

# Research on Field Investigation Methods of Folk drama

Huhe Qiao<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Candidate, Literature Department, No.1 Northwest New Village, Lanzhou, China

**Abstract.** Field investigation is an important research method for studying folk drama. Taking field survey experience of Errentai as an example, this article summarizes the methods and precautions that need to be used in the field survey of folk drama, hoping to provide a substantive case for the research methods of folk drama.

## 1 FOREWORD

Folk drama is an important part of folk literature, and it is also a form of folk literature and art with the highest artistic achievements, the largest performance scale, and the most complete performance links. Conducting a field survey of folk drama is conducive to comprehensively grasping the current situation and development rules of folk drama performance, and is also an important supplement and detail improvement to the textual research of traditional folk drama. Through participation in observation, questionnaire interviews, and other methods, it is of great practical significance to further understand the psychological state of the audience of folk drama and the latest performance scripts of folk drama in the contemporary society. This article will take the popular Errentai drama in North China as an example, and explore the field investigation methods of folk drama through the author's experience and field investigation practice.

At present, the theoretical research on folk drama and field research has been relatively rich. For example, Khayambashi Shirin<sup>1</sup> and Vetter Jeremy<sup>3</sup> and other scholars discussed the history of field research and the challenges it poses, and some scholars carried out thinking in the process of field research<sup>4</sup>. Steadman Jones Richard<sup>5</sup> provided the case of field research. Liu Hongyan<sup>6</sup>, Zhao Q, Lu X<sup>7</sup>, and others have conducted relevant research on Chinese folk drama and Errentai. Alshallaqi Mohammad<sup>2</sup> also carried out a useful discussion on field research and research ethics.

## 2 FOLK DRAMA AND ERRENTAI DRAMA

Throughout China, there has always been a tradition of performing folk drama, and various forms and styles of folk drama performance have been derived from different local cultures. Folk dramas are based on mass life, with language art as the backbone, and incorporate music and dance elements around language art texts. In

modern environments, elements such as lighting are added to enhance the overall performance atmosphere.

Errentai is developed on the basis of Mongols and Han folk songs, and is widely distributed in several provinces in North China. Errentai's performance forms not only include singing and dancing, drama, rhymes, but also include various forms such as proverbs and joke sketches.

The content of the Errentai not only includes Mongolian folk songs sung in Chinese, but also the theme of expressing the yearning for beautiful love among the young people of the Mongolian and Han ethnic groups, as well as the content of depicting the daily life scenes of the local people. Props and clothing are relatively simple, and most of them are production and daily necessities, as well as clothing, shoes, and hats.

The research results of Errentai are relatively few, especially the field research. Research on the Errentai often traces its history of development, as well as its artistic expression, language style, singing, and dance aspects. There are also articles on the current situation and future direction of Errentai through on-site investigation, but the exploration is not very in-depth.

## 3 SELECT FIELD SURVEY POINTS

Errentai is a form of folk drama that is widely spread in Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Hebei, Shaanxi, Ningxia, and other provinces. Areas where performance of the Errentai is relatively concentrated include Hequ in Shanxi, Fugu in Shaanxi, Kangbao in Hebei, Hubao'e in Inner Mongolia, and Ulanqab in Inner Mongolia.

Errentai drama is widely spread in five provinces and regions. Therefore, the selection of field survey sites will inevitably be concentrated in the above five provinces and regions. According to the literature review before the survey, the Tumet region in Inner Mongolia is the most suitable field survey point. There are three reasons for this:

1. The Tumet region is densely populated and economically developed, with a relatively large number

\* Corresponding author: [johuhint@outlook.com](mailto:johuhint@outlook.com)

of performance scenes for field investigation and observation.

2. The Tumet region has a large number of performers and rich interview objects. Compared with other regions, the cultural integration of Mongolia and Han is the most prominent feature.

3. The author was born in Hohhot City, and has a good grasp of the local dialect and dialect, making it relatively easy to conduct in-depth interviews and observations in the society.

Based on the above reasons, the author chose Tumet Right Banner as a field investigation site.

## 4 FIELDWORK METHODS AND PROCESSES

Fieldwork is not accomplished overnight, but rather a manual task with numerous links and cumbersome operations. The specific operation process should follow the following process:

### 1. Establish trust relationships

In the field survey process, the most important and prerequisite task is to establish trust relationships. It can be said that once a trust relationship is established. Fieldwork is half successful. Facing an acquaintance society like China, how to become one of our acquaintances is the first practical issue we face. There are three actual situations of trusting relationships:

#### (1) Already integrated

Some scholars choose a field survey location that is in itself their hometown or a place where they work, study, and live. I am already an acquaintance in an acquaintance society, and I am extremely familiar with the interviewees. Such fieldwork sites already have mature trust and social relationships, but it is important to point out whether they are in an information cocoon.

