

Minority Oral Tradition in China

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Non-textual, performative oral traditions oustrip written texts in terms of kinesics, expression, intonation, situation, and so forth, all of which dimensions convey metaphors that contain a wealth of intuition. It takes a special form of mnemonics, integrated into the narrator's performances, to strengthen, re-present, and reconstruct local memories. Oral history relies on performativity for inheritance and representation, and the performance of oral history is the transformation of three-dimensional social memory. Such a medium has no gender bias; both men and women can perform and listen to it. Oral history rejects linguistic hegemony and can be performed in various languages, with its audience coming from either the nobility or the "untouchables."

In a "digitalized" or "digitalizing" world, oral traditions provide us with strong moral support via the sense or experience of bodily presence that we start to enjoy with our parents the moment we are born into the world. Oral traditions are one of the major sources for identity formation, giving group members moral comfort and a feeling of unity. No complete, healthy personality can be cultivated for a man or a woman in a society if he or she is denied access to oral traditions while such traditions are available. More plurality and diversity are allowed for oral traditions than for digital technology. Such differences are especially meaningful for a nation-building China that embraces more and more homogeneity and tolerates less and less heterogeneity in terms of culture and language.

In addition, oral traditions can overstep the boundary between "idealism" and "materialism" by incorporation of both: corporeal skill and mental wisdom are always integrated into habitus or "doxa," as Bourdieu would put it.¹

¹ Habitus: as defined by Bourdieu (1990), a culturally specific way not only of doing and speaking, but also of seeing, thinking, and categorizing. Habitus tends to be "naturalized" in that it is taken for granted or assimilated into the unconscious, so that habitus is a necessary condition of action and shared understanding.

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References

Bourdieu 1990

Pierre Bourdieu. "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices," and "Belief and the Body." In *The Logic of Practice*. Trans. by Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 52-79.