# Heritage preservation vs. adaptation to achieve sustainability – A case study of the Fishermen's Dances, Rizhao city, Shandong province, China

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of heritage preservation for economic development is now recognised, although not without debate. For cultural assets that have survived threats and perils, the key may lie in adaptation to changed circumstances as much as preservation of traditions. The question then arises whether such adaptation compromises the goal of sustainability. In the present case study of Fishermen's Dances in Rizhao city, adaptation has resulted in the loss of some long-held traditions. But it has gained a measure of sustainability. Given the strong role of the state, its vision and capability to transform its cultural assets for income-generation activities will be decisive.



## Keywords

heritage preservation, cultural assets, historical preservation, culture development


## Introduction

Far from being viewed as an alternative to modernisation and economic development, heritage preservation is nowadays seen as an essential ingredient of economic development. Thus Rypkema (1999) referred to historical preservation as becoming a uniquely effective vehicle for economic growth.Historical preservation was said to confer benefits such as job creation and training, import substitution, infrastructure rehabilitation, production diversification and opportunities for tourism. In a similar vein, a British Council report (2018, 3) concluded that 'a peopled-centred approach to heritage, that benefits all levels of society, will bring social cohesion and economic growth to emerging economies and developing countries'. Equally effusive about the benefits of heritage on the economy is Childs (n.d.).

But awareness of these benefits has not prevented the widespread destruction of heritage assets. A prime example is China, with its substantial reservoir of heritage assets, both tangible and intangible, facing the challenge that 'improper development throughout the countryside has damaged the structure, environment and features of some historical villages in China [...] accelerated

urbanization has also put historical cities and towns under the great pressure of hosting a large population' (*China Daily* 2012).

Against these odds, the country has nevertheless made steady progress. China's history of heritage conservation was said to date to the 1930s (Wang 2008). Tong (2016) notes that

> the number of registered immovable cultural properties soared from 300,000 to 760,000, while the number of state priority protected sites increased from 750 in 2000 to 4,296 today. In addition, the number of priority protected sites at regional and local levels also increased significantly(see pp.10).

In addition to large-scale surveys, China has organised numerous conferences to tap new ideas, advance theory development and facilitate international exchange of knowledge (Tong 2016).

Legal protection represents another key instrument of heritage protection. In 1982, shortly after liberalisation in 1978, China passed the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, which established a conservation system and a list defining famous cities of historical and cultural value. In 1986, a second group of famous cities was added to the first. In 2002, the 1982 law was revised to define historic areas as 'small towns, neighbourhoods with an unusual wealth of cultural relics of important historical value or high revolutionary memorial significance. Thus, for the first time, small urban centres were covered under the law.

Despite this, as a measure of the country's wealth of historical capital, only a fraction of historical heritage sites have been recorded, with many others lost to posterity (Shen and Chen 2010, 73). Yet other assets have fallen victim to the pace of new construction during the decades of rapid economic development. Iossifova (2014, 34) notes that 'the speed of development, lack of knowledge at all levels of governance and a lack of appropriate skills for the implementation of cultural heritage have led to a number of disasters with local, regional, national and even global consequences'. Xie (2016) also points to 'a profit-driven society and rapid changes in public life' and '(the lack of professional educational institutions and professionals in relevant areas also hinder the development of Chinese intangible cultural heritage'.

Amid these challenges, the passage of the 2003 UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguard of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, of which China was a signatory, represented a major fillip to China's heritage preservation efforts (Rees 2017). Shortly after, in 2005, the State Council issued the *Circular on Strengthening the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, which distinguished between tangible and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for the first time. Following the *Circular*, in 2006 and 2008, the first two groups of national ICH were listed and published. More recently, the government has maintained its focus on the country's ICH by adding three traditional holidays – Tomb-Sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Day and Mid-Autumn Day – as public holidays. As part of its 'Rural Rejuvenation' policy to arrest rural-to-urban migration and reduce urban–rural economic inequality, China has also promoted heritage tourism.

National recognition, which has translated into financial resources, has not, however, been an unmitigated blessing for ICH sites. Commentators complain of legislative deficiencies (Huo 2015), inadequate attention at the subnational levels to viewing cultural heritage as an integral part of development and even less attention for sustainable development (Petronela 2015).

