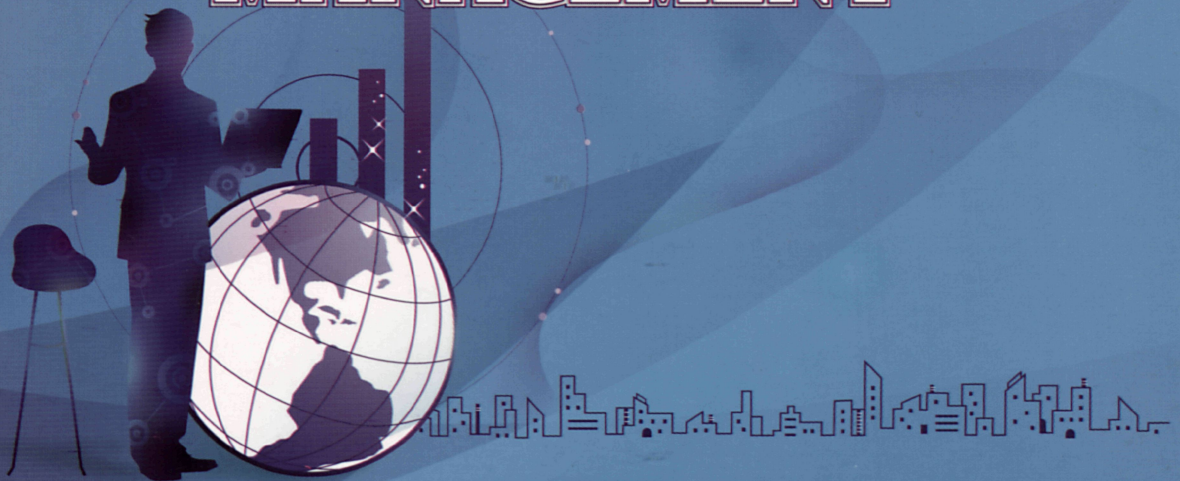


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ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA: PROGRAMMES, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *The Oral History Association of Malaysia was formed in order to gather information based on oral history approaches and to promote this information sources as an important material for research on history in the near future. Historical records of an event can be completed through oral history since part of the information still resides in a person's memory. Interview is one method that is used in oral history to collect information from an individual. Evidence shows that not all documented records are thorough and adequately recorded. Gaps still exist in history. It is within this context that Oral History Association of Malaysia will help to fill gaps that exists particularly in historical events. Many institution are involved in oral history activities which were carried out by full-time and part-time staff as well as students. Among the issues and challenges faced were "the race against time,"the high cost of conducting an oral history project,choice and scope of the topic chosen, authenticity of material collected.*

Keywords: *Oral History Association of Malaysia, Historical Records, Oral History Programmes, Issues and Challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The desire and ambition to form the Oral History Association of Malaysia was not something new but only recently it materialised due to the positive development in state public and university libraries throughout Malaysia which encourages each library to carry out oral history project (Zahidi, 2013). Thereby the formation of Oral History Association of Malaysia is timely and is fully supported by public and university libraries throughout Malaysia. The association would cooperate with related government agencies, such as the National Archives, National Library, National Museum, Jabatan Warisan Negara and NGOs such as Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, Persatuan Muzium Malaysia, Ikatan Ahli Arkeologi Malaysia.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT

Many prominent personalities have passed away, including actors, actresses and popular singers and not many of the veteran Malay film personalities are still alive. Such film and singing personalities who have passed away were Dato' Sharifah Aini, Azean Irdawaty, Dato' Aziz Satar, Omar Suwita, Kuswadinata, Latifah Omar, Kartinah Dahari, Datin Umi Kalthum, S.Shamsuddin. Besides that personalities, there was a prominent academic figure, Tan Sri Awang Had Salleh. In addition, Dato' Abdul Razak Abdul Hamid, the only Malaysian survivor of Hiroshima atomic bomb. Heroic figure, Dato' Kanang Anak Langkau and prominent sport figure Istiaq Mubarak are just to name a few. It is a great loss to the nation if these prominent figures passed away without the opportunity to record their experiences and sacrifices to the country. On the 2nd July 2013 during the opening ceremony of the new Sungai Siput Police Station, the appearance of an English gentleman who once served at Sungai Siput Police Station in 1948 was a pleasant surprise. Lieutenant (rtd) A. A.Walter, 92 years old served at the Sungai Siput Police Station from 1948 until 1958 appeared at the ceremony complete, with a police uniform during the colonial attire era. However, a few weeks after the event, he passed away before having the chance to be interviewed.

ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA

The main objective of the association is to promote awareness of the significance of oral history. The association hopes that oral history project will be an on-going and sustainable process. The association will organize workshops on oral history from time to time. It will be active in publication because this is the only way to publicise public awareness of the significance of oral history. The association will publish bulletines and books on oral history in Malaysia (Zahidi, 2013). The Oral History Association of Malaysia was registered under the Registrar of society and its registration number is PPM-007-10-03082013 on August 3rd 2013.

The registered address is: *Oral History Association of Malaysia, Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam, Selangor, Jalan Kelab Golf 13/6, Seksyen 13, 540100 Shah Alam, Selangor.*

The objectives of the association are as follows:

- to serves as a platform for cooperation with other agencies in undertaking oral history research
- to organize courses on oral history
- to document oral history materials

Table 1 and 2 shown Committee Members of the Oral History Association of Malaysia and the Kedah region.

Table 1: *Committee Members of the Oral History Association of Malaysia*

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Patron | Director General of National Archives of Malaysia |
| Advisor | Director of Selangor State Library |
| Chairman | Dr Zahidi Dato' Zainol Rashid |
| Deputy Chairman | Associate Prof. Dr Faridah Mohd Noor (University Malaya) |
| Secretary | Hikmah Hassan (Selangor State Library) |
| Assistant Secretary | Hanis Diyana Kamarudin (UiTM) |
| Treasurer | Nazaleeza Hassan (Selangor State Library) |
| Committee Member | Sharifah Norashikin Syed Mohd Pisal (Selangor State Library) Haji Mohamad Nazari Hj. Abdul Hamid (Perak State Library) Khairil Hisham Mohd Ashaari (Negeri Sembilan State Library) Habsah Abdul Rahman (USM) |
| Audit | Noor Lela Osman (INFRA) MazrizalHashim (KL Library) |

Table 2: *Committee Member of the Oral History Association of Malaysia Kedah*

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Patron | Dato' Wira Affifudin Hj. Omar |
| Advisor | Dato'(Dr) Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof |
| Chairman | Associate Prof. Dr Mohd Isa Othman (USM) |
| Deputy Chairman | Dr Mohd Kasri Saidon (UUM) |
| Secretary | Rebeca Lily Mohd Perok (PSMCK) |
| Treasurer | Haslinda Hj. Hassan (UUM) |
| Committee Member | Rohani Hassan (ANM) Mohd Farit Ahmad (PSMCK) Mohd Jamil Hj. Ramli (PSMCK) Mukhtar Mansor (PSMCK) |

The first project undertaken by the association is Seminar Internasional Sejarah Lisan Rumpun Melayu 2014. It was organized with the cooperation of Masyarakat Sejarahwan Indonesia Cabang Riau and Konsulat Malaysia Pekanbaru. It was held at Gedung Guru Riau, Jl. Jend. Sudirman, Pekan baru, Indonesia on 27-30 March 2014. The relationship between the state of Siak Seri Inderapura and the Malay Peninsular from the point of view political and social studies and the role of Raja Kecil Siak and his contribution to

the history of Malay Peninsular traced. Also the migration diaspora Sumatra to the Malay Peninsular from the perspective of the Malay world traced in this seminar. The theme of this seminar is Malay world from the perspective of history and culture.

