

# Research on Oral Archives in China based on Bibliometrics and knowledge mapping

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## Abstract

Using journal articles indexed in CNKI as the data source, this study carries out a bibliometric and visualization analysis to systematically explore the current research status, research hotspots, and developmental trends of oral archives studies in China. The results show that oral archives research in China began in 1981, with research attention gradually increasing over time, reaching a peak in 2019, and subsequently entering a stage of relatively stable development. Deng Jun and Peng Yan are identified as core authors in this research field. The development of oral archives research can be divided into five stages: the nascent stage, the initiation stage, the rapid development stage, the mature stage, and the stable development stage. Major research hotspots include the digital protection of ethnic minority cultures, the construction of local memory collections in libraries, the development of intangible cultural heritage archival resources, the development and value expansion of red archives, and the exploration of social memory and the functions of university archives, reflecting the complexity and multidimensional characteristics of oral archives research. Accordingly, this study proposes that future research on oral archives in China can be advanced along three main directions: the improvement and deepening of theoretical development, the in-depth exploration of social functions and historical value, and the development and dissemination of oral archives in the era of digital and intelligent technologies.

## Keywords

Oral archives; bibliometric analysis; knowledge mapping; research hotspots.

## 1. Introduction

Research on oral archives in China began in the 1980s and now spans more than four decades [1]. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, scholarly attention within the Chinese archival community has continued to increase. The 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Archives Undertaking explicitly identifies the construction of an archival resources system as a key priority during the 14th Five-Year Plan period and encourages the collection of oral archives in order to enrich both the content and forms of archival resources. Strengthening research on the development of oral archives is of substantial significance for sustaining the vitality of Chinese culture, preserving cultural subjectivity, and filling gaps left by other categories of archival materials.

A review of the literature indicates that numerous scholars have examined different dimensions of oral archives and have analyzed the opportunities and challenges they present. However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to bibliometric and visualization-based analyses. Drawing upon data from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), this study focuses on literature related to oral archives. Through bibliometric analysis and visualization techniques, it systematically maps the current research landscape, core themes, and emerging trends in this field in China. The objective is to provide reference points for both scholarly

inquiry and practical advancement, thereby promoting the systematic development of oral archive construction in China.

## 2. Data Sources and Analytical Tools

This study uses the journal database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as its primary data source. On the CNKI advanced search interface, the terms “oral archives,” “oral history,” and “recorded interviews” were initially employed as search keywords. To balance recall and precision, multiple rounds of testing were conducted. The final search expression was determined as:

TI% = ('oral' + 'interview archives' + 'audio archives') OR KY% = ('oral' + 'interview archives' + 'audio archives').

This formulation was designed to ensure that the retrieved results would comprehensively cover representative research outputs in the field of oral archives in China. The subject categories were limited to “Library, Information and Digital Library” and “Archival Science and Archival Undertaking.” The search scope was set to the overall database—academic journals, with no lower time limit and an upper limit of November 31, 2025.

All retrieved records were manually cleaned to remove conference briefings, book reviews, news reports, and other items with low relevance. After this process, 1,220 valid records were retained for analysis. The primary analytical tools employed in this study include Cite Space, SPSS, and Microsoft Excel.

## 3. Current Status of Oral History Research in China

### 3.1. Analysis of Publication Volume and Trends

In bibliometric analysis, the volume of publications provides an intuitive reflection of a field’s academic vitality and evolving research trajectory, and thus serves as a key indicator for assessing the developmental dynamics of oral archive studies.

A systematic count was conducted of the annual number of publications related to oral archives in China. Based on this dataset, corresponding figures illustrating both the annual publication volume and the cumulative publication volume were generated, as shown in Fig. 1.

