

## Research on the Safeguarding Mechanism for Sustainable Development of Oral History Construction in China (Postprint)

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Oral history transmits historical memory through its unique humanistic attributes and has received widespread attention due to its functions such as supplementing historical materials and protecting cultural heritage. Constructing a safeguard mechanism for oral history development in China is of great significance for realizing the value of oral history and its sustainable development. [Method/Process] Using methods such as web surveys, literature research, and email consultation, this study reveals the current status of oral history development. [Results/Conclusions] A safeguard mechanism is constructed from five dimensions: strategic policy orientation, organizational and personnel planning, technology-driven support, legal and ethical coordination, and funding procurement and supply. An in-depth discussion is conducted on how to facilitate the sustainable development of oral history, which is conducive to improving China's oral history development system and promoting the substantial progress of oral history.

### Full Text

## Research on the Guarantee Mechanism for Sustainable Development of Oral History Construction in China

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**Abstract:** Oral history inherits historical memories through its unique humanistic attributes and has garnered widespread attention for its functions in enriching historical materials and protecting cultural heritage. Constructing a guarantee mechanism for oral history development in China is of great significance for realizing the value of oral history and ensuring its sustainable development. This study reveals the current state of oral history construction through

network surveys, literature reviews, and email consultations. It constructs a guarantee mechanism from five dimensions: strategic policy orientation, organizational and personnel planning, technology-driven support, legal and ethical coordination, and funding procurement and supply. The paper discusses in depth how to facilitate the sustainable development of oral history construction, which will help improve China's oral history construction system and promote its long-term development.

**Keywords:** oral history; sustainable development; guarantee mechanism

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Oral history serves as an important carrier and link for historical culture and memory inheritance, valued by scholars both domestically and internationally for its functions in recording era transformations, shaping social memory, enriching historical materials, filling documentation gaps, and protecting human cultural heritage. China's long-standing historical culture has been passed down through generations, yet many precious cultural heritage resources have been lost or are endangered over time. In 1992, UNESCO launched the Memory of the World Programme to rescue gradually aging, damaged, and disappearing documentary records worldwide through international cooperation and digital technology application. In recent years, China has successively carried out intangible cultural heritage protection and memory projects, broadening the audience for oral history construction and helping to reverse the "theory-heavy, practice-light" status quo in China's oral history development.

## 2 Literature Review

No consensus has yet been reached on the definition of oral history. The International Council on Archives' *Dictionary of Archival Terminology* defines it as oral archives created through planned interviews for research purposes, typically in the form of audio recordings or verbatim transcripts. Some scholars view it from individual, community, and memory dimensions as oral memory, social memory, or digital memory. Despite these varied conceptual depictions, oral history essentially endows archives, culture, and memory with new dimensions. Therefore, the authors consider oral history as records collected through technical equipment that can compensate for historical events and related memories, reproducing certain stages or aspects of historical development processes.

China's oral history research, marked by the oral science and technology history project initiated by the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1980, has undergone 40 years of practical development, producing numerous researchers and professional groups. Although China's oral history construction has gradually shifted from theoretical discussion to practical extension, focusing on resource collection, organization, dissemination, and utilization, it remains in its initial stage, lacking in-depth development and knowledge mining. This not only severs the interwoven net-

work between sustainable development and cultural inheritance but also erects barriers to resource co-construction and sharing. Consequently, creating guarantee mechanisms to preserve and facilitate the sustainable development of oral history has become an urgent issue.

Literature analysis reveals that scholars have focused on conceptual discussions and construction process explorations, such as collection methods and model selection. Survey results indicate that current oral history construction in China predominantly unfolds through projects, creating a multi-agent development pattern that includes independent construction and collaborative models, with projects covering extensive themes. However, research remains stagnant at the primary stages of collection, storage, and publication, revealing shortcomings in technology, legal and ethical constraints, and funding that obstruct deep integration, organization, storage, and utilization of oral history resources—directly related to the absence of corresponding guarantee mechanisms.

