

Orality in the Context of Hong Kong Film History



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「口述」的範疇(Orality)在知識生產的領域中向來是民族學的專有財產。若說歷史的研究在傳統及實踐上偏向文字的記錄，那麼民族學就對沒有被寫下來的東西給予特別的關照。結構主義人類學家李維史特勞斯就指出，歷史是按照有意識地表達出來的資料去組織成的事實，而民族學則追溯社群生活實況中無意識的層面¹。

然而，此時此地該如何去理解電影資料館的一連串導演影人訪問？在歷史知識的生產上又該如何定位？首先必須肯定這是一項有價值的追述行動，填補了我們對本地影業過往在認知上的缺口。更重要的是，香港本地史的研究要到近十數年來才漸受正視²，談到本地影史，更是徘徊於找尋及辨別相關的文字、器物的階段中，不少似乎成了歷史定論的課題，其實是倘須鑑定和辯論的臨時立論，在這前提下，資料館的追述行動，就是在文字記述尚未充分成史的過程中一種必須的緩衝。

雖如此說，我們斷不能過份高估或高抬這類資料的權威性。我們現在身處的是文字影像文化的時域。民族學領域中的「口述」之能夠成為「口述歷史」(oral history)，蓋因研究對象主要為口述的文化(oral culture)及氛圍；因此，以今天的視點和後見出發，「口述歷史」是沒有文字記述的情況下獨有而必須的代替品，一項特殊的品種。這種獨有性和權威性卻斷不能隨便移植到今天的口錄追述行動上去。

要重新定位，必須回顧一下近一個世紀以來在歷史學範疇中所出現過的幾個階段：

(一)是什麼構成一物件的歷史價值？那些證據才算歷史證據？這是十九世紀歷史學家最關注的問題。英國史學家卡爾形容十九世紀是膜拜「事實」(facts)與「證據」(document)的時代³。法國的利科則視此為實證主義的繁囿。實證主義強調客觀性，即研究者不會介入所研究的對象。利科不單對此作出質疑，更指責他們把歷史簡化為文獻的收集和考證，過份高舉經驗論，強信現成的歷史已經存在於文獻之中。利科更指出這種做法犯了對偶然事件作決定論的毛病，把解釋的活動局限於把偶然事件聯繫起來⁴。

(二)以上的看法，到了十九世紀末分別由德國的狄爾泰及意大利的克羅齊兩位哲學家推翻，首次提出所有歷史都是「當代」歷史的說法，指出歷史的視野永遠是用現代人的眼睛看過去的，而且大底上是以當代的問題為促發點去透視過去的意義。這想法可算奠定了二十世紀現代及後現代觀點的歷史胸襟。

史學家歌連活在一九四五年的名著 "The Idea of History" 中更引申這個論點，說明沒有任何歷史的事實是以「不沾」(pure)的狀態到達我們手中的，歷史家因而要運用想像力去理解他們接觸到的前陳事物——「要學歷史就必須先嘗試去觸摸前人的思維狀態。」

(三)二十世紀以來在歷史學範疇內的一個重要跨進是對歷史哲學的重視，因而提出了種種有關歷史學家的寫作方法論的問題，以及出現了歷史知識的性質的論述：他們強調歷史事件與自然事件有別、歷史性的事實又得跟社會性的事實分別開來，還有敘事/敘述性的解釋之間的關係，因果與規律的不同等等。

"Orality" has always been the special property of ethnology in knowledge production. While history, by tradition and in practice, is biased towards the written word, ethnology is especially interested in what is not written. Structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss echoes such distinction, adding that history organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions, whereas ethnology does so to the unconscious conditions of social life.¹

The question then comes as to how we are to make sense of the Film Archive's series of interviews with directors and film personalities in the here-and-now context, and how we may situate these "oral documents" in the production of historical knowledge. Firstly, we must affirm the worth of these interviews for they fill in a major gap in our understanding of the local film industry. More importantly, concerted effort to produce serious scholarship on the local history of Hong Kong has been rare until the past decade or so.² When it comes to local film history, the struggle remains at the stage of searching for and identifying relevant literature and artefacts. Much of what we call historical truths about the cinema are at best tentative readings that warrant debate and verification. When written documents are still too disparate to form a wholesome discourse, the Film Archive's oral documentation becomes a necessary fill-up.