The objectives of this seminar were:

- to strengthen the understanding of Malay world from historical and cultural perspective
- to increase the relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia through history information and culture
- to preserve the understanding between Malaysia and Indonesia through history and culture

Twenty eight speakers presented their papers which included 8 from Indonesia listed in table 3

Table 3: *Presenters from Indonesia*

| No. | Presenters |
|-----|----------------------------|
| 1 | Prof. Suwardi (MSI) |
| 2 | Drs. A. Latif Hasyim (MSI) |
| 3 | Prof. Dr Isjoni (PGRI) |
| 4 | Drs. O.K. Nizami (YWBMR) |
| 5 | Dr Ellyas Roza (UIN) |
| 6 | Prof. Dr M Dien (UIN) |
| 7 | Tenas Effendy (LAMR) |
| 8 | Al-Azhar (LAMR) |

Table 4: *Presenters from Malaysia*

| No. | Presenters |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Prof. Madya Dr Haji Ishak Saat (UPSI) |
| 2 | Prof. Madya Dr Ahmad Jelani Hsalimi (USM) |
| 3 | Major General Dato' Dr Amir Guntur Kamparputra (Ikatan Anak Kampar Malaysia) |
| 4 | Ahmad Farhan Abdullah (UM) |
| 5 | Dr Azman Yusof (Unikl) |
| 6 | Dr Solahuddin Abdul Hamid (UUM) |

| | |
|----|---|
| 8 | Dr Mohd Akram Dato'Dahaman(UUM) |
| 9 | Zulhilmi Pardi(UUM) |
| 10 | Dr Amar Muhamad(UUM) |
| 11 | Mohamad Khadafi Hj Rofie (UUM) |
| 12 | Prof. Madya Dr Rohani Ab Ghani (UUM) |
| 13 | Dr Mohd Kasri Saidon (UUM) |
| 14 | Dr Suhanim Abdullah (UUM) |
| 15 | Nor Azlah Sham Rambery (UUM) |
| 16 | Kamarul Afendy Hamimi (Unikl) |
| 17 | Dr Basri Hasan (UIA) |
| 18 | Prof. Dato' Dr Raja Abdullah Yaacob(UiTM) |
| 19 | Jazmilzwan Jamal (Aswara) |
| 20 | Zaihasriah Zahidi (MMU) |
| 21 | Hikmah Hasan (PPAS) |
| 22 | Suzliana Abdul Hamid (PPAS) |

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

Among the oral history projects undertaken by National Archives of Malaysia (Mahani, 2013) are shown in table 5.

Table 5: *Oral History Projects by National Archive of Malaysia*

| No | Oral History Projects |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman |
| 2 | Biography of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad |
| 3 | Biography of Tun Hussein Onn |
| 4 | Biography of Tan Sri P. Ramlee |
| 5 | Malayan Union |
| 6 | Force 136 |
| 7 | Emergency |
| 8 | Japanese occupation |
| 9 | ASEAN |
| 10 | Death Railway |

Some of the oral history projects undertaken by the Kedah State Library (Hasmah, 2013) are shown in table 6:

Table 6: Oral History Projects by Kedah State Library

| No | Oral History Projects |
|----|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman |
| 2 | Biography of TunDr Mahathir Mohamad |
| 3 | Kedah Volunteer Force |
| 4 | Kedah Civil Service |
| 5 | Biography of PanglimaNayan |
| 6 | Biography of Hj Ahmad Rabat |
| 7 | Malayan Union |
| 8 | Baling Talk |
| 9 | Sedim |
| 10 | UMNO |
| 11 | Pekan Rabu |
| 12 | Football |

Examples of the oral history projects undertaken by USM (Siti Roudhah, 2013) are illustrated in table 7.

Table 7: Oral History Projects by USM

| No | Oral History Projects |
|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | Japanese occupation |
| 2 | Penang personalities |
| 3 | Memory |
| 4 | Peranakan |

Table 8 shows some of the oral history projects undertaken by UKM (Mohd Samsudin, 2012).