The present case study is about the Fishermen's Dances in Rizhao, Shandong province, China. Rizhao distinguishes itself because it is located in an ancient part of the country, with historical and cultural sites in abundance located in the city's vicinity. The Fishermen's Dances, which also date back centuries, distinguish themselves as having been disrupted and then revived by the state. Resources placed in the hands of the state render them powerful stakeholders that can have a say in shaping the organisation and conduct of the ICH. To the extent that their views are not consonant with those of the custodians of the ICH, contestations between stakeholders may have consequences for the sustainability of the ICH itself.

## Rizhao and the Fishermen's Festival and Dances

The area of study is the region of Shandong province around the Huang Hai (Yellow Sea). This geographical area also defines its cultural practices. For instance, the worship of the dragon god is common in this area. In the heart of the above region is Rizhao, a coastal city located in southern Shandong province of China (fig. 1). The name

'Rizhao' means 'bright sunshine', but the city is known for more than its fine weather. The *Oxford Handbook of World History* accredits the Rizhao Liangchengzhen site as the first established city in Asia from 3500 BCE to 2000 BCE. Rizhao town itself was steeped in antiquity, having been established in 1184 and upgraded to a prefecture-level city in 1989.

Due to the influence of the ocean, Rizhao has a more favourable climate than other Chinese cities. It is hot and rainy during the summer and cold and less rainy during the winter; the brightness of the sunshine is higher than the average for China the whole year; the day and night temperatures differ little; the seasons are distinctive; the annual precipitation is adequate – all rendering the city ideal for tourism.

The Rizhao coastline is connected by many capes and bays, and its coastline is blessed by the presence of natural harbours. Offshore, the currents, water quality and temperature are all favourable for the nurturing and cultivation of aquatic products. Approximately 150 fishing villages along the coast and 11 million people are involved in the fishing industry. The livelihood of the seaside villagers depends on fishing and aquaculture activities.

The community's reliance on maritime activities as a source of livelihood has produced, among the fishermen especially, a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. The ocean was for the fishermen and their families both a source of sustenance and wealth as well as a source of calamity when bad weather or storms struck. Ancient mariners and fishermen lacked the technology to predict the conditions when setting out to sea. They had little choice but to rely on prayers to spirits that were parts of local beliefs and folklore. Typical among these beliefs is the legend of a Dragon King, exemplified by the local saying: 'Only if there is the sea is there a Dragon King'.[1] Villagers in Rizhao and surrounding areas believed that the ocean has a mysterious power that they were unable to control, so they were in awe of the ocean. They also believe that the Dragon King and his marine 'army' had the authority to take control of the ocean and protect the Rizhao fishermen. This is why the villagers around Rizhao had such strong faith in the Dragon King and his marine army to the point of creating rituals of worship.