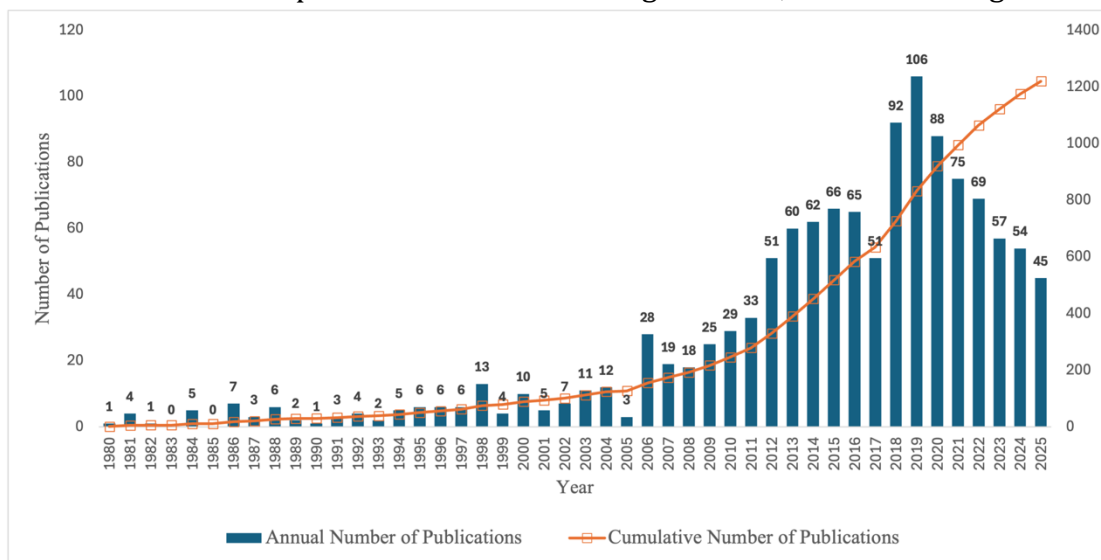


Fig. 1 Trends in Annual and Cumulative Publication Volume

According to the publication statistics and an examination of specific documents, the earliest article on oral archives in China was published in 1980. Entitled “The Construction of Photographic, Film, and Audio Archives Should Be Valued at an Early Stage,” it appeared in *Archives Science Bulletin*. This article was the first to state explicitly that audio archives, like other forms of archival materials, constitute an integral component of the national archival fonds and that their management should be duly emphasized [2].

The first article of substantive research significance in the field of oral archives in China was “Oral Archives and Their Emergence,” published in 1986 in the journal *Archives*. This study examined the concept of oral archives and the historical background of their emergence [3]. In 1993, “An Overview of Oral Archive Practices Abroad” was published in *Shanghai Archival Work*, providing a systematic introduction to relevant international practices and experiences [4]. From that year onward, research on oral archives in China increasingly drew upon foreign theoretical achievements and practical experiences—such as studies of developments in Africa [5], the United States [6] and Singapore [7]—thereby initiating a phase in which an international perspective contributed to the advancement of domestic scholarship.

Based on the observed publication trends, this study divides the development of oral archive research in China into five stages: ① Embryonic Stage (1980–1992): During this period, publication output was extremely limited. Only one article was published in 1980 and one in 1982, and the cumulative number of publications from 1980 to 1992 totaled just 37. Research mainly consisted of introducing proceedings from international conferences and discussing the basic concepts of oral archives. ② Enlightenment Stage (1993–2000): Annual publications increased from two in 1993 to a cumulative total of 52 by 2000. During this period, scholars began to examine successful international experiences more systematically and attempted to adapt these insights to domestic practice. ③ Rapid Development Stage (2001–2015): Annual publication output continued to rise steadily, increasing from five articles in 2001 to an annual average exceeding 50 articles. Research expanded from foundational theoretical inquiry to explorations of technical methodologies, demonstrating both diversification and practical orientation. The scope of research broadened to include areas such as the preservation of ethnic minority cultures, the exploration of local characteristics, and wider social applications. ④ Maturity Stage (2016–2019): During this stage, the annual average publication volume exceeded 60 articles, reaching a peak of 106 articles in 2019. The cumulative number of publications from 2016 to 2019 reached 832. Oral archive research entered a peak phase and became a prominent academic focus. Substantively, research began to emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration and the role of oral archives in cultural heritage preservation. ⑤ Stable Development Stage (2020–present): Since 2020, although annual publication output has declined slightly, it has remained at a relatively high level of 50 to 80 articles per year. Research in this period has entered a phase of steady development. Greater attention has been paid to practical value, particularly the function of oral archives in shaping social memory and transmitting historical and cultural heritage. At the same time, efforts to innovate in terms of technologies and methodologies have gradually emerged.

