

Course Form for PKU Summer School International 2026

Course Title	Title in English: THE FORMS OF FOLKLORE
	Title in Chinese: 民俗学专题
Teacher	Dr. Mengji Cheng (Department of Chinese Language & Literature, Peking University)
First day of classes	July 20
Last day of classes	July 31
Course Credit	3 credits
Course Description	
Objective:	
<p>This intensive introduction to folk-literature studies familiarises international students with the major prose and poetic genres of living oral traditions—myth, legend, folktale, folk song and epic—together with the research methods used to analyse them. Through in-class lectures, guided reading, two off-campus field visits, and short quizzes that double as attendance checks, participants learn to identify, classify and interpret folklore texts both as aesthetic artefacts and as communicative events embedded in contemporary social life.</p> <p>By the end of the course, students will be able to:</p> <p>Identify and classify various forms of folklore using theoretical frameworks; Apply textual (diachronic) and contextual (synchronic) methods to analyze folk narratives and poetic forms; Develop a broader understanding of literature that includes oral, performative, and community-based traditions.</p>	
Pre-requisites /Target audience	
<p>No prerequisites required. Open to undergraduate and graduate students with an interest in literature, anthropology, cultural studies, or Chinese traditions.</p>	
Proceeding of the Course	
<p>The course runs Monday-Friday and combines seven thematic lectures and two off-campus field visits. One reflective essay is required, and a final open-book examination will be held on the last day. Office-hour sessions are available on a voluntary basis; no group discussion is scheduled.</p>	
Assignments (essay or other forms)	
<p>One short reflective essay (500–1,000 words in English) and final open-book examination (questions provided in advance)</p>	

Evaluation Details

Attendance and Participation: 40%

Reflective Essay: 30%

Open-book final examination (last day): 30%

Text Books and Reading Materials

Bascom, William. "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives."

Dundes, Alan. "The Fabrication of Fakelore."

Academic Integrity (If necessary)

All written work must be original and properly cited; plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course.

CLASS SCHEDULE

(Subject to adjustment)

Session 1: *Title* Folklore: Definitions and Categories

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

This introductory lecture is designed to provide a foundational understanding of the field of folklore studies, focusing on key terms and their evolving definitions, the primary categories of folklore content, and an overview of the academic history that has shaped folklore as a discipline. We will begin with an exploration of the term folk and how its meaning has shifted over time within different scholarly contexts. This session will also introduce students to the basic categories of folklore, laying a foundation for future lectures on specific folklore forms. Finally, we will examine how folklore studies developed as an academic discipline and discuss the relationship between folklore as a cultural phenomenon and folkloristics as a field of study.

【Questions】

How has the concept of "folklore" evolved in folklore studies, and why does this shift matter? What are the basic categories in folklore studies?

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】**【Assignments for this session (if any)】**

Session 2: *Title* Research Methods - "Text" and "Context"

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

This session covers two major research approaches in folklore studies: diachronic (textual, focusing on the changes of texts over time) and synchronic (contextual, focusing on cultural context at a given time). We will explore how each method applies to the analysis of folklore materials and their broader cultural significance. Students will examine how each approach yields different insights, with examples drawn from folktales, rituals, and other cultural forms.

【Questions】 Using a familiar folklore example, show how textual and contextual perspectives enhance analysis. In what ways might combining both methods enrich our analysis of folklore?	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 3: <i>Title</i> Prose Narratives - Myths	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) This lecture introduces the study of myths, beginning with various definitions of myth, followed by the particular challenges in defining and categorizing Chinese myths. Students will explore foundational research methods for myth analysis, focusing on historical, cultural, and structural approaches.	
【Questions】 What defines a myth, and how is this definition complicated in the Chinese context?	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 4: <i>Title</i> Prose Narratives - Legends	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) This session focuses on the definition and study of legends, distinguishing them from myths and highlighting their unique place within folklore. We will discuss the social function of legends and examine case studies to illustrate effective research methodologies.	
【Questions】 How do myths and legends differ in purpose and structure? What methods are most effective in the study of legends?	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 5: <i>Title</i> Off-Campus Visit - Rural Heritage Exploration in Beijing Suburbs	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) This session is an unguided, self-directed field visit to a traditional village in the Beijing suburbs (e.g., Cuandixia Village or alternative heritage sites). The purpose is to provide firsthand observation of rural built environments, vernacular architecture, and the lived experiences of intangible cultural heritage within community settings. Students are required to bring notes and	

questions from Week 1's lectures on folklore dynamics, using them as analytical lenses during the visit. The visit will be conducted in small groups or individually, without a tour guide, encouraging independent inquiry and direct engagement with the site.