Having said that, one must guard against over accrediting the authority of such materials. For we are now talking about orality in a manuscript culture, an image culture, and a milieu in which visuality proliferates with technology. Looking now in hindsight, the leap from "orality" to "oral history" is very much a product unique to oral cultures whereby the scantiness of written records necessarily endows with orality's unique historiographic value - something that must not be recklessly transplanted to oral records of our time without reckoning the spatial-temporal and cultural differences. Oral history is after all a special category.

To put into perspective the Film Archive's endeavour, we must also review several key moments in the development of historiography in the past century in the West:

1) What accounts for a historical document? What constitutes the historical value of a thing? These questions are central to 19th-century historiography. According to English historian E.H. Carr, 19th-century is the age of fetishism of "facts" and "documents."ⁱⁱⁱ French philosopher Paul Ricoeur views this as a sign of the constraints of positivism, a position that upholds objectivity by which the researcher does not involve himself or herself with the object of study. Not only was Ricoeur skeptical about this view, but also other positivist beliefs in history: their reducing historical studies to the collection and verification of documents; the empiricist stance that ready-made history already exists in documents; and the deterministic view that imposes relation among random events, thus confining interpretive activities to such imposition.^{iv}

2) The above views were repudiated as early as the late 19th century by two philosophers, the German Wilhelm Dilthey and the Italian Benedetto Croce. They were among the first to give voice to the idea that all history is "contemporary history"; that history essentially sees the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems. This largely establishes the foundation of the modernist and postmodernist historiographic vision.

Dilthey and Croce's idea was picked up by Collingwood in 1945 in his famous work *The Idea of History*. Collingwood asserts that the facts of history never come to us "pure", and therefore historians are required of imaginative understanding for the past. History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing.

3) While the philosophy of history was basically rejected by 19th-century historians of the West, it was fully embraced in the 20th century, and has since then generated a few crucial questions that has transformed the landscape of historical studies. As a result, methodological issues in historiography and discourses on

(四)除了民族學之外，另一群為「口述」賦予重要地位的是七十年代以來漸成勢力的「文化研究」倡導者，在主張綜合各人文和社會學科的同時，提出所謂「新文化史」。這是「修正派歷史寫作」(Revisionist Historiography)的一種，強調從下而上，本地人、本地歷史、本地知識，正視普通平民百姓的音容以及日常生活面貌。口述的記錄便因而重新被強調，人誌學(Ethnography)的文法學再得到應用與發展。然而「新文化史」又同時強調敘事過程的作用，因而講述、文字記述本身便成為歷史知識生產的重要變數⁵。這個說法其實早在二十世紀較早時便由傳播史家麥克盧恩提出，再由Walter J. Ong發揚光大，指出媒體對組織認知世界的決定性作用⁶。

在上述的思潮背景下，我們再看資料館的追述行動就無法再純粹強調其對「事實」的重視這一面。肯定此舉的珍貴價值的同時，還得釐清以下幾個問題：

(一)「口述證據」(oral document)不等如「口述歷史」(oral history)。

(二)不要迷信「證據」：任何可接觸的口述文字資料都是經撰述者的解釋所過濾，而且細看一篇訪問的筆錄時，往往會發現在事件的次序承接上很多「空隙」有待填補，追述回憶的行動本身又不免為事件添上感情色彩等等。

最終，「口述」的資料盛載的是「人的記憶」，在口述文化的時代，記憶的作用是把事實不斷的重複，在此時此地，記憶卻是一種令過去「復活」的方法⁷。重活一次的過去卻是為「現在」而活的，因此再活過來的不單是當年現實細節，也同時是已淹沒迷失了的當年的心態；重拾的不是前人的秘笈智慧，而是他們的思想狀態。歷史的理解正是要好好掌握「記憶」，在理解的過程中透過重組、鑑證等更新它的意義。