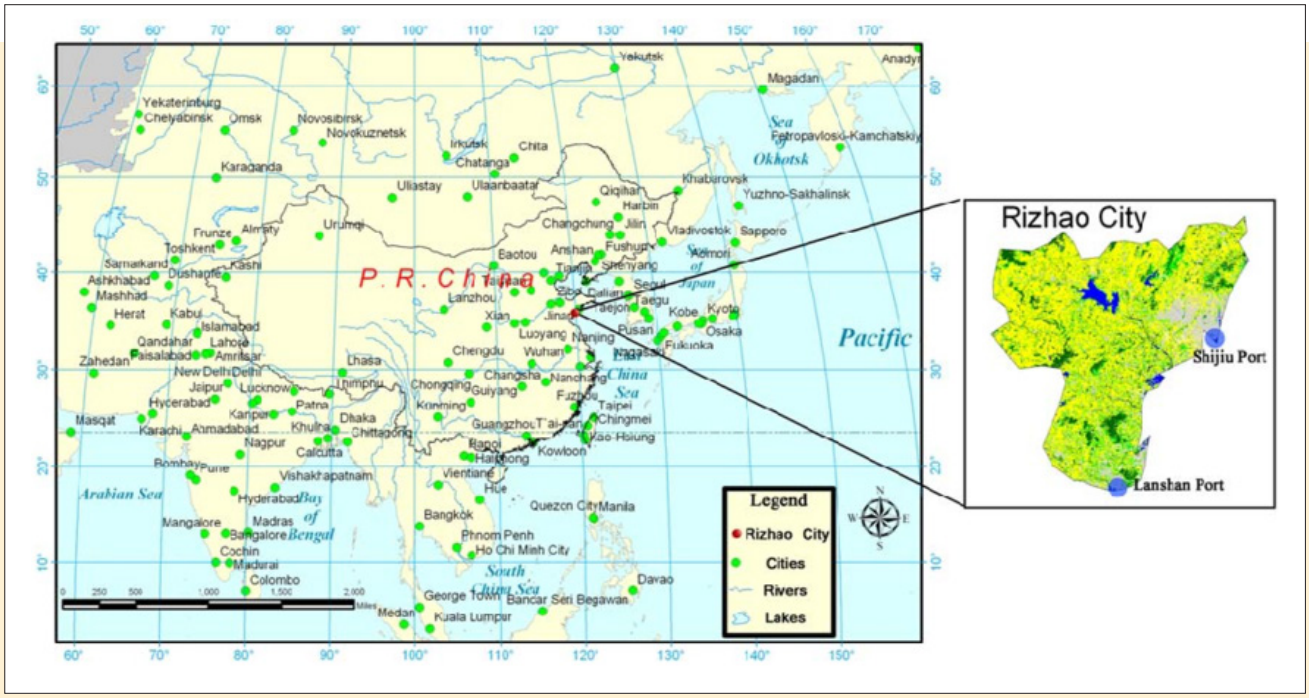


**Figure 1**
Rizhao city, Shandong province, China
Source: Wang et al. (2009, 1173)

The Fishermen's Festival dates to the ancient dynasties of Xia (2100 to 1600 BCE),[2] Shang (1600 to 1050 BCE) and Zhou (1046 to 256 BCE), but it became most popular during the Tang (618 to 906 CE) and Sung (960 to 1279 CE) dynasties. Today, the festival is held on the 13th day of the sixth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. It is hosted by a 'skipper', a boat captain of noble character and high prestige, who announces the beginning of the festival at the seaside early in the morning, with offerings and prayers to the spirits of the sea led by the Dragon King.

Legends about the Dragon King as overlord of the ocean abound; although a number of Dragon King temples dotted the region around Rizhao, few survived the turmoil of the early years of the Republic. The Dragon Dance, one of a suite of dances in the festival, is dedicated to the worship of the Dragon King, and its survival is testimony to the residents' strong faith in the worship of the Dragon King. This strong faith also saw the government authorising the reconstruction of the partially destroyed temple in 1995.

The Dragon Dance is accompanied by the Shui ('water') or Aquatic Dance. Performers of the Shui Dance dress up as marine creatures – fish, turtle, shrimp, crab, etc. – to symbolise the pantheon of marine spirits under the Dragon King. But the dances not only serve a worship function but also celebrate the daily lives of the fishermen as they go about their daily chores. The Han Boats Dance tells of the fishermen's life at sea as well as their yearning for a better life on land. The Stilts Dance mimics the fishermen's use of stilts to catch shrimp close to shore.

Thus, up to the founding of the People's Republic, the suite of folklore performances – namely, the Dragon Dance, Shui Dance, the Han Boats Dance and the Stilts Dance – was an integral part of the festival, creating a much merrier and more joyful atmosphere than during the Lunar (Chinese) New Year. All the performers are amateurs from the fishing industry. Thus, over the course of its history, the Fishermen's Festival has been developed from a simple ceremony of worshipping the sea to a major ceremony for the fishermen's key activities, such as setting off to the sea, celebrating the harvest from the sea and so on.

Despite its local importance, literature on the festival and its dances is not plentiful. There is hardly any academic literature in English on Shandong's Fishermen's Festival and dances. Accounts of these festivities are found mainly, although rather briefly, in the media (e.g. China.org.cn 2012; Chinadaily.com.cn 2017). Much of existing academic discussion of this festival is in Chinese. Among these are Ye (2000; 2002), Yi (2009) and Song and He (2015). Several studies have covered specific dances. For the Shui Dance, there is Song (2015), Ge (2012) and Zheng and Zhang (2015). Only two sources recorded the inclusion of the Dragon Dance in Rizhao's ICH in 2008 and 2014. Other studies on the Dragon Dance did not reference Rizhao. There has been no research on Rizhao's Stilts Dance or on the Han Boats Dance.