To analyze more precisely the publication trends of oral archive research in China, this study employed SPSS and Microsoft Excel to perform curve fitting on the annual cumulative publication data. After testing multiple fitting models—including linear, logarithmic, and polynomial functions—and conducting repeated comparisons, it was found that the cubic function model provided a better fit than both the linear and exponential models.

$$y(x) = 0.0276x^3 - 0.8347x^2 + 8.5639x \quad (1)$$

$$R^2 = 0.994 \quad (2)$$

The cumulative publication data and the corresponding fitting results are presented in Fig. 2, where  $y$  denotes the cumulative annual number of publications and  $x$  represents the year of publication.

The primary rationale for selecting the cubic function lies in its superior capacity to model dynamic growth patterns. A linear model fails to capture variations in growth rate, while an exponential model may overstate long-term growth trends, thereby producing projections that deviate from empirical reality. In contrast, the cubic function more effectively captures the nonlinear characteristics of publication growth, particularly during periods of rapid expansion in the research field. Therefore, the cubic model demonstrates greater rationality and accuracy in describing the developmental trajectory of oral archive research.

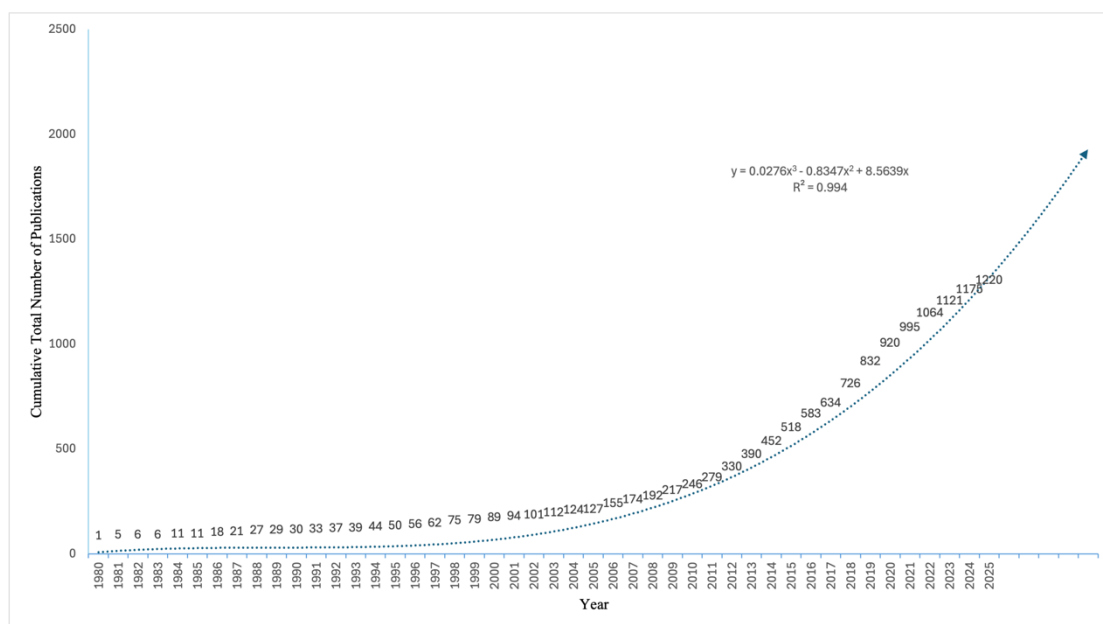


Fig. 2 Fitted Curve of the Development Trend of Oral Archive Research in China

An examination of the fitted curve depicting the developmental trend of oral archive research indicates that, over the next five years, the cumulative publication curve is projected to maintain a pronounced upward trajectory. This suggests that the volume of publications in this field indexed in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) is expected to continue growing and remains promising in the foreseeable future.

