

The Cultural Tradition Changes of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Zhoushan Area: Historical Context and Modern Transformation

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Abstract

The Kaiyang and Xieyang Festivals in Zhoushan area are closely linked to local marine culture and folk beliefs, especially the Dragon God belief, and originated from marine production. Influenced by traditional sea god beliefs and fishing methods from ancient to modern times, they have seen changes. Western culture made sacrifice objects more diverse. Modern social changes led to fishing technology innovation and ideological shifts, altering festival connotations and reducing superstitious elements. Young people now focus on cultural and social aspects. The Zhoushan government's policies and social participation have expanded the festivals' cultural connotations to include cultural inheritance and tourism. These festivals are crucial for Zhoushan's marine culture inheritance and have boosted local economic development.

Keywords

Zhoushan area; Kaiyang Festival; Xieyang Festival; cultural tradition changes; marine culture.

1. The Origins and Traditional Forms of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Zhoushan Area

The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Zhoushan area are closely related to the local unique marine culture and folk beliefs, carrying profound historical heritage. The belief in the Dragon God plays an important role in the original marine culture of Zhoushan and has a far-reaching impact on the origin of these two festivals. In ancient times, people generally believed that the Sea Dragon King was the master of the ocean, controlling the life and death, fortune and misfortune of fishermen. This worship of the Sea Dragon King, deeply rooted in the traditional thinking of fishermen, widely influenced their behavioral and spiritual culture. According to relevant ancient records, Du You's *Tongdian* in the Tang Dynasty mentioned that "Emperor Minghuang of the Tang Dynasty bestowed titles on the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas", indicating that the belief in the Dragon King had reached a considerable scale and was officially recognized in the Tang Dynasty.

By the period of the Republic of China, there were more than 60 Dragon King temples in Zhoushan area, as well as dozens of large and small dragon ponds. Whenever there was a drought, the common people would go to pray for rain. In the minds of fishermen, fishing boats were respectfully called "wooden dragons", and the fish, shrimp, crabs, and shellfish caught were regarded as the subjects of the Sea Dragon King. The people's respect for the dragon made the dragon - sacrificing ceremony an important local custom. Before going to sea for fishing, fishermen would hold the "sacrifice to the Dragon King" ceremony. Through offerings and sincere prayers, they expressed their good wishes for a safe voyage and a bountiful harvest. After the fishing season of the Xieyang Festival, people would hold the "Xieyang" ceremony to express gratitude to the Dragon King. At the same time, there were activities such as performing

the Dragon King opera and dancing the underwater palace dance to thank the Dragon King for his blessings.

Zhoushan is located in the largest archipelago along China's coast, with rich fishery resources. Marine fishing is the main production method of local residents. Therefore, marine production is the practical basis for the origin of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival. In the long-term marine production process, fishermen face many uncertainties and risks, such as bad weather, ferocious sea beasts, and unpredictable sea conditions, which seriously threaten their lives and production harvests. In order to pray for safety and a good harvest, fishermen gradually developed the sacrifice customs before going to sea and after returning. This is not only a spiritual sustenance for fishermen but also a cultural tradition accumulated in their long-term marine production practice.

2. The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Historical Changes

2.1. Development and Evolution from Ancient to Modern Times

In ancient times, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Zhoushan area were deeply influenced by traditional sea god beliefs and fishing production methods. During the long-lasting agricultural civilization era, the ocean was both a rich resource treasure trove and an area full of unknowns and dangers for coastal residents. Fishermen depended on the ocean for their livelihood but felt small and powerless in the unpredictable ocean environment. Therefore, they pinned their hopes for safety and a good harvest on the sea god, and the sacrifice ceremonies of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival became important ways for them to communicate with the sea god. During this period, the main object of sacrifice was the Sea Dragon King. The sacrifice ceremonies were held in the Dragon King temples by the sea or on temporary altars. The process was solemn and solemn. These ceremonies were not only simple sacrifice activities but also the spiritual sustenance of fishermen, carrying their longing for a better life and hope for the future.

In modern times, with social changes and the gradual penetration of Western culture, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival also underwent some significant changes. With the aggression of Western powers breaking the original social pattern of China, the coastal areas were the first to be affected, and the influence of Western culture was more profound. Although the sacrifice activities were still the core of the festivals at this time, the objects of sacrifice gradually became more diverse. In addition to the traditional Sea Dragon King, some Western sea god images also began to appear locally, such as Poseidon in Greek mythology. Although these Western sea god images did not completely replace the position of the Sea Dragon King in the hearts of fishermen, their appearance reflected the impact of Western culture on traditional marine beliefs. At the same time, the application of new fishing gear and fishing techniques greatly improved the local fishing production efficiency. With the development of fishing production, the economic strength of fishermen gradually increased, and the festival celebrations became more grand. Some fishing villages would even invite professional opera troupes to perform, attracting many residents from surrounding areas to watch, further expanding the influence of the festivals.