While various aspects of the dances have been addressed, there is scant discussion on what is arguably the pivotal issue relating to the change in the substance of the dances, and the consequences for the sustainability of the heritage have not been addressed. Filling this research lacuna is made difficult by the break in the practice of this tradition, which required interviews with festival and dance 'insiders' to recall and narrate. In the next section, thanks to these recollections, the evolution of the dances, the outcome of major political ideological changes and rethinking of these changes are briefly described.

## The evolution of the Fishermen's Dances

The Fishermen's Festival and its dances had survived major historical upheavals over the many centuries of its existence; however, it fell victim to the 'new' socialism that the country in the years immediately after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This disruption transformed a primarily ritual event into four independent Fishermen's Dances. The transformation of this ritual began well before the establishment of the People's Republic. From the beginning of the 20th century, traditional Confucianist values were seen as regressive and as obstructing progress. Led by neo-Confucianists like Liang Qichao, traditional Confucianism was discredited and some folk cultures were labelled 'superstitions', and their continued practice was either prohibited in Chinese society or became tools of political propaganda.

From the perspective of the devotees of the Fishermen's Festival and those who held this tradition so dearly, the cancellation of the Fishermen's Festival was a major blow. In the early 1950s, the statues in the Dragon King Temple were destroyed, the temple was changed into a school and Rizhao's Fishermen's Dances were no longer held. The Han Boats Dance and Shui Dance were