### 3.2. Analysis of Core Contributing Authors

According to Price’s Law, the number of publications produced by highly productive authors should account for approximately half of the total output in a given field. The formula for calculating the threshold of highly productive authors is:  $M=0.749 \sqrt{Nmax}$ , where  $M$  represents the minimum number of publications required to qualify as a highly productive author, and  $\sqrt{Nmax}$  denotes the highest number of publications by a single author in the field [8]. A search conducted in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database indicates that  $\sqrt{Nmax}$  in this field is 14. Accordingly,  $M \approx 3$ , meaning that authors with more than three publications are considered highly productive. Statistical results show that 72 authors have published more than three articles, collectively contributing 325 papers. These highly productive authors account for 6.9% of the total number of authors, a relatively low proportion; however, their publications represent 27% of the total output. This figure does not reach the 50% benchmark stipulated by Price’s Law for the formation of a core author group, suggesting that the depth and concentration of research in the field of oral archives in China remain insufficient, with considerable room for further development. For analytical

convenience, Price's Law is employed here only as a reference framework. In this study, authors with  $\geq 3$  publications are used as the operational criterion for identifying highly productive contributors.

Highly productive authors are not necessarily core research authors, but core research authors are typically highly productive. Therefore, highly productive authors can be treated as candidate core research authors, and the comprehensive index evaluation method can be used to identify the core research authors [9]. The comprehensive index evaluation method quantifies multiple evaluation indicators that exert substantial influence on the object being evaluated, assigns corresponding scores and weights to these indicators, and converts them into a unified index form for overall ranking. Based on the comprehensive index and ranking, the level or relative merit of the evaluation objects can then be determined. This method generally includes five steps: defining the evaluation indicators, assigning weights, calculating the index, determining the threshold, and aggregating the results for ranking [8].

Using the expert survey method (a commonly used approach in evaluation studies in which domain experts are consulted to determine indicators and their relative importance), the influence indicators of core research authors and their corresponding weights were investigated. Four indicators were selected for evaluation: the total number of relevant publications (A), the number of relevant papers published as the first author (B), the number of relevant publications indexed by core journals—specifically those included in the Peking University Core Journals Index or the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index and its extended edition (C), and the total citation count of the relevant papers (D). The weight ratio assigned to these indicators is 3:2:2:3. The formula for calculating the comprehensive index (X) is as follows:

$$X_i = \left( \frac{A_i}{A} \times 30\% + \frac{B_i}{B} \times 20\% + \frac{C_i}{C} \times 20\% + \frac{D_i}{D} \times 30\% \right) \times 100 \quad (3)$$

where  $i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, 13$ .

After calculating and ranking the comprehensive index for the highly productive authors, the statistical results of the comprehensive indices of the top ten core research authors can be obtained, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Comprehensive Index Statistics of Core Research Authors in the Field of Oral Archives Research in China

Highly Productive Author	A	B	C	D	A Index	B Index	C Index	D Index	Comprehensive Index
Deng Jun	9	7	8	150	0.3107	0.2363	0.365	0.5801	149.21
Peng Yan	14	14	9	111	0.1494	0.4727	0.4105	0.4289	146.15
Feng Yun	9	9	8	9	0.3107	0.3039	0.365	0.3058	128.54
Wang Ruan	7	2	7	149	0.2416	0.0675	0.3202	0.5765	120.58
Quan Genxian	8	7	6	85	0.2761	0.2363	0.2737	0.3282	111.43
Gao Mian	9	9	6	44	0.3107	0.3039	0.2737	0.1699	105.82
Wang Yulong	8	5	5	85	0.2761	0.1688	0.2281	0.3282	100.12
Liu Weirong	11	6	3	40	0.3796	0.2026	0.1378	0.1545	87.45
Huang Xiangfei	6	5	0	106	0.2071	0.1688	0	0.409	78.49
Gao Jianhui	9	5	3	36	0.3107	0.1688	0.1378	0.139	75.63

Based on the comprehensive index statistics presented in Table 1, this study classifies the core research authors into three tiers. The first tier is represented by Deng Jun and Peng Yan. Deng

