential information from existing written records in the cultural institutions can give additional context to what has been captured by the audio recordings. The historical gaps can be reduced and clarified, based on the available reference sources.

1. Seek out in-depth and comprehensive oral history documentation, instead of relying on a single reference source.

2. Verify, where possible the information in the collected audio recording before being published in any communication channel. Information gained from two or three interviewees can be compared to find common points for verification.
3. Cross-check information with the appropriate people, such as the interviewees' family members.
4. Locate supporting material or reference sources before the actual interview process starts.
5. Locate someone who is reliable to provide narratives from pictures, diaries, manuscripts and other relevant documents. Images could help to describe the situation recorded in an interview in a much better, clearer way.
6. Acquire local information from newspapers and broadcast agencies and data from related government departments and compare all this with the content obtained from the oral history interview.
7. Document all the activities, transactions and related information involved with the interview before, during and after the interview session.

**v. *Encoding systems***

Audio recordings need to be converted and interpreted into meaningful information or oral history products. Language and dialects need to be encoded or translated to allow wider access to them.

1. Consider the narrators' preferred language before an interview session begins, and during and after the session.
2. Provide a comprehensive transcript that is able to increase the understanding of the audio recording's content, and so reduce the chance of any misinterpretation of the information.
3. Provide content summaries of the audio recordings to allow better interpretation of their contents.
4. Ensure that recording formats are up-to-date and can easily be converted.
5. Ensure that metadata captured is consistent with that of the systems that will host the oral history collections.
6. Ensure that metadata includes information on:
  - Interview data (time, date, name of interviewee, name of interviewer, place of interview etc),
  - context or subject and
  - rights and access.



**vi. Legal and ethical issues**

Communities and national memories should be collected and retained as a matter of public interest. Cultural institutions can provide information and advice on the appropriate ethical and legal methods for conducting oral interviews to students or researchers. There are a number of ethical aspects that need to be considered to make oral history collections acceptable to society. Interviewers should ensure consideration of the following aspects.

1. Inform interviewees about the purposes and procedures of oral history collections' development and their mutual rights in the oral history process.
2. Ensure interviewees are aware of the purposes of the oral history collection so that they can give informed consent to participate.
3. Obtain (signed) agreement from each interviewee indicating what they have agreed to in relation to ownership, sharing and control of their interview.
4. Allow interviewees to review and check the content of interviews before releasing any collections to the public.
5. Minimise arguments and communicate ethically and professionally with the interviewees, especially during difficult conversations or interview sessions.
6. Consider copyright issues, including the rights to the material produced, as this aspect will affect the future access to oral history collections.

**vii. Engagement**

Publicity and promotion needs to be enhanced and strengthened to attract a wider audience to access the oral history collections. This is a crucial part of the initiative to increase the awareness of Malaysian society about the importance of recording oral histories. By instilling awareness among the members of society, a culture to preserve oral history could be promoted and enriched by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals.

1. Ensure using one of the techniques listed so that communities have access to the outcomes of projects.
2. Organise forums and seminars related to a community's memories and invite the community's members to speak at the forums.
3. Record seminars and forum sessions on video and publish them for the members of the community.

4. Engage with academics and teachers to organise seminars and workshops.
5. Recognise rural libraries and local councils as crucial agents for the development of oral history collections.
6. Create and distribute documentaries or audio collections to schools to support the teaching and learning process (this would only apply to cultural institution professionals).
7. Offer proper guidance and advice to oral history practitioners on the storage of oral history collections (this would only apply to cultural institution professionals).

### **7.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed the results in terms of the research questions and revisited the research objectives of this study. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model has been applied as a way to understand and to map what is happening with the development and management of oral history in Malaysia. The model was also used to explain the process used for developing interview questions and broadening the research discussion, within the context of oral history and through numerous diverse perspectives. The research findings are organised and arranged according to the three main research questions and two sub-research questions. The Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol was developed as a guide for oral history practitioners and cultural institution's professionals in developing and managing oral history collections as part of practical contributions from this research.