Please note: The specific date, location, and departure time will be finalized 2-5 days in advance based on weather forecasts and real-time traffic conditions to ensure safety and accessibility. Students should prepare for a full-day trip, wear sturdy walking shoes, and bring water and snacks.

【Questions】

How do tangible (architecture, layout) and intangible (crafts, social practices) heritage intersect in this village?

What evidence can you find of tourism's impact on local cultural preservation or transformation?

How do your field observations align with or challenge the theoretical frameworks discussed in Week 1?

What narratives are visible or absent in the site's physical and social landscape?

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

Background Research: Official tourism website of Cuandixia Village (or alternative site) for historical context.

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

This visit may serve as the ethnographic basis for your reflective essay (due Session 10), which must critically integrate field observations with topics, cases, concepts, or theories discussed in our lectures.

Session 6: *Title* Prose Narratives - Folktales

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

This lecture delves into the study of folktales, defining their characteristics and exploring their relationship to myths and legends. Students will learn about the morphology of folktales and the comparative cultural analysis of story types.

【Questions】

What makes a folktale distinct within folklore studies?

How can morphology and comparative studies enhance our understanding of folktales?

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

Session 7: *Title* Poetic Forms - Folk Songs

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

Exploration of folk songs within Chinese collection traditions and their distinctive characteristics.

【Questions】 Using specific examples, analyze the distinctive characteristics of children's folk songs.	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 8: <i>Title</i> Poetic Forms-Epics	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) This session introduces the study of epics, focusing on their definitions, and major theoretical frameworks for analyzing epic narratives, especially the oral-formulaic theory.	
【Questions】 Using examples or theory, explain how epics function as a "super-genre."	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 9: <i>Title</i> Off-Campus Visit II-Museum	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) This session is a self-guided visit to the Beijing Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum (or another folklore/heritage-themed museum). The session aims to critically examine how living traditions are represented, classified, and interpreted through institutional curation. Students will explore exhibitions at their own pace, focusing on how museum displays translate dynamic, participatory cultural practices into static visual narratives. Please note: The exact date and time will be confirmed one week prior, contingent on museum opening hours and public transportation conditions. Students are encouraged to take detailed notes on exhibit design, labeling language, and visitor interactions.	
【Questions】 How does the museum's curation "freeze" or "activate" the liveliness of intangible heritage? Which cultural practices are prominently featured, and which are marginalized or omitted? What might this reveal about state-sponsored heritage narratives? How do display techniques (multimedia, artifacts, live demos) shape your understanding of the traditions presented? Connect your observations to the lecture discussions on heritage authentication and community agency.	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】 Online Resource: Beijing ICH Museum official website - preview current exhibitions and digital collections.	

【Assignments for this session (if any)】 This museum visit may optionally form the core case-study for your reflective essay (due Session 10), which must critique institutional heritage practices using academic sources discussed in the previous lectures.	
Session 10: <i>Title</i>	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.) This mandatory in-person session serves as the final examination for this summer school course. The exam will be conducted in an open-book format, allowing students to consult their personal course notes and printed materials only. Electronic devices of any kind are strictly prohibited. The examination questions will be distributed in advance, offering a defined scope while maintaining flexibility to encourage critical, open-ended responses. The assessment focuses on students' understanding of key concepts, cases, and methodologies in folklore studies and Chinese folk literature discussed throughout the course. Emphasis is placed on integrative thinking and reflective analysis rather than rote memorization, ensuring a low-pressure environment that rewards synthesis and insight.	
【Questions】	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】 Please complete the in-person, open-book exam during the designated session time. This examination is a mandatory component of the course assessment and must be completed to receive a final grade..	

A CV of 250-300 words and a high-resolution personal photo should also be provided

CV of the instructor

Mengji Cheng is a scholar of Chinese folklore and folk literature at Peking University. She completed her B.A. in Chinese Literature at Peking University (2015) and later earned her Ph.D. in Chinese Literature from the same institution (2020), with joint training at the University of California, Berkeley (2018-2019).

Currently, Cheng serves as an Assistant Professor and Research Fellow in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Peking University, where her research focuses on early Chinese concepts of supernatural phenomena, popular literature, and the visual culture of early modern China. Cheng's research investigates the interwoven relationship between textual and visual forms in early Chinese society, exploring how these mediums articulated and reshaped worldviews, cultural identities, and collective memory across different social strata.

In her teaching, Cheng strives to introduce students to the complex cultural dynamics embedded within traditional Chinese literature and folklore. She is the primary instructor for the required undergraduate course Introduction to Folk Literature, which covers foundational topics in Chinese folklore and its various genres. Additionally, she is responsible for the graduate seminar Topics in Folk Imagery Studies, a course that examines the role of folk imagery and visual expressions in the evolution of popular narratives and belief systems in China.