Jun demonstrates relatively high index values across all four indicators, with a total citation count of 150, which ranks far ahead of the others. This indicates that Deng Jun's research achievements have exerted substantial academic influence and therefore merit close scholarly attention. Peng Yan ranks first in both the total number of publications and the number of first-author publications, and also holds the highest number of papers indexed by core journals. This reflects her sustained contribution and central position in the field of oral archives research. The second tier includes Feng Yun, Wang Ruan, and Quan Genxian, whose comprehensive indices are 128.54, 120.58, and 111.43, respectively. Although a certain gap remains between them and the first tier, they still belong to the group of core research authors. Feng Yun demonstrates relatively balanced performance across the four indicators, particularly excelling in the number of publications indexed by core journals and the number of first-author publications, which indicates stability in both academic productivity and research quality. Wang Ruan ranks second in total citation count, suggesting a relatively high research quality; however, the relatively low number of total publications and first-author publications indicates a lower level of research concentration and independent authorship. Quan Genxian shows moderate performance in terms of total publications and first-author publications, while achieving relatively higher scores in core journal indexing and total citations, reflecting a noteworthy level of academic influence. The third tier is represented by Gao Mian, Wang Yulong, and Liu Weirong, whose comprehensive indices range from 78.49 to 105.82, indicating a certain degree of research influence. Gao Mian scores relatively high in total publications and first-author publications; however, the citation count and the number of publications indexed by core journals remain comparatively low, suggesting that the overall academic impact still requires further improvement. Wang Yulong shows relatively high scores in total publications and total citations, but lower scores in first-author publications and core journal indexing, implying that this author may participate more frequently in collaborative research. Liu Weirong has a relatively high number of publications, yet the other three indicators remain comparatively low, indicating that the depth and influence of the research could still be strengthened. In addition, Huang Xiangfei and Gao Jianhui can be regarded as potential core authors worthy of attention. Huang Xiangfei has a relatively high citation count, but the number of publications indexed by core journals is zero, suggesting that the research topics may involve innovative or emerging issues and thus deserve further observation. Gao Jianhui's comprehensive index is 75.63, close to the minimum threshold of core research authors. Although the author has nine publications, the other indicators remain relatively weak. Authors with such a foundation of academic output may further strengthen their core status if they continue to deepen their research in the future.

### **3.3. Analysis of Research Hotspots in Oral History Studies in China**

In this study, keyword clustering analysis was conducted on the bibliographic records of 1,220 retrieved articles using VOS viewer. The analysis identified five major clustering groups with relatively large cluster sizes. The visualization results are shown in Fig. 3. The size of each cluster area reflects the scale of the cluster: the larger the numerical value of the cluster size, the greater the level of attention and research devoted to the corresponding topic within the field of oral archives studies in China [10].



	intangible cultural heritage; university libraries	
Red Archives and the Functional Expansion of Archives Institutions	value; oral historical materials; library history; development and utilization; archives institutions; red archives	15.50
Social Memory and Archival Functions of Universities	oral archives; solicitation; collection; archives; social memory; universities	51.33

By examining Fig. 3 together with Table 2, the distribution of research topics in oral archives studies in China can be clearly observed. Each cluster theme demonstrates relatively distinct research focuses and academic orientations. Based on this, the major research directions are analyzed separately as follows.

### 3.3.1. Integration of Ethnic Minority Culture and Digital Humanities

The keywords in this research direction include “protection,” “ethnic minorities,” and “culture,” indicating that the primary focus lies in the preservation and transmission of ethnic minority culture through digital approaches. The attention devoted to this topic reflects the growing application value of digital humanities technologies in the field of oral archives. An analysis of the relevant literature shows that digital technologies play a crucial role in preserving the history and culture of ethnic minority groups. For example, researcher Yang Jing [11] proposed a method for protecting endangered cultural resources through database construction and cloud storage, which has achieved notable results when implemented in Yunnan Province and other ethnic minority regions. In addition, digital humanities, as an emerging technological approach, has injected new vitality into the preservation and transmission of ethnic culture. Gao Jianhui proposed a resource acquisition workflow and methodological framework centered on database construction and information access, aiming to facilitate the systematic collection and utilization of oral historical materials. This approach provides a practical solution for the emergency collection and preservation of ethnic minority oral history resources [12].