In summary, the majority of the oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals emphasised the need for increased support, in terms of the budgets allocated by the state governments and other related agencies, which may able to support a better pluralisation mechanism for the oral histories' outcomes.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### 8.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This study addressed the three primary research objectives, which were to:

- i. Examine the current practices of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals involved in oral history in Malaysia.
- ii. Investigate how cultural institutions can reframe and transform themselves to enrich local communities' oral history collections.
- iii. Develop a protocol for the development of community oral history collections in Malaysia, based on the theoretical lens.

The researcher has applied the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model to the oral history context. The application of this model for oral history management and development is significant, in terms of the provision of meaningful and essential perspectives from oral history practitioners and the cultural institution professionals in Malaysia. The Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is used as a checklist to determine and assess how well oral histories are being 'co-created, captured, organised, curated and pluralised' in the Malaysian context. This investigation is a particularly important checklist of the aspects to be considered for oral history collections' development and management.

The findings of this research act as a basis for reflecting on the participation of oral history practitioners in managing oral history collections, from the co-create stage to the pluralisation stage of the process. The transformation aspects required to reform the services offered for oral history, by the cultural institutions, have also been investigated through this research. This research demonstrates that the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model is useful and can be applied as a significant tool for evaluating the practices of anyone involved in developing and managing oral history collections.

Based on the interviews conducted, the findings reveal that oral history practitioners, including those from the cultural institutions, need to take proactive efforts towards various aspects of the wider community's historical documentation. The involvement of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals in oral history is crucial, as they will help to discover and explore the local history that is valuable and important for the nation's identity and the preservation of its heritage.

Evaluating the current management of oral history collections from the cultural institutions' perspectives is one of the central focuses of this research. Cultural institutions in Malaysia need to transform their oral history services as one way to engage with the wider Malaysian community, especially in increasing the level of awareness of oral history initiatives. This is in line with the suggestion made by Uzuegbu (2012), that the involvement of local communities in oral history is crucial in shaping the community's memories and a country's identity. There is also a need for cooperation and mutual understanding between the cultural institutions and local governments, to encourage more members of the community to participate in co-creating, capturing, curating and pluralising their history, to help preserve its memory.

Cultural institutions cannot operate successfully without providing valuable services for society. Cultural institutions can enhance closer collaboration with the general public, users of the oral history collections, oral history practitioners and the other related institutions to increase the scope of the collections, and to minimise the current gaps in the available written records. It is crucial to consider the input and views of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals, who represent cultural institutions, as this could help to revise the existing process for developing oral history collections that can serve better.

The findings reported that the participation of the oral history community, especially those living in villages, is still limited. This group of people needs to be engaged by the cultural institutions or other related agencies, to rejuvenate the efforts to enrich local communities' oral history collections. Limited exposure to oral history's management processes and limited funds are significant concerns highlighted by the villagers who participated in this study. The oral history practitioners could provide extensive training and help with the budget while cultivating an awareness of the importance of preserving local history, which should also be part of the cultural institutions and other related government departments' roles.

The findings of this study suggest that the pluralisation could be given greater attention, to allow better access to and utilisation of the oral history collections. Databases for managing the oral history collections can improve the pluralisation of the collections. Idrus (2016) stated that the Internet is an essential space for alternative discourse in Malaysia. Therefore, the transformation of oral history collections to a more interactive digital content could be initiated to improve the pluralisation process. Through this effort, the context of the oral history collections can be expanded and enriched.

## **8.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS**

The outcome of the study will contribute to new knowledge, with both theoretical and practical aspects. It is hoped that this study will be the basis for future research and will benefit all the groups who create, use, manage and preserve oral history, especially in cultural institutions, the oral history practitioners themselves and the community itself. These findings have implications for both the theory and practice of oral history.