2.2. The Influence of Modern Social Changes on the Festivals

Since modern times, Zhoushan area has experienced profound social changes, which have had various impacts on the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival. The innovation of fishing technology is an important feature of this period. With the development of science and technology, advanced fishing technologies have emerged continuously, having a huge impact on the traditional fishing production method. According to relevant statistical data, "In the middle of the 20th century, the number of mechanized fishing boats in Zhoushan area began to

increase rapidly. In the later period, the proportion of sailing boats in fishing production was negligible." [^footnote0] New fishing gear and fishing techniques have also been constantly updated, such as the application of modern trawls and purse seines, which have greatly improved the fishing efficiency and yield. These technological changes have not only changed the production methods and living rhythms of fishermen but also affected the connotations of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival.

With the popularization of education and the dissemination of scientific knowledge, people's minds have gradually become more open, and their understanding of the world has become more rational. Therefore, some superstitious colors in traditional festivals have gradually faded. In the past, fishermen firmly believed in the existence of the sea god during sacrifices and thought that every link of the sacrifice was related to the safety of going to sea and the harvest, and they dared not be negligent. Nowadays, although the sacrifice ceremonies are still retained, people mostly regard them as a cultural tradition and an emotional sustenance rather than completely relying on the blessing of the gods. The participation and understanding of the festivals by young people have also changed. They are no longer limited to the traditional sacrifice ceremonies but pay more attention to the cultural activities and social functions of the festivals. During the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, young people actively participate in cultural performances, folk custom exhibitions, and other activities. They can not only feel the charm of traditional culture but also enhance communication and interaction with others. It can be seen that this change in ideological concepts has enabled the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival to better adapt to the development needs of modern society while retaining their traditional cultural connotations.

2.3. The New Forms and Connotations of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Modern Society

In contemporary society, with the increasing emphasis on traditional culture, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Zhoushan area have ushered in new development opportunities and shown a trend of revival and prosperity. In order to protect and inherit these two folk activities with profound historical and cultural heritage, the Zhoushan government has introduced a series of relevant policies. For example, it has set up a special fund for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, which is used for the collection, collation, research of materials related to the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, as well as the cultivation and support of inheritors. At the same time, it actively organizes various cultural activities and incorporates the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival into the local cultural development strategy to enhance their status in social and cultural life.

All sectors of society have also actively participated in the revival and development of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival. Many cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations have thrown themselves into it and carried out rich and colorful activities. They deeply explore the cultural connotations of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival through cultural lectures, exhibitions, seminars, and other forms, and popularize relevant knowledge to the public. Some cultural institutions have also organized professional personnel to sort out and study the traditional ceremonies and performance forms of the festivals, providing theoretical support for the inheritance and innovation of the festivals.

With the joint efforts of the government and all sectors of society, the scale of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival in Zhoushan area has been continuously expanding, and their influence has been increasing day by day. Today, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival are no longer exclusive to fishermen but attract tourists and cultural enthusiasts from all over the country, and the influence of the festivals has been significantly enhanced.

The cultural connotations of the modern Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have expanded and transformed from simple beliefs to multiple directions, which also reflects social

development and the renewal of people's concepts. With the development of the times, cultural inheritance has become a new important connotation of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival. The marine culture in Zhoushan area has a long history. The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, as important parts of the marine culture, carry rich historical information and cultural memories. In modern society, people gradually realize the importance of these traditional festivals for the inheritance of marine culture. By holding the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, traditional sacrifice ceremonies, cultural performances, folk custom exhibitions, and other activities are completely preserved and inherited, enabling the younger generation to understand and recognize the marine culture of Zhoushan. During the festivals, old fishermen will tell the younger generation about the origin of the festivals, traditional customs, and marine production experiences, so that the marine culture can be passed down from generation to generation. Some schools and communities also organize cultural activities related to the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, such as holding marine culture lectures and compiling marine culture textbooks, which further strengthen the efforts of cultural inheritance.

Tourism development has also given new connotations to the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival. Zhoushan area has unique marine tourism resources. The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, as folk activities with strong local characteristics, have become important cultural business cards to attract tourists. During the festivals, a large number of tourists pour into Zhoushan and participate in various festival activities. Tourists can not only enjoy traditional sacrifice ceremonies and wonderful cultural performances but also taste authentic seafood and experience the unique marine culture. This not only promotes the development of local tourism but also further expands the influence of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival. In order to better meet the needs of tourists, a series of tourism products related to the festivals have been developed locally, such as marine cultural souvenirs and folk custom cultural experience tours. The development of these tourism products not only enriches the tourism experience of tourists but also injects new vitality into the local economic development. The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have also been closely integrated with modern economic development through tourism development and have become an important force to promote local economic development.