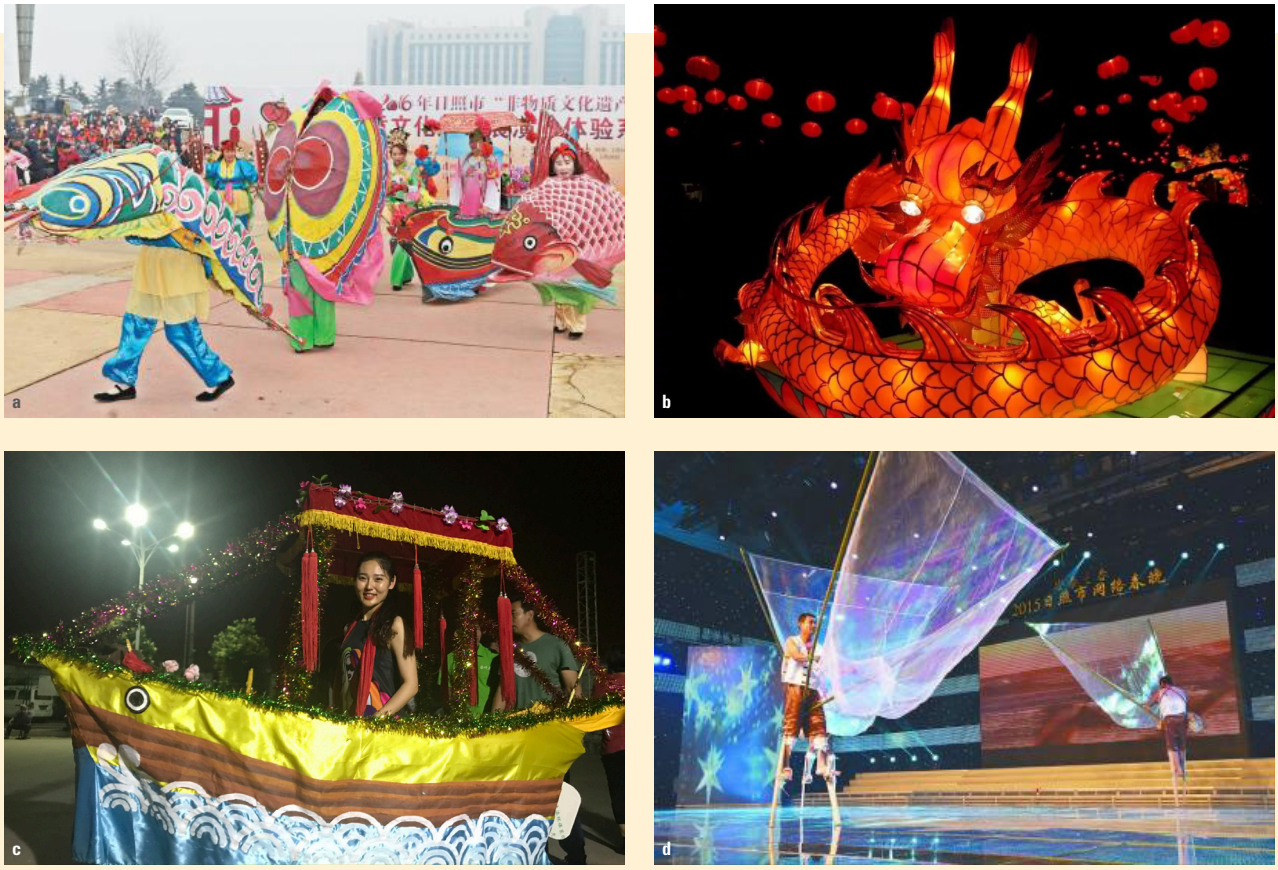

**Figure 2**
The Dances in the Fishermen's Festival. (a) The 'Shui' (Aquatic) Dance, (b) The Dragon Boat Dance, (c) The Han Boats Dance, (d) The Stilts Dance.
Notes: The Fishermen's Festival contains diverse dances, including the Shui Dance, Dragon Dance, Han Boat Dance and the Stilts Dance. The pictures were captured by the author in May 2019, Rizhao.

cancelled, followed by the cancellation of Fishermen's Festival. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the Fishermen's Dances were subject to the draconian national ideology.

Whatever dances survived had their choreography and content changed under the authority of the state. While they often physically satisfied the people's need to perpetuate the dances, they ignored people's demands for preserving tradition and emotional needs. The blessing functions of the Fishermen's Dances to ensure the fishermen's safety at sea, good weather and good harvest were lost, which is why so many of the Rizhao fishermen did not accept the changes the government made to the Fishermen's Dances.

After the 1980s, interest in traditional cultures in China was revived, and the region's Fishermen's Dance culture was once again recognised. China itself has become aware of the presence of a considerable pool of cultural heritage in the country, both tangible and intangible. In 2004, China joined and was one of the early signatories of UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The four Fishermen's Dances were included in China's ICH list. The listing of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Declaration shows that China values its ICH as much as its tangible assets. Hence, the history of the Fishermen's Dances is valued once again by the government. Even before, in 1995, the Dragon King Temple was rebuilt by donations from overseas Chinese with the approval of the government. During the Fishermen's Festival, the Dragon Dance and the Han Boats Dance gradually began to be performed in the festival again and are now recognised as part of Rizhao's regional culture.

## The Fishermen's Dances today

Rizhao's reversal of fortunes is the consequence of two sets of factors, both related to policy. The first is the

availability of resources for cities with ICH assets. The more ICHs a city is able to identify, the more monetary resources it is able to acquire from the central government.

*Recognising distinct ICHs.* With each dance eligible to be classified as an ICH, together with the festival itself, detaching the dances from the festival would seem a natural solution for the city to maximise its resources from the central government. But this involved a series of steps.

With specific reference to the Fishermen's Dances, the city government assisted the fishermen artists to develop the four Fishermen's Dances. In registering the dances as ICH, the basic information of the project had to be filled out – geographical location, historical evolution, main values, area and geographic environment, distribution areas, specific manifestations, main characteristics, status of existence, related products or works, lineages, main inheritors and other information. With such detailed information, the Fishermen's Festival was listed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Shandong province in 2007, while it was listed in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2018. In 2018, the Shui Dance and Dragon Dance were included in the first batch of Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Rizhao. Rizhao's local Han Boats Dance and Stilts Dance were also performed during the 'Rizhao Intangible Cultural Heritage Month'. Through these steps, the dances and the festival became separate ICHs. Thus, with official sponsorship, the reputation of the dances has been enhanced.