### **8.2.1 Theoretical contributions**

#### ***Application of the mediated recordkeeping: culture as evidence model as a theoretical lens into a new context***

The primary contribution of this thesis has been to apply Gibbons' Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture as Evidence model in a new domain, oral history. The model was developed in Gibbons' (2014) study. She has explored how continuum theory and models address the complexity of online cultural heritage as evidence.

The study provided an opportunity to assess the applicability and usefulness of the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model from the perspective of oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals and to demonstrate its usefulness. The model proved a good fit with the requirements of oral history and was particularly useful in demonstrating the interrelationships inherent in all elements of the model, and the need to consider those interrelationships through the dimensions: co-create, capture, organise, curate and pluralise. Minor issues were found with the definitions of the various levels provided by Gibbons, and where necessary, these

have been expanded to be more applicable to the domain of oral history by drawing on the work of those who developed the underlying Records Continuum theory. No changes to the diagram representing the model were required.

The problems of dealing with multiple languages and cultures or worldviews were found to be inadequately dealt with by the model, and neither of these areas was treated in any depth in Gibbons' original work as it was limited to a study of YouTube users. These can not be simply encoded. Although identified as a weakness in the model, there was insufficient data available to be able to fully consider the implications of potentially different languages, cultures, and consequently ways of thinking. This will have to be a subject for future research.

Assessing the theoretical aspects of the model in this way has been important in a practical sense, and should benefit oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals in the future.

### **8.2.2 Practical contributions**

#### ***Creation of a Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol***

This study demonstrated a need for the cultural institutions to refine their roles when engaging and equipping a community with the necessary skills to conduct oral histories in a manner that better meets the community's needs. This study has offered new perspectives on how oral history initiatives are conducted and managed by cultural institutions, such as archives and libraries, as well as the local council libraries. A Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol was developed based on this study and it provides recommendations on how cultural institutions can and should be more responsive in accommodating their local community's needs regarding their local history collections and how they can assist in furthering their own research efforts through oral history.

This research highlights the findings of the importance and possible strategies for engaging community and cultural institutions in Malaysia to preserve the local history that will be useful for the nation's development. The Community Oral History Collections' Development Protocol highlights how cultural institutions in Malaysia can strategise their oral history training programmes and this will allow them to revisit or

scrutinise their policies and standards for enriching local history and community memories for future generations. The protocol can be applied in both the teaching and research contexts. The results of the study will be beneficial for policymakers, academics, researchers, advanced-level students and development practitioners as it will help them to identify opportunities and strategies to encourage greater active public participation in oral history collections' development.

### **8.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

In addition to Gibbons, a small number of other studies have addressed related themes such as community archives and oral history benefits. For example, Welland (2015) undertook a study of the role of community archives, highlighting the importance of strong focus of community memory projects and the role of heritage institutions and professional associations in developing material for community memory preservation, and Dayton-Wood et al (2012) who found that oral history can serve as a bridge between community members by sharing and celebrating common heritage. While these themes come through strongly in my research, using the Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model as a lens through which to study the Malaysian situation, has highlighted a number of additional areas of specific concern in that context, including significant challenges due to the number of languages and dialects practised in Malaysia, and problems in developing a fully participatory approach, due to a strong dependence on funding from state governments and issues related to the control and ownership of oral history collections.

### **8.4 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH**

The research process was planned to ensure systematic and credible research was achieved. However, there are several identified limitations that should be considered about this study.

- i. Since the research was conducted in Malaysia, the results are specific to that country and may not apply to other countries.
- ii. This research looks specifically at the collection, management, and development of oral history; although there is an overlap into oral tradition, it does not research oral traditions as such.

- iii. This study examines oral history practices by oral history practitioners and cultural institution professionals' perspectives, and so does not claim to address the views of other groups in Malaysian society.

