

Analysis of Language and Performance of Errenzhuan from the Perspective of Carnival

Ning Guo

College of Literature, Liaoning University, Liaoning Province, 110084 ,China
guoning0611@gmail.com

Abstract: "Errenzhuan," as the most representative form of folk art in Northeast China, possesses a diversified and rustic charm. It has undergone several transformations from the early years of the People's Republic of China to the planned economic system and, more recently, to the market-oriented economic system. By applying Bakhtin's theory of carnival, an analysis of the physical and linguistic performances of traditional and contemporary Errenzhuan can reveal elements of carnival, allowing for reflection after the carnival. This approach can contribute to the transformation of "green" Errenzhuan, ensuring the inheritance and development of this art form.

Keywords: Artistic Characteristics; Transformation; Carnival Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

"Errenzhuan" is deeply rooted in the folk culture of Northeast China, brimming with rich northeastern characteristics. There's a saying, "Rather skip a meal than miss an Errenzhuan performance," which illustrates the love and affection people in the Northeast have for it. Errenzhuan reflects the human culture, history, and heritage of the Northeastern region, making it the most representative form of folk art in the area. It not only embodies the cultural uniqueness of Northeast China but also showcases the essence and charm of Northeastern culture. In the folk culture of Northeast China, there is no other art form as widely known and cherished as Errenzhuan.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON ERRENZHUAN

Regarding the historical origins of Errenzhuan, some scholars consider it a comprehensive form of art falling under the category of folk minor drama. For instance, Tian Zifu proposes three potential origins for Errenzhuan in Northeast China. Begging Art refers to the tunes sung by impoverished farmers while begging for food. These tunes often featured songs like "Lianhua Luo" or "Fengyang Ge." Collective Music Art involves the concept of "Dayangge," where large groups of people engage in collective singing and dancing, often associated with the "Xia Qingchang"

(下清场) tradition of Northeast Dayangge, particularly in southern Liaoning. And the Comedic Art (搞笑艺术) means during leisure hours or long evenings, people would gather around a fire and engage in humorous conversations, playful banter, and the sharing of amusing stories (Tian, 2007). Some scholars argue that Errenzhuan has an inseparable connection with Shamanism. In the paper titled "On the Origin of Errenzhuan from Shamanic Song and Dance," the author suggests that Errenzhuan originated from the forms of Shamanic song and dance (Zhao, 2003). Errenzhuan originated in Northeast China, a region that has experienced significant economic and social changes, transitioning from being known as the "Republic's Eldest Son" to facing the challenges of millions of laid-off workers during economic reforms and later striving to revitalize its industrial base. This history of ups and downs has provided a rich cultural environment and performance space for the "satirical" style of Errenzhuan. Many Errenzhuan performances draw from the wellspring of social reality, reacting to and satirizing various aspects of society. They reflect the people of Northeast China's feelings of helplessness and hope in their lives. In the research on the essence of Errenzhuan, as discussed in "Dance in Errenzhuan," the author suggests that early Errenzhuan dance forms can be categorized into pure dance, stage dance, and dramatic dance segments. The author introduces these various forms of dance and emphasizes that Errenzhuan's dance performances are not static; they evolve with the progress of society. Scholarly research and involvement have contributed to the standardization of dance movements within Errenzhuan. Under the influence of external cultures, traditional folk dances have undergone changes and absorbed elements from foreign dances such as swing, tap dance, social dance, and modern dance. This process has facilitated the development and transformation of Errenzhuan dance (Xu & Guan, 2006). Yuan Shuzhen, from the perspective of an Errenzhuan performer, explains the role of folk dance in Errenzhuan. She believes that the exaggeration in folk dance can enhance the intensity of Errenzhuan performances. The beauty of folk dance can enrich the character portrayals in Errenzhuan, while the simplicity of folk dance can convey the emotions and feelings expressed in Errenzhuan (Yuan, 2005). Currently, the academic research on the essence of Errenzhuan is quite comprehensive and rich. Overall, it is believed that Errenzhuan is a cross-disciplinary art form that integrates elements of traditional Chinese storytelling, song and dance, drama, sketches, acrobatics, and more. It is a versatile and all-encompassing form of art that allows for creative