Many times, we don't really understand the environment we are in, and we turn a blind eye to many things, unable to discover the underlying principles and problems. Therefore, if we enter a familiar place to carry out field research, we must avoid this situation. We not only need to observe the content of our investigation with a critical perspective, but also constantly reflect on whether our investigation views are biased.

#### (2) A familiar stranger

Some scholars or field survey workers have already lived in the society where the field survey site is located before entering the field, but due to factors such as studying, they have failed to establish strong social relationships in society. I call this situation a familiar stranger, and it's often the worst. When faced with certain issues, they are often ignored because they are commonplace, and often fall into a situation where the beholder is confused. The way to solve this problem is to compare, see, think, and reflects more.

If you have known about the relevant situation of the field research site, you should avoid blind arrogance and carefully screen the authenticity of the information you have obtained. A little knowledge is the most troublesome, and it is also the biggest obstacle to our in-depth field research. All successful field research

should be based on comprehensive understanding and in-depth insight.

### (3) How to integrate strangers

The latest situation is that scholars who need to carry out fieldwork know little or nothing about fieldwork sites, and there are no acquaintances or simply strangers in the fieldwork society. This often happens to young students, as being the case with the author. Under such circumstances, how to establish a trust relationship. First, you are required to bring a letter of introduction issued by your unit to the government for assistance. Secondly, it is necessary in order to find ways to integrate into society, such as finding a part-time job locally and establishing preliminary interpersonal relationships. Finally, slowly develop acquaintances and expand the network.

In the existing research results, many field research disguise themselves as teachers, teach foreign languages or find other strengths to enter the community that needs investigation. Only by truly integrating into the community that needs to be surveyed can we observe the overall picture of the entire community, truly understand the operational laws of this society, and obtain more information. Some young scholars, in order to avoid trouble, often adopt the method of paying certain remuneration to interview specific groups, which can lead to the formation of an information cocoon, often obtaining information that is one-sided.

### 2. Participate in performance activities

If a relatively unchanging trust relationship has been established, the next most important task is to participate in performance practice. The term "participation" here includes not only participating as an audience, but also performing as an actor, fully understanding the artistic connotation that folk literary and artistic performances need to express.

#### (1) Appropriate Identity

To participate in performance practice, it is necessary to first have an appropriate identity, and sometimes multiple identities are even required in order to close the relationship with the audience. Taking folk drama as an example, investigators can enter the audience as enthusiasts, but this makes it difficult approach the actors. Therefore, investigators often need to learn some professions to communicate with the cast.

#### (2) Performance timing

To observe a performance, it is necessary in order to understand the performance occasion, specific time and location, and other information. The timing of the performance determines what type of performance occasions the investigator can observe. For example, weddings, funerals, and weddings, different occasions will perform diverse content. The repertoire performed at the temple fair is bound to be different from the wedding, which requires attention.

### 3. Summary and data compilation

After participating in performance activities or completing interviews and questionnaires, the most critical task is to sort out and classify the collected text, audio and video materials, paving the way for subsequent thesis writing. When organizing materials, it is often to follow the following principles. The first thing is

supposed to be timely. After obtaining interview materials, compare them with your plan as soon as possible to see if you have obtained the content and information you plan to obtain, how many discrepancies exist, and if there are any errors or omissions, find ways to remedy them as soon as possible. The second is to be comprehensive, which refers not only to the comprehensive collection of materials, but also to do a good job. After storing the collected materials by category, you should also write field survey notes to reflect on your shortcomings and omissions in this survey. The third is to examine. During the field survey, it is necessary to seek opinions from key interviewees, which are a discussion link. After the field survey, it is also essential to carry out some communication and discussion with your team members or guidance teachers. Such discussions can often find issues that you have missed. As the saying goes, it is nice to see from the sidelines.

## 5 FOLK TABOOS AND PRECAUTIONS

Throughout China, due to separate folk cultural traditions, different taboos and rules of social and cultural life have also been derived. In the final analysis, our fieldwork activities still involve dealing with people, so we must pay attention to regional folk customs and taboos. Taking visiting villagers as an example, whether it is necessary in order to bring a greeting gift and what kind of gift is appropriate is a question that needs serious consideration.