註：

1. Michel de Certeau: "The Writing of History", 哥倫比亞大學出版, 紐約, 1988, 210頁。
2. 周佳榮: "導論——香港史學的成立和展望", 周佳榮及劉詠聰編《當代香港史學研究》, 香港三聯出版社, 1994, 8-9頁。
3. 卡爾: "What is History?", Penguin, 紐約, 1964, 16至21頁。
4. 利科: 《歷史學家的技藝與貢獻》及《法國史學對史學理論的貢獻》, 見"The Contribution of French Historiography to the Theory of History", 牛津大學出版社, 1993, 8-13頁。
5. Lynn Hunt 編著: "The New Cultural History", 美國加州大學出版社, 伯克萊、加州、倫敦, 1989。
6. 參考麥克盧恩的"Understanding Media: the Extension of Man" (紐約麥格勞-希爾出版社, 1964)及與Quentin Fiore合著的"The Medium is the Message" (Bantam Books, 1967), 以及Ong的"Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word" (Methuen, 倫敦, 1982)和"The Presence of the Word" (耶魯大學出版社, 1967)。此外Harold A. Innis的"The Bias of Communication" (多倫多大學出版社, 1951)亦有相類的討論。
7. Patrick H. Hutton: "History as an Art of Memory", 佛蒙特州大學出版, 漢諾威及倫敦, 1993, 17-20頁。

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the nature of historical knowledge are brought to the forefront. Philosophers of history draw distinctions between historical events and natural events, historical facts and social facts, variations in cause / effect and patterns.

- 4) Ever since the 1970s, with the gradual but disquieting emergence of cultural studies, "orality" returns but with a different twist. Partly a result of its inter-disciplinary vision, members of the cultural studies camp finally turn to issues of history. "New cultural history," as they call it, pertains to one kind of revisionist history-writing. It advocates a bottom-up perspective that insists on uncovering the long suppressed realities of the ordinary everyday individual from the oppression of official historical discourses. It believes in the local: local people, local history and local knowledge. As a result, orality becomes an important tool to give voice to the formerly unspeakable, but now complemented by the written record. Ethnology now becomes ethnography. New cultural history also acknowledges the effects of the narrative process, that is to say, oral narration and recording in words are necessary variables in the course of the production of historical knowledge. A precedent of this thesis was put forth much earlier in the century by Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, and further developed by his student Walter J. Ong, scholar of American cultural history. Both pointed out the decisive function of individual medium in organising our cognitive world.^{vi}

With the above thoughts, we can no longer celebrate ingenuously the value of "facts" of the Film Archive's "Oral History Project". We must bear in mind the following issues:

- 1) Oral document does not equate with oral history.
- 2) We must not make a fetish of facts. All oral documents are filtered through the interpretation of the interviewees. In studying an interview, we often discover many factual loopholes and gaps. Recollection is often vague, sketchy and selective, and events meet no precise explanation. Memory and recollection are often coloured by the emotions attached to the very act of retrospection.

Lastly, what oral documents carry is human memory. "Memory of repetition" is carried over from the time of oral culture to the present to be gradually replaced by "memory as a resurrection."^{vii} Living memory does not only recover the secret wisdom of the past, but resurrects their state of mind, not a different reality but a lost mentality. Historical memory depends more on reconstruction and interpretation, and less on inherited wisdom. Historical understanding should take possession of memory, and in the process transform its meaning.

Notes:

- i Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 210.
- ii Chow Kai-wing, *Introduction: the establishment and future prospects of historiography in Hong Kong*, (*Dangdai Xianggang shi xue yanjiu* [historical research in contemporary Hong Kong]), eds. Chow Kai-wing & Clara W.C. Ho, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1994, 8-9.
- iii E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, Harmondsworth, New York: Penguin, 1964, 16-21.
- iv Paul Ricoeur, *The Contribution of French Historiography to the Theory of History*, Oxford University Press, 1993, 8-13.
- v See Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989.
- vi See McLuhan's *Understanding Media: the Extension of Man*, (McGraw-Hill, 1964), *The Medium Is the Message* (Bantam Books, 1967) co-authored with Quentin Fiore; Ong's *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982) and *Presence of the Word* (Yale University Press, 1967). Argument of a similar vein is read in Harold A. Innis' *The Bias of Communication* (University of Toronto Press, 1951) with an introduction by Marshall McLuhan.
- vii Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, Hanover & London: University of Vermont, 1993, 17-20.

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