expression without limitations. The research on the aesthetic attributes of Errenzhuan, represented by scholars like Wang Ken from the older generation of Errenzhuan researchers, is marked by a deep emotional connection to Errenzhuan. They believe that Errenzhuan works can uncover life insights and the essence of human existence within the common experiences of the masses. This commonness can resonate with and transform into something more refined and sophisticated. The "local" and "wild" aspects of Errenzhuan are considered the sources of its artistic vitality, reflecting qualities of robustness, courage, and passion. Yang Pu believes that Errenzhuan's coarseness, and at times, its vulgarity, actually reflect the essence of folk culture. The perspective of mainstream ideological culture should not be imposed on Errenzhuan, as doing so would negate its essential folk cultural attributes. Likewise, demanding Errenzhuan conform to the standpoint of elite intellectual culture would be a mismatch. Folk art primarily expresses the self from the perspective of joy, reflecting human sensuality, often involving a disregard for the superego, a subversion of the sublime, a deconstruction of morality, and an outlet for primal desires (Yang, 2006). In addition, there are various other areas of research related to Errenzhuan, such as studies on Errenzhuan repertoire and selected segments, the relationship between Errenzhuan and Northeastern culture, the impact of Errenzhuan on the ecological environment of the Northeastern region, the future trends in the development of Errenzhuan, the aesthetic relevance of Errenzhuan in contemporary society, and the historical evolution of Errenzhuan. Today, Errenzhuan has become an emblematic cultural identity, and it serves as a distinctive cultural offering in Northeast China. Errenzhuan has become a "signature dish" that North-easterners use to entertain guests. Visitors to Northeast China from other regions often make it a point to attend performances at venues like the "Big Stage" to enjoy an Errenzhuan show, which leaves them relaxed and satisfied after hearty laughter. Although Errenzhuan has entered the mainstream cultural spotlight, mainstream culture has never ceased to scrutinize, critique, and adapt it. This article, framed within the perspective of carnival, focuses on Errenzhuan as its research subject. It employs Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization to explore the elements of carnival within Northeastern Errenzhuan, spanning from traditional to contemporary contexts. The analysis delves into the linguistic and performance aspects of carnival within Errenzhuan, with the aim of promoting its sustainable and environmentally friendly development. Today, Errenzhuan has become an emblematic cultural identity, and it serves as a distinctive cultural offering in Northeast China.

Errenzhuan has become a "signature dish" that Northeasterners use to entertain guests. Visitors to Northeast China from other regions often make it a point to attend performances at venues like the "Big Stage" to enjoy an Errenzhuan show, which leaves them relaxed and satisfied after hearty laughter. Although Errenzhuan has entered the mainstream cultural spotlight, mainstream culture has never ceased to scrutinize, critique, and adapt it. This article, framed within the perspective of carnival, focuses on Errenzhuan as its research subject. It employs Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization to explore the elements of carnival within Northeastern Errenzhuan, spanning from traditional to contemporary contexts. The analysis delves into the linguistic and performance aspects of carnival within Errenzhuan, with the aim of promoting its sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

3. TRANSFORMATION AND CURRENT STATUS OF ERRENZHUAN

The development of Errenzhuan has evolved in tandem with cultural changes and can be divided into three historical periods: traditional Errenzhuan predominantly influenced by regional culture before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, professional Errenzhuan during the era of planned economy, and theater-oriented Errenzhuan within the framework of a market-oriented economic system. Traditional Errenzhuan in the People's Republic of China, before its establishment, was composed of seasoned performers and possessed unique performance characteristics. Errenzhuan is a folk art form that combines plot, performance, and melody into a unified whole. Before liberation, Errenzhuan relied primarily on oral transmission among artists, with hardly any written records. The transformation from non-literary to literary was a process of artistic essence transformation. Artists roamed around, singing in military camps and roadside inns. They adapted their performances to suit the tastes of the audience. During that time, Errenzhuan included both performances for the amusement of peasants and those performed by itinerant theater troupes. Errenzhuan went through nearly fifty years of exploration, evolving from a stage of spontaneous and dispersed aesthetics to a stage of conscious and rational aesthetics. During this period, theoretical awareness was primarily manifested in three aspects: first, the performance style of Errenzhuan was comedic and could be summarized as 'clown' art. Second, the origin of Errenzhuan was attributed to the