### 3.3.2. Specialized Development of Libraries and Local Literature Collections

Libraries play a crucial role in the specialized development of local literature collections. As shown in Fig. 3, “local literature” and “distinctive collections” appear as closely connected key nodes, indicating that in the development and utilization of oral archives, libraries serve as important practical platforms that facilitate the archiving and dissemination of culturally distinctive local resources. A review of the relevant literature further shows that both public libraries and university libraries have been actively involved in the collection and development of oral archives related to local culture. For instance, the Zhejiang Library has constructed local historical archives through its “local literature specialization” initiative, providing a new perspective for serving regional cultural preservation and dissemination [13]. In addition, some studies have conducted comparative analyses of the development of oral archives in libraries in China and the United States, proposing that the functions of oral archives should be strengthened in terms of resource integration and social services within the library sector [14].

### 3.3.3. Intangible Cultural Heritage and Archival Resource Development

From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) transmission, although some ethnic ICH traditions are documented and disseminated through written records that describe techniques or processes, a larger proportion of such heritage is transmitted through oral narration and in-person demonstration, forming a collective mode of inheritance. Therefore, the exploration and construction of oral archival resources related to intangible cultural heritage constitute an essential approach to safeguarding and transmitting ICH. There is an

inseparable relationship between intangible cultural heritage and oral archives. As shown in Fig. 3, “intangible cultural heritage” and “resource development” form a closely connected thematic network. This indicates that one of the major research hotspots in oral archives studies concerns the archivalization of cultural heritage and the development of related archival resources. The oral documentation and archival preservation of ICH have been repeatedly emphasized in the literature. For example, researcher You Jinghan proposed the use of oral archives to compensate for the limitations of traditional written documentation, while integrating digital technologies to enable the long-term preservation of intangible cultural heritage resources [15]. In addition, the China Memory Project provides a nationwide reference case for the archival preservation of intangible cultural heritage through the collection and organization of oral history materials [16].

### **3.3.4. Red Archives and the Functional Expansion of Archival Institutions**

Red archives have become a prominent research hotspot in recent years within the field of oral archives studies. This research direction primarily focuses on the preservation and reutilization of red historical memory. By employing oral history methodologies to further explore and effectively utilize red archives, it is possible to expand the depth and breadth of the archival mission of preserving history, informing governance, and educating society. In the clustering map, the keywords “red archives,” “archives institutions,” and “development and utilization” form a secondary cluster network, highlighting the central role of archival institutions in the development and utilization of red archival resources. Existing studies have focused on the active exploration undertaken by archives institutions in the collection, organization, and utilization of oral archival materials, while continuously examining the important role of oral archives in the construction of red archival resource systems. For example, scholar Li Jianwei analyzed practical cases of the archivalization of red oral history, proposing an approach that integrates archival resources with red cultural education [17]. Similarly, Xu Lijuan suggested improving the red archives system through the incorporation of oral historical materials, thereby further strengthening its social and educational functions [18].

### **3.3.5. Social Memory and the Archival Functions of Universities**

Social memory theory focuses on the social construction of memory, emphasizing the interaction between individual memory and collective memory, and thereby provides a new analytical perspective for the study of oral archives [19]. One of the core issues in oral archives research is precisely the construction of social memory, and universities serve as important practical platforms for such research. As shown in Fig. 3, the key nodes “social memory” and “universities” are closely interconnected. Combined with the literature analysis, it can be observed that universities collect archival materials through methods such as faculty and student interviews, which not only support the construction of campus cultural memory, but also contribute to the continuity of broader social memory. For example, scholar Wang Xuedi analyzed how digital technologies facilitate the preservation and dissemination of university historical archives. In addition, researcher Yang Jing emphasized the expansion of university archival functions, suggesting that alumni interviews can be used to document regional history, thereby strengthening the social function of archives [21].

## **4. Advancing Pathways for Oral Archives Research in China**

To promote the higher-quality development and advancement of this field in the new era, this study, building upon the existing research hotspots, explores the development pathways of oral archives research from three perspectives: theoretical and methodological development, social value, and the technological environment. This analysis aims to provide a reference for further deepening the future development trajectory of oral archives research in China.