*Rural Rejuvenation.* A second set of factors is related to China's newly announced policy of Rural Rejuvenation to slow the flow of migrants from rural to urban areas. In China, rural property restrictions imposed by China's central government inhibited rural–urban migration, but still saw migrants from rural areas leaving their rural homes unoccupied, creating 'Vacant Villages' (*Kongxin Cun*). To correct this state of affairs, the central government put forward the land-intensive 'Increasing Urban Land and Decreasing Rural Residential Land Scheme' policy in 2006 to demolish rural vacant houses and consolidate rural land use. Dubbed 'new rural construction', the focus was on urbanisation, but the approach was top-down, without much regard for the feelings of those affected by this consolidation. For their part, local governments saw this as their opportunity to acquire rural land through relocating rural residents into high-rise apartments without regard for their willingness and lifestyle preferences (Wang, Zhang and Cheong 2014; Yep and Forrest 2016).

Together with approaches more relevant to local conditions, rural development reform that began in 2014 came to be known as 'New Urbanisation', which aimed to urbanise China through a more 'people-oriented approach' that takes into consideration the welfare of stakeholders (Chen, Liu, Lu, Chen and Ye 2018). This policy was a breakthrough in bottom-up policymaking based on local stakeholders' preferences (Chen, Gong, Lu and Ye 2019), and it provided the conceptual framework for the current comprehensive approach of 'Rural Rejuvenation' centred on 'people development' (Chen, Zinda and Yeh 2017).

Rural Rejuvenation is based on the promise of reverse flows from urban to rural locations. Connected to this, Yang and Zhang (2018) advanced their 'Rural Socialization Theory', which posits that China's expanding middle class, characterised by high income and high education, and accounting for over a third of the total population, require personalised consumption that can be met partially from rural activities. Thus, rural socialisation, through the interaction of both rural and urban stakeholders, grants benefits to rural residents while also attracting urban capital to rural areas and promoting urban–rural integration (Cheng, Xu, Zhou, He and Zhang 2019; Zhang, Cao and Bai 2019).

One important policy recommendation for Rural Rejuvenation is to leverage heritage tourism as a means of income generation for rural locations. How do these developments impact Rizhao and the city's Fishermen's Festival? The festival and its dances would seem primed to take advantage of China's strategy of Rural Rejuvenation. The area has been inhabited since ancient times. History has given the community strong traditions and a way of life dependent on maritime activities. The community has embraced the festival, which celebrates the community's folklore, customs and way of life. The community readily identifies itself with the festival and its suite of dances. Given the wealth of cultural assets both tangible and intangible in the locality, and with its reputation as a sunshine city, tourism would seem to be a natural activity. This would appear to give the festival a head start in heritage tourism, which fits well with the government's Rural Rejuvenation strategy.

To maximise this tourism potential, the city undertook to replace the traditional amateur groups of dancers with professional dancers and actors. Thus two groups of performers. The first consists of 'inheritors', defined as those who, by tradition, had 'inherited' the organisation and performance of the dances as members of the village or fishermen elites, familiar with the Fishermen's Dances' cultural connotations and significances, ritual process and structure, origin, evolution process. These inheritors must have certain influence and representativeness in the fishing villages of Rizhao, and they are responsible for training budding 'inheritors'. The second consists of performers who are recruited purely for their dancing skills and who receive monetary compensation. They have no other ties to the festival.

## Comparing the traditional to the current model

Although the current model of Fishermen's Dances represents a continuation of the traditional model that had been in existence for centuries, there are major differences in the roles of major stakeholders and in the external opportunities and challenges facing the continuation of the Fishermen's Dances. Table 1 shows the major differences between the traditional model and the current model of the Fishermen's Dances.

The first major difference is the severance of the dances from the Fishermen's Festival, of which they were an inseparable part when they began. While the spin-off of each dance from each other and from the Fishermen's Festival offers opportunities for generating tourist dollars, the coherence that characterised the festival and dances can no longer be engineered. Thus, compared to the traditional Fishermen's Dances as a pure and natural cultural inheritance model devoted to prayer to the Spirits of the Ocean, the modern version is a culturally guided model approved – if not dictated – by the government. The modern model is more standardised than the traditional model and, according to the government, it is able to complement and develop into a model that is more in tune with contemporary tastes and hence able to bring benefits to the fishermen's community around Rizhao. However, the negative aspect of the modern model of Fishermen's Dances is that it has deviated from the traditional model based on worship and anchored in the Fishermen's Festival. From the perspective of heritage preservation, it can no longer lay claim to the centuries-old tradition that the Fishermen's Festival was able to claim.