Northeastern yangge and lotus dance. Finally, the artistic composition of Errenzhuan had a diverse character. Under the backdrop of a planned economy, professional Errenzhuan, distinct from traditional Errenzhuan, was also referred to as "New Errenzhuan." During this period, with the involvement of a significant number of drama professionals and scholars, there was a surge in theoretical publications on Errenzhuan. A community centered around modern aesthetic consciousness emerged. By the late 1980s, a plethora of new plays reflecting real-life scenarios and adaptations of traditional dramas began to surface, enhancing the public's aesthetic sensibilities. Classic plays like "The Romance of the Western Chamber" and "Recalling the Wine Cup" were created during this period. These plays not only expanded the scope of Errenzhuan art but also ushered in new explorations. They inherited the essence of tradition while incorporating elements from popular songs, television, and modern artistic sketches. Under the market-oriented economic system, with the diversification and secularization of people's aesthetics, Errenzhuan has transformed into an art form within small theater settings. Mass consumption has driven changes in the essence of duets (including comedic sketches, popular songs, and even acrobatics). In the late 1990s, artistic groups emerged with a focus on the audience as the main entity, characterized by free combinations and fluid performances. Represented by Zhao Benshan's "Liu Laogen's Grand Stage," Ma Puan's "Northeast Wind Theater," and Xu Kaiquan's "Heping Theater," these folk small theater Errenzhuan groups both inherited the performance traditions of folk artists and dissolved traditional norms. The art of the clown was unveiled to the public, and the bizarre became the center of the stage. Originally, Errenzhuan used song and dance to narrate stories, but nowadays, the stories have gradually faded, characters have receded, and only a male and a female performer remain. Whether it's popular song and dance or traditional segments, they have been subverted into sources of humor in Errenzhuan. We are living in a rapidly evolving era where the idealism of life has ignited a desire for transformation in the real world. Duets, too, are undergoing a revolution in terms of structure, form, and ideology. Firstly, there is a revolution in the cultural system. Under the planned economic system, most Errenzhuan performances were part of private enterprises. The cultural industry that emerged in the new century does not exhibit the characteristics of professional performing arts groups, such as a bureaucratic structure, institutionalization, and equal compensation for all. In the revolution of the cultural system, the emphasis shifted to the performance as a whole rather than highlighting individual performers.

This has led to an improvement in the overall quality of Errenzhuan art.

Secondly, there is a revolution in terms of form. Market-oriented Errenzhuan combines elements of popular culture and folk culture. Popular culture aims to provide emotional pleasure to a large number of ordinary citizens as part of their daily culture, while folk culture represents the interpretative traditions of Northeast China. As audiences have gradually moved away from certain traditions, it has facilitated variations in Errenzhuan performances. These variations in Errenzhuan retain the central role of the clown, maintain the framework of a male and a female performer, and incorporate new elements. The course of history has driven these changes to meet the aesthetic demands of the audience. Thirdly, there is a revolution in ideology. For contemporary individuals, happiness represents the eruption of desires that have been suppressed for years. "Amusing Ourselves to Death" reflects people's pursuit and assertion of their rights to human nature. Market-oriented Errenzhuan satisfies the public's pursuit of happiness. On today's stage, the comedic and humorous performance style that has evolved to align with the audience's appreciation interests is gradually replacing the traditional Errenzhuan format. Today's Errenzhuan is not merely a form of entertainment without a theme; it carries meaning within the realm of happiness and expresses truths through laughter. The pursuit of happiness in the market inherits and develops the traditional performance style of Errenzhuan rooted in rural folk art. Throughout history, Errenzhuan has not been a means of moral instruction but has consistently served as a form of entertainment for the lower-class populace. Traditional plays like "The Romance of the Western Chamber," "Recalling the Wine Cup," and "Piggy Bajie Arching the Earth" have entertainment as their central theme. Errenzhuan is characterized by its accessibility to the common people, grassroots origins, and rural culture, emphasizing the populism and commonality of folk art. For ordinary individuals, Errenzhuan performances greatly satisfy their spiritual needs. Today, Errenzhuan exists within a dynamic environment of development and transformation. The increasing cultural demand among people has actively driven the progress of Errenzhuan, leading to a shift from a seller's market to a buyer's market in the cultural industry. For instance, Benshan Media employs a commercial model to manage the Errenzhuan cultural industry while simultaneously preserving the traditional folk apprenticeship system of masters training apprentices. This approach has created a positive cycle in the development of Errenzhuan. Through corporate management, the group has transformed these performances into tradable cultural commodities. As one of the first