## **8.5 FUTURE RESEARCH**

Each community has its unique values, culture and norms, which are worth preserving. For this reason, local community oral history programmes need to be designed as 'niche driven' or community-driven programmes that are developed based on the community's preferences and input. Future research can be conducted to assess the wider groups of communities' needs and expectations about community oral history programmes. More feedback or recommendations can be gained from the communities to overcome any challenges or obstacles to developing comprehensive and consistent oral history programmes. It would be useful to undertake more in-depth research to explore a better strategy to network community memories and connect small community groups with their traditions and culture through oral history techniques.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Oral history practitioners' demographic information

Interviewee	Code	Research participants' group	Region	Sex	Years of experience in oral history
1	EP1	Expert practitioner	Central	M	More than 10 years
		EP1 started working as an instructor at a public research university and subsequently completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in History in 1974. Currently, EP1 is an Emeritus Professor at the oldest university in Malaysia.			
2	VP1	Village person	Central	M	Less than 5 years
		VP1 is one of the Chinese community's representatives in Kajang, Selangor. VP1 has not received any formal oral history training. He was a biology graduate from a public university in Northern Malaysia and a teacher.			
3	EP2	Expert practitioner	Central	M	More than 10 years
		EP2 is a prominent historian in Malaysia and known as a walking encyclopedia of that nation's history. He is an Emeritus Professor in the History Department at a public research university.			
4	IR1	Independent researcher	Central	M	5 years to 10 years
		IR1 is a fellow at the Politics and Security Research Centre (one of the leading teaching and research centres in the field of history and political science in Malaysia). He is a Masters candidate in Economic History.			
5	IR2	Independent researcher	Northern	M	5 to 10 years
		IR2 obtained his master's degree from the oldest university in Malaysia in 2000. Then he began working in the language department: Sekolah Bahasa dan Pemikiran Saintifik, of a public university in the Northern Region. In 2007, he began his PhD, which he completed in 2013. He is an expert in the field of Malaysian poetry.			
6	EP3	Expert practitioner	Northern	M	More than 10 years



		EP3 was a history teacher in a secondary school. His PhD is from a public university in the Central Region and he has used oral history sources widely. Currently, he works as an academic at a local university and often uses oral history in his writing.			
7	IR3	Independent researcher	Northern	M	Less than 5 years
		IR3 received a Bachelors degree in Music Composition in 2006 and a Masters degree in Public Management in 2010. He actively conducts oral history project related to culture and arts in the Northern Region.			
8	IR4	Independent researcher	Northern	M	5 to 10 years
		IR4 has been involved in oral history projects since 2003, focusing on oral history systems' development. He participates in innovation, invention and design competitions and engages in several competitions at the university and national level as part of the effort to improve oral history programmes. He has received a bronze medal at the national level for his work.			
9	EP4	Expert practitioner	Central	M	More than 10 years
		EP4 came from the field of library and information science. Oral history was very relevant to that discipline when he was doing his undergraduate studies.			
10	IR5	Independent researcher	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	5 to 10 years
		IR5 works as an academic at a public university in Sabah and obtained his PhD in History from a public research university in the Central Region. He has used oral history techniques since his bachelor's degree, and has continued to apply the same methods in his research.			
11	VP2	Village person	Southern	M	5 to 10 years
		VP2 is a representative of the Chetty community in Melaka. He actively participates in arts and heritage related to the Chetty community in Melaka, but has not, as yet, conducted his own oral history project. Instead, he participates in oral history by providing relevant information and being an intermediary between cultural institutions and the Chetty community in Melaka.			

12	IR6	Independent researcher	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	Less than 5 years
		IR6 is a researcher from a public university who uses oral history methods to discover the local history related to Sabah. One of his papers, based on oral history techniques, concerns the role of the Sabah-East Kalimantan Border during the Malaysia-Indonesia Confrontation Era from 1963 to 1966.			
13	VP3	Village person	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	5 to 10 years
		VP3 is a freelancer, who uses oral history techniques. Previously he worked in the state museum and has been actively involved with the oral history programme in Sarawak. His knowledge of oral history's management is used by the Sarawak Museum, where he was invited to provide in-house training and related courses to the new museum staff in charge of the oral history collections.			
14	IR7	Independent researcher	Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah)	M	5 to 10 years
		IR7 received his Masters degree in History from a public university and has used oral history techniques since his first degree. He has produced a book based on oral history interviews.			
15	IR8	Independent researcher	Southern	F	5 to 10 years
		IR8 received her first degree in history from a public university. She worked as a teacher from 1998 to 2007, and currently is a lecturer at a teacher training college in the Southern Region.			
16	VP4	Village person	Southern	M	Less than 5 years
		VP4 is a storyteller with broad and extensive experience and knowledge of the history of the Portuguese community in Melaka.			
17	EP5	Expert practitioner	Northern	M	More than 10 years