#### **4.1. Advancing the Improvement and Deepening of Theoretical Development**

The improvement and deepening of theoretical development help enhance the depth and standardization of oral archives research, thereby laying a solid foundation for subsequent studies. To this end, the systematic development of oral archives research should be strengthened. First, the attributes of oral archives should be clearly defined. Oral archives should be recognized as authentic records of real-life practices, and their authenticity can be ensured through standardized collection procedures and verification methods. Second, the necessity of promoting oral archives development should be clarified. The construction of oral archives is of great significance for the rescue and preservation of cultural heritage, and it also holds important value for the high-quality development of archival work. Therefore, oral archives development should be regarded as one of the fundamental functions of archival institutions. Third, the connotation and scope of oral archives should be further clarified. On the basis of archival science theory, multidisciplinary perspectives from fields such as History, Anthropology, and Sociology should be incorporated. This interdisciplinary approach can strengthen theoretical interpretation, help establish a relatively unified theoretical framework, and promote the standardized development of oral archives construction. Fourth, a comprehensive evaluation system and long-term mechanism should be established. By introducing indicators such as archival utilization rate and social influence, research outcomes and practical achievements can be regularly assessed, thereby ensuring the sustainable development of oral archives initiatives.

#### **4.2. Advancing the In-Depth Exploration of Social Functions and Historical Value**

The core value of oral archives lies in their ability to fill gaps in social memory. Research on oral archives should therefore aim to present social memory in a comprehensive and multidimensional manner, restoring historical facts as authentically and completely as possible and constructing vivid memories of the nation, ethnic groups, and society. First, it is necessary to promote research oriented toward social application, strengthening collaboration among multiple stakeholders and integrating oral archives with fields such as community education and cultural tourism. For example, oral-history-based guide systems could be developed in red tourism sites to enhance visitors' experiential engagement with historical learning. At the same time, during the documentation of major historical events, oral archives can be combined with traditional archival records to establish public memory repositories, thereby providing references for policy-making. Second, the historical value of oral archives should be further explored through the development of targeted and distinctive research topics, which can complement the limitations of mainstream historical narratives and address the diverse needs of different social groups. For instance, oral histories of groups such as women and migrant workers can be documented to promote greater social inclusiveness and equity. In addition, collecting oral histories of writers and artists can reveal the creative processes and stories behind artistic works, deepening the understanding of cultural production. Furthermore, the value of red oral archives should be thoroughly explored and effectively utilized in order to continue historical memory and transmit cultural heritage across generations.

#### **4.3. Advancing Development and Dissemination Pathways in the Era of Digital and Intelligent Technologies**

The wave of digital and intelligent technologies has brought both opportunities and challenges to the development of oral archives. Building upon existing research, future studies can promote the development of oral archives in China in the digital-intelligent era from three main dimensions: legal protection, public participation, and resource optimization. At the level of legal protection, greater attention should be given to copyright protection and privacy

protection in oral archives. Establishing more comprehensive laws, regulations, and standardized guidelines would help reduce copyright disputes and provide an institutional foundation for the orderly development of oral archives. At the level of public participation, it is important to enhance the public's capacity for information creation and historical participation, ensuring that citizens can take part in the process of constructing historical narratives. The establishment of open online supervision platforms can strengthen public understanding and recognition of oral archives, encouraging citizens to become active contributors to the construction of historical memory. Meanwhile, user-friendly digital platforms should be developed to provide interactive historical education tools and resources, thereby encouraging the public to share their own oral histories. At the level of resource optimization, unified archival information standards and data formats should be formulated to ensure the compatibility of archival data across institutions. At the same time, a comprehensive collection and sharing mechanism for oral archives should be established to facilitate inter-institutional information exchange and connectivity. In addition, cooperation among libraries, archival institutions, and technology enterprises should be encouraged in order to promote cross-platform integration and sharing of oral archives resources, thereby enhancing their accessibility and long-term value.

## 5. Conclusion

Looking ahead, research on oral archives in China should build upon the existing foundation by further promoting the systematic construction of a theoretical framework, deepening the exploration of their social functions and historical value, and actively adapting to the trends of the digital-intelligence era. In particular, it is necessary to explore innovative approaches that integrate technological empowerment with public participation. Only through coordinated advancement in theory, practice, and technology can oral archive research in China achieve a fundamental shift from quantitative expansion to qualitative improvement, thereby providing solid support for the high-quality development of archival undertakings and the sustained construction of national cultural memory.

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