"National Cultural Industry Demonstration Bases," Benshan Media Group now possesses assets worth hundreds of millions and has become a comprehensive large-scale cultural industry conglomerate.

4. ERRENZHUAN UNDER THE THEORY OF CARNIVALESQUE

The theory of carnival, formulated by the Soviet theorist Mikhail Bakhtin through his research on medieval folk humor culture, is a poetic theory that has its roots in Western folk cultural traditions. In Western ancient cultures, carnival festivals promoted folk humor culture, where everyone could participate in unconstrained activities, including costume parades, comedic performances, and unrestrained revelry. Bakhtin referred to this world of carnival as the "world upside down." Bakhtin's theory of carnival divides the world into two levels. The first level is the realm of life or the official "first world," referring to the space of people's daily lives and the strict hierarchical order of society ruled by the church and feudal states. In this world, the ruling class possesses unlimited discourse power, while ordinary people in subordinate positions are bound by authorities. The "second world" is the contrasting world of carnival, characterized by widespread participation. During festivals, people of different social statuses and classes break free from the everyday hierarchy, discard the constraints imposed by official and religious authorities, and engage in revelry in the squares and streets. Officials, the church, and commoners all enter a state of carnival, where everyone forgets or transcends the social systems they are part of, completely contrasting with the "first world." As Bakhtin put it, "The second life of folk culture, the second world, as opposed to the everyday life, is not a mockery of carnival but is established by the world upside down" [Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2010]. Carnival blends reality with people's utopian fantasies, fully embodying the freedom of the masses. As the main participants in the festival, ordinary people take center stage, while the aristocracy is temporarily rendered common, becoming objects of ridicule. This festival temporarily breaks down class divisions and religious oppression, representing the dissolution of the "second world" in the face of the "first world." During the carnival, people shed their disguises and engage in revelry on highly infectious squares, which is completely contrary to the real world. Through extreme exaggeration, distortion, and mimicry in their physical expressions, the desire for inner and outer dialogue is

intensified, enabling sincere communication on an entirely equal basis. In this non-realistic space and under the influence of bizarre physicality, language becomes correspondingly colloquial, vernacular, and carnivalesque. The performance of Errenzhuan does not solely refer to a two-person act but encompasses various forms. "Du jiao xi" or solo performance, wherein a single performer portrays multiple roles simultaneously, creating vivid and captivating scenes. In "Hong Yue'e's Dream," for instance, the actor enacts a dream wedding scene, playing multiple characters convincingly. In "La Chang xi" or ensemble performances, it primarily involves young male actors and clowns. Examples of La Chang xi include "Da Deng Guan," derived from "yang ge dance", "Hui Bei Ji" evolved from Lianhua Luo, "Jian Mian Hua" originating from folk songs, and "Ma Ji" transplanted from other small dramas. These are all considered La Changxi. Additionally, in "Dui Kouxi" or double performances, two individuals jointly portray multiple roles. Within the realm of folk opera, this is categorized under the folk art of singing and performing while traveling. From a theatrical perspective, it can also be considered a unique form of folk performance. These three forms collectively fall under the category of Yangge or Yangge Drama, though some artists do not endorse such terminology. The various branches of Errenzhuan are closely linked to its origins. China's folk operas draw inspiration from folk songs, yangge dances, colloquial expressions, and Errenzhuan, in particular, is a unique synthesis of Northeastern yangge and the narrative style of Lianhua Luo, incorporating elements from Peking opera, shadow puppetry, and other traditional forms, making it a distinctive comprehensive folk art.