		EP5 is a history lecturer with a deep knowledge of the history and civilisation of the Malay people in Southeast Asia.			
18	VP5	Village person	East Coast	M	Less than 5 years
		VP5 previously worked in the state museum and used oral history techniques on local collections.			
19	VP6	Village person	Southern	F	Less than 5 years
		VP6 is one of the members of the Peranakan (Baba Nyonya) Association in Melaka. She has participated in oral history programmes initiated by the State Library of Melaka.			
20	IR9	Independent researcher	Northern	F	5 to 10 years
		IR9 is an ex-librarian involved in an oral history project in the Northern Region. Currently, she works closely with a public research university in the Northern Region and is actively engaged in oral history projects at that university.			

## Appendix 2 : Cultural institution professionals' demographic information

Interviewee	Code	Respondent Position/Acronym	Region	Sex	Years of experience in oral history
1	IP1	Senior Assistant Librarian	Central	F	5 to 10 years
		IP1 holds a Masters degree in Knowledge Management and is currently in charge of the local collection unit at Selangor Public Library while also serving as a committee member for the Oral History Association of Malaysia.			
2	IP2	Director of National Archives	Central	M	More than 10 years
		IP2 pursued his studies to obtain a Diploma in Archives Administration from a school of archives in India. In 1995, IP2 continued his master's degree at the University of New South Wales, in Sydney, Australia. Among the experiences of IP2's career, IP2 provided services in the oral history unit, records management training unit, became Head of the Electronic Records Management Section, and shifted to Deputy Director General (Planning). IP2 has held a senior position in the National Archives of Malaysia since 2014.			
3	IP3	Head of Reference & Multimedia Unit	Northern	M	Less than 5 years
		IP3 is in charge of the multimedia collection's unit and local collections related to Kedah's history. IP3 has experience of conducting an oral history project with rural communities in Kedah.			
4	IP4	Assistant Librarian	Southern	F	5 to 10 years
		IP4 has worked for almost 30 years at Perpustakaan Awam Melaka and obtained her final education from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in the field of library science. For 20 years, IP4 worked in the procurement department and was then transferred to the network department. After that, for six years, IP4 was in the Administration Department of Melaka's Collection Department. She has now spent almost 4 years in Melaka's Collection Department.			
5	IP5	Head of Archives Management Division, Sarawak State Library	Borneo	F	5 to 10 years
		IP5 is actively involved in conducting interviews using oral history techniques with public figures who have made a massive contribution in or to Sarawak. IP5 has been engaged in the oral history field since 2002.			

6	IP6	Assistant Librarian	Central	F	Less than 5 years
		IP6 graduated from Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia in the information management field. IP6 was assigned to initiate the oral history programme for internal staff before setting up an oral history unit in the library. IP6 is also learning from the Petaling Jaya Museum how to coordinate and set up oral history projects.			
7	IP7	Assistant Curator	Central	F	5 to 10 years
		IP7 was assigned to collect relevant information during the initial phase of the museum's development, before the museum officially opened to the public in November 2007. IP7's responsibility in the oral history initiative is mostly involved with locating possible interviewees around Petaling Jaya.			
8	IP8	Head of Local Collection and Digitals Unit	East Coast region	M	Less than 5 years
		IP8 focuses primarily on planning for the development of oral history collections in Terengganu. IP8 is quite new to the oral history approach, but has a great deal of interest in keeping valuable community-based stories using oral history techniques.			
9	IP9	Librarian, Sarawak State Library	Borneo	M	5 to 10 years
		IP9 has been working in Sarawak State Library as a librarian and was sent to undertake a postgraduate Diploma in Information Management. IP9 actively participates in local and international conferences.			
10	IP10	Deputy CEO Sarawak State Library	Borneo	F	5 to 10 years
		IP10 is part of the management team at the Sarawak State Library where IP10 also actively participates in oral history projects. IP10 has a passion for enriching the community's oral history collections among the various ethnic groups in Sarawak.			
11	IP11	Librarian, Collection Development Unit, Perdana Library	Central	M	More than 5 years
		IP11 actively participate in oral history and knowledge management seminars in the Central Region. IP11 is currently in charge of the Oral History Unit at Perdana Library.			