### (1) Meeting Ceremony

Meeting gifts are an important medium for establishing initial trust relationships when visiting the masses. In contemporary society, the form of saluting ceremony is relatively lively. For instance, during a preliminary visit or stampede, it is often possible to initiate a conversation by dispersing smoke or other means. Owing to special living habits in the Tumet region, when choosing a greeting gift, it is often to choose food that is resistant to preservation as the greeting gift. For example, canned food such as canned fruit, canned Babao Congee, and Baijiu is very popular among local people. With the gradual improvement of economic level, contemporary meeting rituals have gradually become rich and diverse. Currently, liquid packaged milk, fruit, etc. is also common greeting gift. What should be noted is the etiquette of the meeting ceremony. When visiting an old artist, the author chose Baijiu at the meeting ceremony, but because only one bottle was brought, it caused unnecessary misunderstanding. Such minor omissions can lead to needless trouble and obstacles for field investigations. When meeting interviewees, in addition to the greeting ceremony, it is also important to point out that when entering a home, you should not step on the threshold, use the appropriate address appropriately, and not disrupt the seniority. Even when entering the door, you should consider which foot to take first.

### (2) Daily etiquette

China's thousands of years of history have spawned a large number of life etiquette norms, especially in rural areas, where many elderly people still strictly abide by these norms. We must also give attention to them at all times during the field survey process. The first is table manners. Small talk during meals can often quickly pull into interpersonal relationships, so being able to grab meals at the interviewees' homes during field surveys is often an important foundation for effective interview activities. In the Tumet area, it is prohibited to insert chopsticks into a bowl at the dinner table, to speak loudly, to drink in order, and to eat in a hierarchical manner. In addition to table manners, there are also many stressed in daily life. In traditional fieldwork methods, experiential investigation is more emphasized, but when investigating folk drama, it is not only about experiencing, but also about learning and integrating into indigenous society. At this time, daily etiquette is the most direct manifestation of whether to integrate into local society. As the saying goes, only by learning and using local cultural etiquette and customs can we better way the local people and provide convenience for field research.

### (3) Folk customs

As a form of folk performance, folk drama is inseparable from native customs. This aspect includes not only the local festivals, weddings and funerals, as well as the time and place the organization of temple fairs, but also deeper folk customs such as kinship.

Understanding folk customs, on the one hand, are to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings caused by touching local folk taboo, and on the other hand. It will also provide many clues for our investigation and research. For example, around the 15th day of the first lunar month in the Tumet region, there are about three days of carnival activities, which are often based on folk beliefs. At this time, there will be a large number of minor performances of the Errentai Drama. If we are able to learn about these customs in a timely manner, simply looking for a performance occasion for the Errentai is tantamount to a blind person feeling like an elephant without the full picture.

In general, paying attention to regional folk culture, customs, taboos, and other aspects, on the one hand, is to avoid misunderstandings and create obstacles for field investigation, and on the other hand, is also to find clues for investigation. However, it should be noted that it is necessary to clarify the main body, not to understand folk customs in order to understand them, but to grasp the principal line of folk drama.

Folk drama not only embodies the aesthetic taste of the local people, but also reflects their dialects, local languages, ideological concepts, and even worldviews. Therefore, in the process of field research, recording the information obtained is the most basic work, and we should further understand the world outlook and metaphysical thinking contained in drama.

## 6 CONCLUSION

As the most conspicuous form of folk literature and art, folk drama is not only widely spread in rural society, but

also among migrant workers and the vast youth group. As one of the foremost research methods for studying folk drama, fieldwork is an indispensable and important research method. From the perspective of current theoretical research, scholars studying field survey methods mainly improve and promote field survey methods based on ethnographic methods of anthropology and ethnology. However, folk drama has a relatively timeliness and requires more flexible research methods. Compared to traditional ethnography, the field investigation of folk dramas should pay greater attention to the efficiency of the investigation. The information collected is often complex and requires further processing. In addition, there is more preparatory work to be done in order to study folk dramas, and adequate plans must be prepared.

When carrying out field research, it is necessary to formulate a survey plan and plan adapted to local conditions according to the local specific conditions, so as to avoid emergencies affecting the progress of the entire survey. In addition, the performance content and process of folk drama often contain a large amount of local knowledge. It may be difficult to conduct corresponding investigations and studies without mastering relevant local knowledge, so this further demonstrates the importance of preliminary preparation.

In general, the field research for folk drama needs to be well prepared. In addition, in response to unexpected situations that may occur at any time, in addition to preparing well, there should also be sufficient psychological preparation.

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