The characteristics and aesthetic orientation of the Northeastern ethnic groups have influenced the unique artistic style of Errenzhuan. The Northeastern people's warm and hospitable nature, along with their simple rural lifestyle, provide endless inspiration for the creation of Errenzhuan. The down-to-earth and rugged nature of the Northeastern people indirectly promotes the vernacular nature of Errenzhuan's language, making it relatable to daily life and sounding simple and approachable. The Northern dialect is close to Mandarin, making it more easily accepted by people. The Northeastern people's innate ability to find joy in adversity and their simple aesthetic orientation determine the overall humor and aesthetics of Errenzhuan. As a result, Errenzhuan appears novel to outsiders and familiar to locals, and its characteristics evolve with the changing times.

5. LANGUAGE ANALYSIS OF LIAONING ERRENZHUAN IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CARNIVAL

5.1 The Subversive Language of Traditional Errenzhuan

Errenzhuan, originating in the rural areas of Northeast China, has a history of over 200 years. Today, the new form of Errenzhuan is popular throughout the country, and its artistic expression is no longer confined to the traditional elements of yangge (a rural folk dance) and singing. Influenced by commercial interests, more and more Errenzhuan performances incorporate elements such as stand-up comedy, Latin dance, and acrobatics. Its singing language is plain, easy to understand, and humorous, reflecting the simplicity and directness of rural life. Onstage, Errenzhuan often portrays everyday family matters, interpersonal relationships, flirtation, and even themes with implicit sexual innuendos. The physical movements and expressions are comically exaggerated, sometimes rivaling the antics of clowns in acrobatic performances. This primitive and down-to-earth form of theater offers audiences an unprecedented sense of authenticity and novelty in their aesthetic experiences. Errenzhuan can be described as a comprehensive folk art form that combines elements of traditional Chinese opera, storytelling, singing, and dancing. It has accumulated profound cultural significance over the years. In terms of performance, the fundamental characteristic of Errenzhuan is that it involves two performers, a leading role (dan) and a clown (xiaochou), who seamlessly transition between multiple time periods, settings, scenes, and characters. This vividly showcases the essence of China's traditional expressive culture. Over the past two centuries of Errenzhuan's development, one enduring controversy has revolved around the issue of "risqué segments" or "spicy sections". These segments include songs and spoken parts with sexual undertones and are also referred to as "spring segments," "spring songs," "powder segments," "green segments," "late-night segments," and more. Examples of such works include excerpts from pieces like "Widow Ma Opens a Shop," "Picking Cucumbers," "Big Girl Goes to School," "Red Moon Dreams," "Waiting for the Fifth Watch," "Enchanted Lovers," and "The Great West Chamber." In these types of works, the storylines often appear to be structured around traditional ethical and moral values. However, in Errenzhuan, this structure based on ethical values does not play a significant role, nor is it the primary content or essence of the works. The main content and essence of these works lie in the "Deconstruction" and "Re-composition" of another kind of content that goes beyond the structural framework of traditional morality. For

