

CHINADAILY

Eyewitnesses recall the past for posterity



From left: Ron Meyer, NBC Universal vice-chairman; Xu Xin, Nanjing University professor; Ming Hsieh, chairman and CEO of Fulgent Therapeutics and USC Trustee; Chang Zhiqiang, Nanjing Massacre survivor; and Stephen D. Smith, executive director of USC Shoah Foundation, at the USC Global Conference 2015 on Friday. *Photo courtesy of China Daily*

By Wang Hongyi in Shanghai

More survivors of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre will be interviewed this year as part of a collaborative oral history project being jointly conducted by Chinese and US research institutes.

On Dec 13, 1937, the Japanese military captured Nanjing, which was then China's capital, and over the course of the next six weeks killed as many as 300,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers who had already laid down their arms.

To preserve the testimonies of the last survivors of the massacre, the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education and the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall joined hands in 2012 to create the Shoah Foundation's Nanjing Massacre collection of eyewitness accounts.

The first 12 testimonies of survivors of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre were recorded in December that year and integrated into

the Visual History Archive in February 2014. The next 18 testimonies were recorded in September and October 2014.

The average age of the interviewees was 85, with the oldest survivor interviewed 94.

"When it comes to documentary history, it's very important for us to learn specifically and personally about the lives of individuals," said Stephen D. Smith, executive director of the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History

and Education, who was attending the USC Global Conference 2015 in Shanghai on Friday.

He said it is important to record what the survivors' lives were like before the massacre and how their lives were affected afterwards. "We not only ask about what happened in those terrible months," he said. "We also ask what kind of lifestyle they had, and what happened after and who they have become."

But he said time is running out to talk to the eyewitnesses "who can add new perspectives and understanding to the history of the Nanjing Massacre," and they are trying to record as many as they can to show what happened in the city through their eyes.

Smith said they will start to collect the testimonies of another 30 or so survivors this year, "but it's difficult to say the exact number, as it depends on how many survivors are still alive and how many are strong enough and willing to give their testimonies."

"What's surprising is that each day more people say 'I want to be part of that and tell my story'. So the number could grow to 50 or so. However, the number of survivors is very small now," he said.

The number of Nanjing massacre survivors is reportedly fewer than 200, which makes the videoing of their testimonies even more urgent.

The USC Shoah Foundation also held a panel discussion on "Nanjing: The Power of Survivors' Stories and Why Capturing them Matters" during the conference in Shanghai on Friday.

"A lot of work has been done. More and more people in China and the world are learning more about the massacre in Nanjing," said Chang Zhiqiang, the survivor of the Nanjing Massacre.

During the panel discussion, the 87-year-old recalled his experiences during the Nanjing massacre. Several Japanese soldiers

broke into the house where Chang's family members were hiding. His father and two brothers were shot. His elder sister was raped and then killed. A Japanese soldier bayoneted his mother. Chang Zhiqiang's youngest brother who was still a babe in her arms also died later. Only Chang and his other sister survived.

"These video testimonies are very valuable historical records. They allow more people in the world to learn about that terrible part of history in Nanjing," said Zhu Chengshan, curator of the Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Invaders.

In the cooperation with the Shoah Foundation, the Memorial Hall acts as a link with the Nanjing survivor community and provides expertise in supporting the interview methodology and process.

The Memorial Hall has around 4,000 testimonies of its own, mainly written testimonies collected over the past two decades, with a smaller number of audio-visual testimonies filmed in the 1990s. Copies of the testimonies filmed by the Shoah Foundation will be added to the Memorial Hall's existing collection to be used for research and education.

"In the research program, we are interested in what specifically happened here and how remembering that can help stop such violence continuing to occur," Smith said.

These testimonies will also bring the past alive for the younger generation, as Smith said they will bring these testimonies along with other testimonies together into schools.

The testimonies are also used as the context for a film on the Nanjing Massacre that will be distributed around the world.

USC Global Conference 2015 brought together leaders of the USC community in Shanghai from Thursday to Saturday to examine cutting-edge innovations that are already changing the world and the

opportunities they present for the future.

USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education is dedicated to making audio-visual interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides a compelling voice for education and action.

Key Facts

- The Institute houses nearly 53,000 audio-visual testimonies conducted in 62 countries and in 39 languages.
- Steven Spielberg founded the institute in 1994 to videotape and preserve interviews with survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust.
- The institute holds 11 patents on digital collection management technologies.
- The institute celebrated its 20th anniversary in March 2013, commemorating with the start of filming Schindler's List in Krakow, Poland.
- The Shoah Foundation moved to its permanent home at the University of Southern California in January 2006.
- Testimonies average over two hours in length, including personal history before, during and after the firsthand experience of genocide.
- 11,000 hours of video testimony have been recorded with all content indexed and searchable.
- Rwandan testimonies were added to the Visual History Archive and IWitness educational website in Spring 2013.
- Currently the USC Shoah Foundation employs 60 people worldwide.
- Stephen D. Smith serves as executive director of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education.