### 3 Analysis of Current Practice

Sustainable development in oral history means maintaining and coordinating a stable balance among multiple agents, enabling each agent's effectiveness to be fully realized within the overall system environment. The oral history practice process involves multiple stages, from planning to completion. Planning includes program formulation, fiscal fund application, and team organization. Execution management includes inviting interviewees, arranging interviews, recording content, and compiling interview data. Post-production work includes supervising project quality and effectiveness, opening data, and promotion.

Regarding archiving and other stages, the operation involves numerous development agents lacking overall planning, easily causing problems such as low resource utilization, dispersion, and privacy leakage—particularly challenging for intellectual property disputes. Over time, this hinders further resource dissemination and utilization. Oral history construction integrates practicality and academic nature throughout topic selection, interview target establishment, resource identification, audio editing, and record supplementation, requiring broad knowledge structures. Currently, the talent pool structure is relatively homogeneous, predominantly comprising archival professionals familiar with archival business knowledge and competent in resource collection, yet lacking information literacy for digital processing and development.

With increasing demand for oral history, users no longer limit themselves to textual and audio-visual records. Digital technology innovation brings tremendous revolution to sustainable development. To maximize preservation and solve issues of distortion, aging, and damage, digital restoration, storage, database creation, and digital platforms can be employed. However, current project funding mainly derives from government appropriations, with single-source funding channels insufficient to maintain technology investment, forcing delays or shelving of construction processes. Consequently, technological updates lag, means

become outdated, and digital construction remains timid and marginalized, hindering sustainable development and inheritance.

## 4 Construction of Guarantee Mechanisms

Based on the above status, actively planning and rapidly responding to establish oral history guarantee mechanisms is crucial not only for rescuing, preserving, and protecting oral history resources but also for improving China's oral history construction system. Taking sustainable development as the fundamental foothold and mutual benefit as the principle, this paper constructs a five-dimensional guarantee mechanism: strategic policy orientation, organizational and personnel planning, technology-driven support, legal and ethical coordination, and funding procurement and supply. These mechanisms achieve dynamic mutual promotion, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

### 4.1 Strategic Policy Orientation Mechanism—Holistic Planning for a Sound Structure

The strategic policy orientation mechanism comprises strategic guidance and policy-driven components. As programmatic documents, strategic policies represent the inevitable requirement when oral history construction reaches certain stages, determining its mission, vision, objectives, and implementation frameworks through future-oriented thinking. Specifically, this mechanism operates at macro, meso, and micro levels, forming an integrated “linkage” relationship from top to bottom.

**4.1.1 Macro Level—National Perspective** National strategic policy formulation is fundamental for guaranteeing sustainable oral history development. Although China has not yet issued specific oral history policies at the national level, international best practices provide operational guidance. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism should accelerate the development of strategies suited to national conditions, effectively guiding development agents to respond to changes, grasp future opportunities, regulate organizational behavior, and enhance vitality. Following principles of overall planning and coordination, these policies should transform China's initialization status, form a distinctive Chinese development system, elevate oral history construction to an international perspective, and facilitate sustainable development and digital cultural heritage resource sharing.

**4.1.2 Meso Level—Professional Management Agencies** While the Ministry of Culture and Tourism provides strategic direction at the macro level, professional management agencies such as the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center and the National Archives Administration must deploy specific policies at the meso level. Although the National Archives Administration has issued the *Specification for Collection and Management of Oral Historical Mate-*

*rials* (DA/T59-2017), relevant agencies still need to strengthen supervision and implementation across all construction stages.

These agencies should promote standardization by expanding current industry standards and jointly issuing norms covering collection, organization, management, development, utilization, and protection of oral history resources, thereby coordinating regional development. They must also enhance supervision and guidance by accelerating the formulation and revision of regulations, introducing foreign experiences, and standardizing procedures, methods, and regulations. By promoting pilot region experiences and encouraging provincial-level construction to extend to municipal and county levels, these agencies guide steady progress in oral history development.