### **Appendix 3: Interview questions (expert informants)**

1. When was your oral history project established?
2. What is the aim/s of your projects?
3. Has the aim/s of your projects changed over time?
4. How many people are involved in your oral history project?
5. How many interviews have you conducted?
6. How do you perceive your roles as librarian or archivist in oral history research?
7. How would you describe the relationship of the cultural institutions with the oral history community?
8. How has that relationship developed over time?
9. What is your opinion of the current oral history services, programs and activities?
10. Do you think this cultural institution contributes in any way to the development of the local community history?
11. Do you think the oral history community members contribute in any way to the development of the local history?
12. Do you think the library services, program and activities have helped the oral history community in any way?
13. Are there any additional services, programs or activities that you think this community needs?
14. How archives and libraries dealt with digital oral history collections?
15. How archives and libraries address the rights management, preservation, and use of sound or video collections?
16. What kind of collaborations needed by cultural institutions and historians in digital age?
17. What are the initiatives undertaken by cultural institutions in facing up the transformation in oral history research?

## **Appendix 4: Interview questions (cultural institution professionals)**

### **Background Information**

1. When was your oral history project established?
2. What is the aim/s of your projects?
3. Has the aim/s of your projects changed over time?
4. How many people are involved in your oral history project?
5. How many interviews have you conducted?
6. How do you perceive your roles as librarian or archivist in oral history research?
7. How would you describe the relationship of the cultural institutions with the oral history community?
8. How has that relationship developed over time?
9. What is your opinion of the current oral history services, programs and activities?
10. Do you think this cultural institution contributes in any way to the development of the local community history?
11. Do you think the oral history community members contribute in any way to the development of the local history?
12. Do you think the library services, program and activities have helped the oral history community in any way?
13. Are there any additional services, programs or activities that you think this community needs?
14. What kind of collaborations needed by cultural institutions and communities in digital age?

### **Memory-making**

1. How would you identify what oral records to be selected?
2. What makes you interested in capturing oral history?
3. How do you identify valuable oral records to be captured?
4. Who are responsible to co-create the oral history project for community?
5. What are the full range of stakeholders required in capturing oral history project for community? What are the implication/s?
6. Is there are any associated oral history artefacts such as folk songs, interviews, and folktales that you refer to?
7. In what ways the community memories could be organised?
8. In what ways the community memories could be preserved?

9. Are there any different ways of expressing how people's accounts of experiences and feelings can be recorded and shared?

### **Evidentially**

1. What are the significant things you use to establish evidence on the audio recordings captured?
2. How do you capture other evidence to support the recorded oral history?
3. How do you preserve/curate the audio recordings (oral records)?
4. How to disseminate or share the audio recordings (oral records)?

### **Identities**

1. How do you identify the interviewees?
2. How do you design the question to be asked?
3. Who select the interviewees?
4. How are the interviewees selected?
5. What are the criteria used to select a interviewees?