example, in the Errenzhuan skit "The Silly Man Can Also Be Handsome," there's a dialogue from the character Wei San: Wei: Looking at you from head to toe, I've got an idea. He: What's your idea? Wei: I can name a movie just by looking at you. He: Is that so? Wei: Starting with your little braid, it's like the domestic film "The Function of a Ponytail." Then, your eyeballs, like the film "Panda." Your nose, like "Nameless Highland." Your mouth, when it's open, it's "Gate No. 6," and when it's closed, it's "Jiapi Gou" (a humorous reference). Moving down further, it's "Plainclothes Guerrilla," and even further down, it's "Crossing the Dadu River." If we look back, it's "Beijing Railway Station," and when we move down and turn around, it's "Yongding Gate." This dialogue humorously associates various features of the character with the titles of Chinese movies, creating a playful and witty comedic effect. On the surface, it may not appear humorous, but when delivered by the performer, it becomes full of playful implications. Wei San intentionally uses homophones in Chinese characters and exaggeration to naturally lead the audience to associate with human physiological organs. For instance, “夹皮沟” (Jiapi Gou) becomes “夹屁沟” (Jiapigou) through wordplay, “平原游击队” (Plainclothes Guerrilla) is used metaphorically to describe the other person's small chest, “大渡河” (Crossing the Dadu River) sounds like “大肚河” (Big Belly River), and “永定门” (Yongding Gate) can be humorously associated with “永腚门” (Eternal Butt Gate) using wordplay. Traditional Errenzhuan performers often incorporate words related to bodily functions like “屎尿屁” (feces, urine, and flatulence) into their public performances. This allows the audience to experience emotional catharsis and the release of desires, reflecting the subversive nature of Errenzhuan language.

5.2 The Juxtaposition of Language in Contemporary Errenzhuan

In contemporary Errenzhuan, there is often a juxtaposition of highbrow and lowbrow words. For example, in the "spoken performance," you can find pieces like "Love Equals Genitals," "Saving Face Equals Buttocks," and "Director's Fart." In Errenzhuan's language performance, love is equated with reproductive organs, saving face with buttocks, and fragrance with foul gas. This juxtaposition is bold, "incomprehensible," "derogatory," and "demeaning," completely contrasting with official language. In Errenzhuan's language, you frequently encounter some unsightly things

such as reproductive organs, excretory organs, and excreta. By extensively using objects that are not accepted by conventional aesthetics, they downgrade official language, subvert hierarchy, and eliminate rules. As Bakhtin mentioned in *Rabelais Studies*, "They are a lively form of free expression (Bakhtin, 1998). The Northeastern dialect, much like the black soil of Northeast China, is filled with a rich "earthy" flavor and is highly endearing. Expressions like "可劲造" (ke3 jin4 zao4) are filled with emotion. Two-person performance art, known as "errenzhuan," leverages the sincerity of the Northeastern dialect and incorporates it into the dramatic form, thereby shortening the distance between performers and the audience, creating an atmosphere of revelry. To some extent, the folk nature of the Northeastern dialect contributes to the formation of a world of revelry. "Errenzhuan" fully exploits the imagery and emotions embedded in the Northeastern dialect. For example, to describe helplessness in the face of something, they might say, "酸菜炖土豆, 放挺了", and to depict someone without manners and behaving rudely, they might use "触绝横丧". When expressing frustration or unhappiness, they might say "憋啦巴屈", and to describe something as dirty and messy, they might use "埋了巴汰". This imagery and emotional aspect of the Northeastern dialect inherently infuses Northeastern "rural" "errenzhuan" with a festive and entertaining quality, satisfying the audience's need for relaxation, increasing their sense of closeness, and making it more enjoyable. Satirical imitation refers to the mimicry or mockery of a predetermined and definite object in order to negate its uniqueness and self-sufficiency, rendering it relative. In Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, "parody" is closely related to revelry. "Satirical imitation of existing genres does not simply negate the genre but promotes its renewal because satirical imitation and the world of carnival, the spirit of carnival life, are closely related." Although the term "genre" is mentioned here, satirical imitation of genres can also be seen as an expansion and deepening of satirical imitation in language, so it is equally applicable to language. Two-person performance art, known as "errenzhuan," makes extensive use of satirical imitation in language. For example: 举头望明月, 低头撕裤裆; 在天愿为比翼鸟, 在地愿意干啥就干啥; In the examples above, feelings of homesickness are satirically imitated as "撕裤裆" (tear

pants), and the original phrase "连理枝" (entwined branches) is satirically imitated as "愿意干啥就干啥" (willing to do whatever). This series of adaptations creates a sense of revelry and dissolves into laughter for the audience. Two-person performance art uses satirical imitation to transform rules and classics into something unrecognizable. In this context, there is no room for their original meanings; only the revelry of language remains.