**4.1.3 Micro Level—Implementation** Implementation at the micro level serves as a catalyst for oral history services. Strategic policies should be executed with precision and fragmentation, achieving complementarity between central and local authorities, comprehensive and specialized functions, and priorities and general tasks. Specifically, implementation agencies—including intangible cultural heritage protection associations, libraries, archives, and other relevant institutions—should align their visions and missions with practical trajectories. They should implement local memory projects, collect specialized oral history archives, issue management methods regulating cataloging principles, classification schemes, and legal/ethical content, and conduct personalized oral history construction. These efforts facilitate resource integration and sharing while avoiding overlapping management and waste through inter-institutional coordination.

## **4.2 Organizational and Personnel Planning Mechanism—Stable Operations with Rich Position Configurations**

Oral history construction involves multiple stages—management, interviewing, technical processing, and coordination—requiring clear position configurations and functional divisions. China’s current organizational personnel system relies predominantly on archival staff, lacking “value-added” hierarchical configurations that severely hinder resource circulation, timeliness, and diffusion. For example, the University of Science and Technology of China’s oral history project initially comprised mainly archivists and young teachers, revealing the drawback of “single configuration” despite later expert supplementation.

A scientific and rational organizational personnel planning mechanism should prioritize the urgency of rescuing historical materials, providing talent and knowledge foundations for sustainable development. Foreign development agents have accumulated experience through extensive practice, forming diversified personnel structures. Through network surveys, the authors examined foreign position configurations (including consultants, librarians, assistants, archivists, project leaders, and coordinators) to provide references for China (see Table 1 ). Experienced professional researchers (consultants and project

leaders) direct research projects; assistants support activities, exhibitions, and podcasts; librarians and archivists manage preservation and audio-visual support; and project coordinators handle collections, legal/ethical issues, and workflow 衔接.

Notably, Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies has the most comprehensive position facilities, with clear division of labor among its 96 staff members, providing a benchmark reference. China's mechanism requires support and collaboration from government, universities, social organizations, libraries, archives, museums (LAM), enterprises, and individuals. Internally, initial personnel configuration needs both basic and professional talent, including knowledge management professionals (archivists, audio-visual directors), specialized professionals (consultants, project coordinators, guest experts), service personnel (interns, volunteers), and application specialists proficient in web design, digital publishing, and promotion. Training programs, lectures, and courses can cultivate sustainable talent, building a "personnel community" and developing versatile professionals (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

### **4.3 Technology-Driven Support Mechanism—Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development**

Sustainable oral history development requires digital technology and relevant standards to drive integrated resource services. With "digital memory" development, digitization has become inevitable, bringing new vitality alongside challenges. Digital oral history involves converting various carriers into digital formats through modern information equipment. Digital technology injection and innovation provide new perspectives, driving continuous advancement in digital services.

Development agents should integrate digital thinking, introduce professional platforms and systems, and create digital ecological networks to overcome geographical limitations, facilitate resource dissemination, and stimulate public participation. The authors propose standardizing oral history services from platform construction, synchronous access, permission control, and dissemination perspectives to comprehensively enhance informatization levels (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]).

At the platform level, tools like CONTENTdm facilitate economical and efficient uploading, storage, retrieval, and utilization. For synchronous access, open-source platforms like Omeka and OHMS (Oral History Metadata Synchronizer) enable word-searchable, time-indexed transcripts that precisely locate matching audio-visual segments. To reproduce authentic interview interfaces, plugins like PhillySimpleGallery can provide "vivid" records. Permission control requires B/S architecture, regular maintenance, user authentication, data backup, and legal constraints to prevent privacy leakage and infringement risks. For dissemination, VR/AR/3D technologies and social media should broaden resource pathways, enhancing digital service levels and social impact.