A second difference lies in who has the responsibility for orchestrating the performances. Under the traditional inheritance model, the Fishermen's Dances were exclusively the responsibility of the fishermen community.

**Table 1**
Features of Fishermen's Dances

| Major feature | Traditional model | Current model |
|---|---|---|
| Relationship with Fishermen's Festival | An integral part of Fishermen's Festival | Not related to Fishermen's Festival |
| 'Heritage' role of dances | Linked to Fishermen's Festival over centuries | No link. Mainly entertainment value |
| Objective of dances | Prayer to sea spirits, stress unity between man, gods and nature | Earn tourist revenue |
| Dominant stakeholder | Fishermen community | City government, assisted by fishermen community |
| Organisers and performances | Fishermen community ('inheritors'). Inheritors chosen among fishermen community, by consensus | Fishermen community ('inheritors') + professional performers. Inheritors approved by state, selected competitively, have official status recognised by government. Led to reduced |
| Role of 'inheritors' | Repository of traditional practices, nurture, train next generation of 'inheritors' | Much reduced by modern media, and hired, non-inheritor performers |
| Fishermen Community members not chosen to perform | No such situation | Small troupes formed to perform for tourists |

There is a relationship of learning and cooperation between people in the community. The leader chosen to lead the prayers was agreed to by all. Participants learned the skills from each other and showcased their talents. These dances enriched the quality of the life of the residents. In contrast, the modern inheritance model shows a competitive relationship between people. The inheritor has a position from the government which has clarified the responsibilities and tasks of the inheritor in the modern inheritance model. Such competition is conducive to the inheritance and development of the Fishermen's Dances, but it has led to a decline in the enthusiasm of traditional cultural inheritors. It is more focused on the characters of inheritors and activities conducted by the government, which interferes in the inheritance of Fishermen's Dances traditions.

As for the 'non-inheritor' performers, their motivation is primarily economic. With the development of modernisation, the fishermen's mindsets of going out to the sea safely are gradually diminished, as there are other fishermen who willingly go out to work for others and are ready to shoulder the risks of going out to sea. Hence, making money became their main objective. With payments institutionalised by the state, the remuneration from the Fishermen's Dance performances is regarded as an alternative source of income for the community.

A second consequence of the employment of 'non-inheritors' is the diminution of the potential pool of 'inheritors' for future performances. Already, the development of modern media has diminished the traditional role of the inheritor as trainer of future inheritors. Modern media such as the internet, television and video are able to record the movements of Fishermen's Dances from which learners of the performances can learn. This approach has been used by performance groups. While modern media permit the adaptation and combination of traditional dance forms, the inheritor's role as trainer and mentor has been diminished.

Third, under the current system, fishermen who were not chosen by the state to perform had formed their own groups of performers to provide performances for tourists. Any hope that these groups would be gatekeepers of heritage would be dashed – cast adrift from the traditional system that nurtured a core of 'inheritors', these groups were more interested in earning revenue from tourists than in showcasing their crafts and skills.

Reviewing these changes shows that the disruption and revival of the Fishermen's Dances resulted not so much in heritage preservation but rather in heritage adaptation. The disruption from the radicalised socialism with the establishment of the People's Republic deepened the scepticism among intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement, who questioned the relevance of traditional Confucianism in moving China forward. Prohibition of traditional 'superstitions' saw the loss of essential elements of the Fishermen's Dances, while the passage of time and the ageing of performance artistes and organisers further dimmed memories. When the state saw fit to revive the tradition, what was revived was not the traditional system of Fishermen's Dances but a mixed state–community system in which the state retains substantial control that leaves the traditional stakeholders, the 'inheritors', with a diminished role. These changes mean that the current Fishermen's Dances no longer represent heritage preservation but are more akin to heritage adaptation in response to both external (policy) factors and internal (environmental) factors.