3. The Significance and Value of the Cultural Tradition Changes of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival

3.1. The Significance for the Inheritance of Marine Culture in Zhoushan Area

As important carriers of the marine culture in Zhoushan area, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have always carried rich marine cultural connotations in the long - term historical development process. They are of irreplaceable significance for the inheritance of the marine culture in Zhoushan area and are also vivid manifestations of marine cultural memories. Since their emergence, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have been closely connected with the marine production and fishermen's lives in Zhoushan area. In ancient times, fishermen depended on the ocean for their livelihood. The mystery and power of the ocean made them feel awe. Therefore, the sea - sacrificing ceremony of the Kaiyang Festival became an important way for them to pray for a safe voyage and a good harvest, and the Xieyang Festival became a platform for them to express gratitude to the sea after a good harvest. These ceremonies and activities contain fishermen's understanding of the ocean, their awe of nature, and their longing for a better life, and have become an important part of marine cultural memories. With the passage of time, although great changes have taken place in today's era, the cultural memories carried by these festivals are still deeply engraved in the hearts of the people in Zhoushan. In modern society, when people participate in the activities of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang

Festival, they can still feel the history of their ancestors living in harmony with the ocean and experience the unique charm of marine culture. The inheritance of this cultural memory also enables the marine culture in Zhoushan area to continue and develop.

At the same time, various ceremonies and activities in the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have also inherited the spiritual connotations of marine culture. In the sea - sacrificing ceremony of the Kaiyang Festival, fishermen solemnly offer sacrifices to the sea god and pray sincerely, reflecting their awe of nature. This spirit of awe of nature is also one of the core connotations of marine culture. In addition, during the celebration activities of the Xieyang Festival, fishermen will also express their joy of harvest and gratitude to the sea through singing, dancing, opera, and other forms. These spiritual connotations, through the inheritance of the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, have become important spiritual pillars of the marine culture in Zhoushan area. Although people's living and production methods have changed greatly in modern society, this spirit of awe of nature, hard - work, and courage still has important practical significance, constantly inspiring the people of Zhoushan to maintain a positive and optimistic attitude and bravely pursue a better life in the face of various difficulties and challenges.

The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival also provide an important educational platform for the inheritance of marine culture. During the festivals, the elders will tell the younger generation about the origin of the festivals, traditional customs, and marine production experiences and stories, enabling the younger generation to have a deeper understanding of the marine culture in Zhoushan area and enhancing their sense of identity and pride in local culture. Some schools and communities also organize cultural activities related to the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival, such as holding marine culture lectures and carrying out folk custom experience activities, which not only enrich the after - school lives of teenagers but also allow them to learn and inherit marine culture through participation.

3.2. The Value for Local Social Development

The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival play an important role in the social development of Zhoushan area and have the important values of promoting economic development and enhancing social cohesion. In terms of economic development, the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have a significant driving effect on local tourism. With the increasing demand for cultural tourism, these two festivals with strong marine cultural characteristics have attracted a large number of tourists to experience. According to statistics, in recent years, the number of tourists received by Zhoushan City during the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival has been increasing year by year, which not only increases the local tourism income but also drives the development of related industries, such as catering, accommodation, and transportation. During the festivals, local seafood restaurants are booming, and many tourists come here especially to taste the authentic Zhoushan seafood. The occupancy rates of hotels and homestays have also increased significantly, and rooms in some popular areas are even fully booked in advance. The transportation industry also benefits. The passenger flow of taxis and buses has increased significantly, and some tourism charter services are in short supply. "Zhoushan has rich marine - featured intangible cultural heritage and is actively carrying out intangible cultural heritage - based tourism festivals under the guidance of national policies" [¹]. The development of tourism has also actively promoted the development of the local cultural industry. Cultural products related to the Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival have emerged continuously, such as marine cultural souvenirs and folk handicrafts. These cultural products not only have commemorative significance but also enable tourists to better understand the marine culture of Zhoushan. At the same time, some fishermen's paintings and shell handicrafts are deeply loved by tourists and have become popular tourism souvenirs.

The Kaiyang Festival and Xieyang Festival are grand festivals jointly participated by local residents, providing a platform for community residents to communicate and interact, and effectively enhancing social cohesion. During the preparation and holding of the festivals, community residents actively participate and cooperate in division of labor. This process of joint participation enhances the communication and collaboration among residents and promotes the harmonious development of the community invisibly. The villagers work together, not only making the festivals wonderful but also enhancing their mutual feelings. Various ceremonies and activities in the festivals also strengthen the residents' sense of identity and belonging to their hometown. At the sea - sacrificing ceremony of the Kaiyang Festival, residents jointly pray to the sea god to express their concerns for their relatives going to sea and their blessings for their hometown. This common belief and emotional expression make residents feel their close connection with their hometown, thus enhancing their love and identity for their hometown. The holding of these festival activities has also effectively enhanced the social cohesion of Zhoushan area, laying a solid foundation for the stability and development of local society.

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