### **Narratives**

1. How do you identify interviewees within various communities?
2. How do you select the most significant history?
3. How one story became dominant to other story that been collected?
4. What are the ethical considerations in capturing oral history?
5. How are judgements made about what remains private, what goes public, and what is legitimate?
6. How you address the rights management, preservation, and use of sound or video collections?
7. Who is currently own the community oral history?
8. Who should control and own the communities' oral history collections?
9. How to communicate the oral history insights and findings to communities

### **Mediated Memories**

1. What are the tools you use to capture oral history?
2. Where do you keep the audio recordings or oral records that being captured?
3. How do you share the outcome of the audio recordings?
4. Is there any collaborative systems used as mediated tool in disseminating oral history?
5. How do you make oral history collections accessible?

### **Transactionality**

1. When do you think oral history should be captured?



2. What kind of activities involve in oral history collections process?
3. What are the functions of oral history recordings?
4. What are the benefits of the oral history recordings to community?
5. What needs to be organised in an archive/libraries for oral history collections retrieval and dissemination?

## **Appendix 5: Interview questions (oral history practitioners)**

### **Background Information**

1. When was your oral history project established?
2. What is the aim/s of your projects?
3. Has the aim/s of your projects changed over time?
4. How many people are involved in your oral history project?
5. How many interviews have you conducted?
6. What is your opinion of the current oral history services, programs and activities?
7. Do you think the cultural institution contributes in any way to the development of the local community history?
8. Do you think the library services, program and activities have helped the oral history community in any way?
9. Are there any additional services, programs or activities that you think this community needs?
10. What kind of collaborations needed by cultural institutions and communities in digital age?

### **Memory-making**

1. How would you as community members identify what oral records or history you want to select?
2. Who do you think the parties that responsible to conduct oral history for your community?
3. What makes you interested in capturing oral history?
4. Who are the responsible parties to co-create the oral records?
5. What are the full range of stakeholders required in capturing oral history project for community? What are the implication/s?
6. How do you identify valuable oral records to be captured?
7. Is there are any associated oral history artefacts such as folk songs, interviews, and folktales that you refer to?
8. What oral records in tangible and tacit forms produced through this process?
9. In what ways the community memories could be organised?
10. In what ways the community memories could be preserved?
11. Are there any different ways of expressing how people's accounts of experiences and feelings can be recorded and shared/utilised?

### **Evidentially**

1. What are the significant things you use to establish evidence on the audio recordings captured?
2. How do you capture other evidence to support the recorded oral history?
3. How do you preserve/curate the audio recordings?
4. How to disseminate or share the audio recordings?

### **Identities**

1. How do you identify the interviewees?
2. How do you design the question to be asked?
3. Who select the interviewees?
4. Why were the interviewees selected?

### **Narratives**

1. How do you identify interviewees within your communities?
2. How do you select the most significant history?
3. How one story became dominant to other story that been collected?
4. What are the ethical considerations in capturing oral history?
5. How are judgements made about what remains private, what goes public, and what is legitimate?
6. Who is currently own the community oral history?
7. Who should control and own the oral history collections?
8. How to communicate the oral history insights and findings to communities?

### **Mediated Memories**

1. What are the tools you use to capture oral history?
2. Where do you keep the audio recordings?
3. How do you share the outcome of the audio recordings?
4. How they are located (or transferred) in families and communities
5. Is there any collaborative systems used as mediated tool?
6. What is you expectation on access to oral history collections from cultural institutions?

### **Transactionality**

1. When do you think oral history should be captured?
2. What kind of activities involve in oral history collections process?
3. What are the functions of oral history recordings?

4. What are the benefits of the oral history recordings to community?
5. What needs to be organized in an archive for retrieval and dissemination?

**Appendix 6: Consent Form for the expert informants, cultural institution professionals and oral history practitioners)**



**MONASH University**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Project:** Oral history collections development of practitioners and cultural institutions in Malaysia: the use of Mediated Recordkeeping: Culture-as-evidence model.

**Chief Investigator:** Dr Tom Denison

**I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.**

<b>I consent to the following:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>I agree to take part in one interview of approximately 30 to 60 minutes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Audio recording during the interview</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Name of Participant:**

**Participant Signature :**

**Date:**