6. REFLECTION AFTER THE CARNIVAL.

In the midst of the cheers of the two-person performance, we should maintain a calm and rational perspective. What can we gain after the carnival? Although two-person performances have many advantages, we cannot deny their illusory nature and limitations. Often, two-person performances provide a spiritual utopia. Therefore, we should strike the right balance and promote the audience's personal development. Otherwise, it becomes a form of indulgence that is more harmful than beneficial. Some performers, in order to cater to a certain audience, use the freedom of two-person performance to incorporate vulgar, base, and sentimental elements into their acts, making it crude and sexualized. The author believes that "Two-Person Performance" is like a piece of jade with some flaws. Two-person performances should learn from the improvement methods of folk arts such as cross-talk and continue to refine themselves, evolving into a truly "green two-person performance" that meets the expectations of the audience. Carnival, at its core, should be about liberating aesthetics and elevating one's spiritual state. However, many people, including the audience of two-person performances, often find themselves in a state of self-contradiction, spiritual confusion, and oppression from the mundane aspects of life. They yearn for liberation but may not know how to break free. Two-person performances, through humor and the immersive atmosphere they create, allow the audience to "immerse themselves in a moment of pure and perfect happiness, free from doubt, fear, repression, tension, and cowardice" (Marcel, 1925). While this peak experience is brief, the audience can find joy in fleeting moments, uncover their potential, and get closer to realizing their self-worth. Therefore, many viewers never tire of watching two-person performances. While satisfying their psychological needs, the audience also engages in a form of play. Gadamer believed that "the presence of the viewer is actually determined by his 'identification,' which is not about common existence

with others simultaneously present there. Identification is participation"(Habermas, 1987). In other words, in the performance of two-person acts, the audience is not passively accepting; instead, they immerse themselves in the game in a way that involves a kind of self-forgetfulness. Errenzhuan, as a folk art form from Northeast China, carries a strong rural flavor and displays a diversity of branches. It has undergone multiple transformations, from traditional oral traditions to small theater productions. The characteristics of humor and carnivalization in Northeast Chinese culture, represented by errenzhuan, are vividly expressed through body language and language use. Performers and the audience resonate with each other through down-to-earth physical movements and free-spirited language, achieving a sense of carnival and gaining popularity among the masses. However, some vulgar language and physical behaviors can be difficult for certain audience members to accept. This issue needs to be urgently addressed to promote the continued inheritance and development of Northeast Chinese humor culture represented by errenzhuan along a positive trajectory. While contemporary errenzhuan has faced criticism and condemnation due to its shortcomings, it has a long history and a distinct cultural tradition. Its fundamental cultural attributes and spirit have remained unchanged. Errenzhuan, as a second world beyond the restrictions of official culture, has always aimed to let people revel and celebrate freely. Evaluating errenzhuan from the perspective of grassroots culture, extracting its essence, and eliminating its flaws while promoting its rational development will continue to be the direction of its future efforts.

References

- Bakhtin, M. (1998). *Rabelais studies* (Z. Li & Z. Xia, Trans.). Hebei Education Press.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *Truth and method*. Liaoning People's Publishing House.
- Marcel, M. (1925). *The gift: Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (M. Cheng, Trans.).
- Tian, Z. (2007). *Aesthetic Description of Northeastern Errenzhuan*. Jilin Literature and History Publishing House.
- Xu, L., & Guan, J. (2006). *Dance in Errenzhuan* (Vol. 6).
- Yang, P. (2006). The Theatricalization of Carnival. *Art Review*, 12(57).
- Yuan, S. (2005). A brief discussion on the role of folk dance in Errenzhuan. *Playwright*(2).
- Zhao, F. (2003). On the Origin of Errenzhuan from Shamanic Song and Dance. *Manchu Studies*, 4, 65-71.