Table 8: Oral History Projects by UKM

| No | Oral History Projects |
|----|--|
| 1 | AskarMelayu |
| 2 | Biography of DrMohd Said |
| 3 | Memali |
| 4 | Thai Community in Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan |
| 5 | Malay leftist and 10 th Regiment of PKM |
| 6 | Emergency |
| 7 | GuaMusang |
| 8 | Biography |

The National Archives of Malaysia has interviewed 617 prominent personalities (Mahani, 2013) which included H.R.H. Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalulail, Raja Perlis, H.R.H.Tuanku Jaafar, Yang Dipertua Negeri Sembilan and Tun Dr Mahathir. Also the National Archives has interviewed film personalities, such as Tan Sri Jins Shamsuddin and Dato' Aziz Satar and singer Dato' S. M. Salim. The National Archive has also interviewed non-elite personalities, such as Kalimuthu, Salmiah Mohd Isa, Hj. Samad Mokhtar who once served the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman. During the silver jubilee celebration of H.R.H. Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah, Sultan Kedah the Kedah State Library presented a special programme named, "Tuanku, this is your life" (Hasnah, 2013). The library interviewed the sultan's teacher, Darus Hanafi and Mr Zain Rashid. Also the sultan's classmates Mohd Nor Rauna and Ahmad Shafie. During the opening of Rumah Kelahiran Mahathir prominent personalities interviewed were Tun Dr Mahathir's sister Rafeah and Habsah and his brother Mashor. Also his classmate Dato' Ahmad Nordin, Tun Mohamad Zahir, Osman Abu Bakar and Ahmad Ariffin. Also his business partner at Pekan Rabu Ahmad Cina. In the Sedim incident where Tunku Abdul Rahman kidnap his father Sultan Abdul Hamid during Japanese occupation Abdul Hamid Saad and Che Li Che Had were interviewed

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The choice and scope of a topic in any oral history project is not entirely limited to history (Raja Abdullah, 1985) but may also include other disciplines which comprised topics such as: *Biography; Local history; Culture; Economy; Literature; Sociology; Medical; Music; Science and technology; History; Performing Arts; Administration; Visual art; and Women studies* Individuals to be interviewed comprise of elite and non-elite personalities. The interviewer may encounter difficulties in interviewing elite who were from the high ranking government officials and ministers. They may not want to

reveal information that they consider as confidential. Scheduling appointment dates pose another problem as they may be very busy. Elite personalities comprise of political, economic, social, and army officials. Non-elite personalities comprise of government servants, private sector workers, teachers, farmers, armies, businessmen, housewives (Shamsil, 1992). Information obtained from interview should be recorded, checked and transcribed to be used as reference sources. Many factors have to be considered in embarking on oral history topics and incidents to be searched. For instance, in the course of writing a biography on Tun Dr Mahathir, the author referred to 18 books written on him (Zahidi, 2011). The biography was completed, based on the facts obtained from these books. Additionally, to cater for insufficient information to fill the gap, interviews were conducted. When the Kedah Historical Society wanted to do research on the sea gypsies in Phuket, it was found that no information sources were available on them. In contrast to Indonesia books are available on the biography of Sukarno but there were not many books on Tunku Abdul Rahman. Not many books were written on Tunku Abdul Rahman except books written by Mubin Shepard and Ramlah Adam. Oral history contributes to subject area such as science, medical and agriculture. It has potentials to obtain unknown information which were kept in memory of individuals and group (Nadzan, 2012). Oral history project requires substantial amount of expenses, namely the recording equipments, travelling cost, correspondence, processing the recording and documentation (Nadzan, 2012). The authenticity of information gathered from the interview is a subject of considerable importance. As such, before undertaking oral history project on a particular topic a detailed research should be carried out. It may also be confronted with the issue of the race against time. As many informants in oral history projects were individuals who were in their 80s, facing the issue of time is inevitable as the individual may suddenly pass away or hospitalized.

CONCLUSION

Many institutions are now involved in undertaking oral history projects. With the formation of Oral History Association of Malaysia, it is hope will coordinate with this institution in undertaking a successful oral history projects. Other than documenting oral history programme, it will hinder duplication among institutions. Also the association will formulate codes of practice for oral history. One important effort that will be undertaken by the association will be the setting up of a database of oral history project. With each institutions namely government agencies, NGOs, undertaken oral history projects, the country's histories and heritage will be richer and it will be useful for research. Adequate sum of money should be allocated for oral history. Other than buying recording equipment, doing oral history projects involve travelling,

corresponding, documentation and publication. Information gathered would be authentic and could be used for research purposes. Oral history is not limited to do research in history but may involve other discipline such as science, technology and agriculture.

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