## Conclusion: sustainability of cultural heritage – preservation or adaptation?

While it has been argued that sustainability may not be compatible with heritage preservation (Cooper 2010), an alternative view is that heritage preservation represents the first step to ensuring sustainability of cultural assets (Plaza 2016; Rypkema 2006; Tong 2016). Between these extremes is the argument that an exclusive focus on heritage preservation is not necessarily an optimal strategy in the absence of sustainability. However, an exclusive focus on heritage preservation has been labelled by McShea (2010, 57) as a 'curatorial approach' that, by ignoring such criteria as financial solvency and public access, has not been helpful to heritage tourism development.

For ICH that has survived over a long time, it is seldom possible for heritage to be 'preserved' in its original state without being impacted by transformative factors. This is also the case with the centuries-old Fishermen's Dances, which survived many political changes until the arrival of the People's Republic. Once revived, the ICH experienced adaptation rather than preservation. The question that arises is whether heritage adaptation qualifies an ICH as sustainable.

From the perspective of the Fishermen's Dances, the

enhanced role of the government as a major stakeholder offers both costs and benefits. As is clear from the earlier discussion, the injection of the government as a source of funding as well as a decision maker has transformed the ICH into what is only superficially similar to the traditional event, with government input into substance and orchestration sometimes decisive. The ability of the fishermen community to lay claim to ownership of the festival and dances is no more and, together with that, its control of the conduct of the festival. In that sense, the casualty of the dances' revival is preservation of heritage, together with traditions that have been lost.

At the same time, some decisions by the city government may yield short-term benefits but longer-term pains. For example, the 'professionalisation' of heritage tourism seems a quick fix in terms of increasing tourist arrivals in the short term, but it is a double-edged sword in the longer term. For one thing, heritage tourists are different from average tourists in that they are particularly interested in the heritage – the story behind the location or activity – visited. Changes from traditional practices affect the 'authenticity' (McShea 2010, 81) of a heritage location and may well detract from its attractiveness. The replacement of amateur performers with professional actors also may make for better entertainment but would damage the 'authenticity' of the performance in the eyes of the heritage tourist. The transition from heritage preservation to heritage tourism is a major step that many ICH hosts have failed to acknowledge.

At the same time, ceding control to city governments has some benefits. The most obvious is the ability to take advantage of pooling resources to achieve economies of scale. Thus, the Fishermen's Dances have traded financial and decision-making dependence on the government of Rizhao for marketing and branding to reach a larger tourist audience. The pooling of resources has allowed the city to organise many cost-effective activities for the marketing, promotion and protection of ICH as a group, keeping manageable operating expenses of individual activities while maximising the impact of these activities. For example, an effort is made to build a brand of ICH folk activities based upon the traditional festival as the centrepiece and the scenic locations as the platform. The strategy is to create a brand that symbolises the development of tourism in the whole region of Rizhao, helping alleviate poverty and actively promote the revitalisation of rural culture. This is akin to the 'ecomuseum' projects that serve both heritage preservation and rural development in parts of China (Nitsky 2012).

All things considered, a greater role for the city government would certainly have ensured the financial sustainability of the Fishermen's Dances and the Fishermen's Festival, although, given several courses of action, such as detaching the dances from the festival and employing professional performers, the heritage sustainability remains a more open question. Still, having the dances sheltered under the protection of the city government affords a degree of protection from unforeseen external impacts. These influences aside, much depends on the city administration's capability in moving towards a sustainable heritage tourism model.

A final question the above discussion raises is the possibility of objective conflicts. While the debate balancing heritage preservation with heritage sustainability is situated squarely within the broad strategy of Rural Rejuvenation – either approach represents alternatives to attract tourists – a different overall strategy, say of accelerating non-farm employment, may see goal conflict that de-emphasises the preservation-sustainability debate. Even within the context of Rural Rejuvenation, the broad objective of reviving rural areas is indifferent to the approach needed. Indeed, the dominant role of the state in orchestrating the dances did not help preservation and may also not be 'people friendly' or 'bottom-up'. The above case highlights the danger that important issues can be submerged in larger strategic debates.

## Acknowledgement

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## ENDNOTES

1. What is often referred to as Chinese folk religion combines elements of many religions and religious practices, which are difficult to define (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.). References to many 'gods' supervising different aspects of people's lives and a hierarchy of gods are central parts of this complexity.
2. Timeline from 'Timeline of Chinese history and other key events': http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/timelines/china_timeline.htm.

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