Metadata serves as the adhesive from data to information to knowledge to wisdom. Oral history digital platforms require unified data modeling and standardized coding to enable smooth data exchange across applications and resource types. Currently, China's heterogeneous resource problem remains unresolved, with few projects adopting DC metadata standards. Foreign agents have established integrated metadata frameworks (see Table 2 ), providing references for selecting generic, hybrid, image, audio, and video metadata standards to accelerate China's metadata development and promote resource sharing.

#### **4.4 Legal and Ethical Coordination Mechanism—Protecting Rights and Avoiding Infringement**

Legal and ethical considerations permeate oral history construction. Issues arise from two aspects: first, as a research method involving “people,” researchers must integrate into narrators' life contexts, creating complex interpersonal legal/ethical issues; second, multiple participants (narrators, interviewers, users, public) have divergent interests requiring coordination.

Respecting stakeholders' legitimate rights forms the starting point. Foreign agents establish guidelines through professional associations like the UK Oral History Society (OHS), Oral History Australia (OHA), and New Zealand's NO-HANZ. The U.S. has a more comprehensive “triple” system comprising the Oral History Association, Institutional Review Board, and Creative Commons, forming effective legal-ethical frameworks.

China currently lacks clear legal regulations and ethical protection mechanisms, related to its late start and weak rights protection awareness. The legal-ethical guarantee mechanism should: (1) trace origins by signing copyright agreements with all participants to establish rights awareness; (2) apply technical constraints through access controls, online usage agreements, and front-end controls to prevent privacy leakage; (3) standardize mechanisms by compiling guidelines, manuals, and clear regulations to strengthen coordination and contract spirit, effectively reducing legal-ethical risks.

#### **4.5 Funding Procurement and Supply Mechanism—Accelerating Investment and Broadening Sources**

Funding is the vitality source for sustainable oral history development. China currently suffers from scarce funding channels and heavy government dependence, insufficient for integrating resources, personnel, and technology. This “passive single-source” supply chain directly hinders sustainable development. For instance, the 崔永元 Oral History Research Center faced business suspension due to funding pressure, while some universities and research institutions struggle with limited or single-source funding.

Foreign agents solve this “financial 短板” through three paths: government allocation, private sponsorship, and self-funding. Government funding focuses on culture, politics, livelihood, and education. Private sponsorship derives from

foundations, committees, social organizations (institutes, communities, associations), and individual donations. Self-funding includes institutional funds and commercialized self-raising. As sustainable development is a long-term endeavor covering pre-research, mid-term collection, and post-production utilization, funding may come from multi-channel synergies varying by stage (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]).

China's mechanism should have three layers: (1) government special funds; (2) social capital from organizations, research institutes, and donations; (3) self-funding from development agents' own resources or commercialized self-raising, supplemented with incentives to attract sponsors and crowdfunding. These three layers can be flexibly scheduled, switched, or cross-coordinated to ensure continuous funding supply.

## Conclusion

Under these five-dimensional guarantee mechanisms, development agents can break through construction constraints. Sustainable oral history development depends not only on independent mechanism functions but also on their synergy. Strategic policy orientation foresees and guides development paths, catalyzing personnel organization, technical standards, legal-ethical controls, and funding preparation. Multi-source funding improves personnel infrastructure and promotes technical upgrading; personnel, as the core human resource, require technical support, legal-ethical constraints, and multi-channel funding; technology drives continuous personnel professional development and more standardized legal-ethical frameworks. Only through interactive and coordinated mechanisms forming holistic synergy can oral history construction achieve organic unity between individual and collective dimensions, promoting sustainable development across all aspects.

China's oral history construction remains in transition from initialization to digitalization, far from the flourishing development abroad. As the foundation for sustainable development, guarantee mechanisms require continuous coordination, optimization, and 短板补齐 in practice to ensure stable and healthy development.

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#### **Author Contributions:**

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