

Wangchuan Ceremony in Xiamen, China: Folklore Aesthetics and Ritual Space in New Era Marine Culture Construction Context

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ABSTRACT

The development of maritime culture in the new era is inextricably linked to the historical underpinnings of traditional maritime culture. Marine folk customs, such as the Wangchuan Ceremony are a crucial component of traditional Chinese marine culture and hold a significant position within the marine cultural system. This article utilises a questionnaire survey and data analysis employing SPSS software to ascertain that the aesthetic elements of the Wangchuan Ceremony have the capacity to enhance public understanding of the relevant marine culture. Specifically, the richer the folk aesthetics presented in the Wangchuan Ceremony, the deeper the understanding of the marine culture it embodies. Furthermore, the adaptability and innovative nature of the ritual space for the Wangchuan Ceremony facilitates participants' perception and experience of marine culture. This demonstrates the necessity of developing marine culture based on folk aesthetics and ritual spaces. By considering these two dimensions, to research into Xiamen's Wangchuan Ceremony has unearthed its rich marine cultural heritage, pioneering spirit, philosophy of harmony, and innovative modes of expression. These elements contribute significantly to the advancement of the principles of harmony and community building within contemporary marine cultural development, while also facilitating the broader dissemination of marine culture.

Keywords: Wangchuan Ceremony, Folklore Aesthetics, Ritual Space, New Era, Marine Culture

INTRODUCTION

Since China embarked on a new era in 2012, significant progress has been made in its marine development. With the advent of the strategy to build a strong marine nation, the development of a distinctive Chinese marine culture that serves this strategy has also been put on the agenda (Xie & Xia, 2022:111). Marine folklore is an essential and important dimension of marine cultural research, and its study contributes to enriching the connotations of marine culture and preserving China's fine traditional culture. The practice of Wangchuan Ceremony, a typical example of traditional Chinese marine folklore, has a history of over 600 years and is widely practiced in southern Fujian Province, Taiwan, and the coastal areas of Malacca, Malaysia. This practice, which involves burning the boat on the seashore or sending the boat into the sea, is a folk custom for local coastal residents seeking peace and spiritual comfort (Peng, 2007:4). "The entire ritual process consists of six steps: building the Wangye's Boat, welcoming the Wangye (The deity who travels among the people on Heaven's behalf), offering sacrifices to the Wangye, praying for salvation, touring the Wangye's Boat, and burning the Wangye's Boat" (Peng, 2016:29). It conveys historical memories of our ancestors' journeys to the sea. However, with the changes in society and the continuous transformation of social structure, the folk aesthetic content, form, and meaning behind the Xiamen Wangchuan Ceremony are also changing, and the venue and space where the ritual

takes place are also constantly changing. It is necessary to conduct in-depth research on this issue, to glimpse its unique internal structure and construction logic, and to fully utilize it in the construction of marine culture in the new era.

A literature review and collation of current research on the Wangchuan Ceremony was conducted. The review found that the research mainly focuses on three aspects.

The first is about the origin, historical development, and connotations of the practice of Wangchuan Ceremony. Scholars have reviewed the history and development of the practice, arguing that the boats were the primary vehicles for bringing plague. They also transformed and repurposed them as instruments for sending off the plague (Xie, 2014). Some scholars have explored the origins and relationship between the Wangye and the Wangye's boat (Lin, 2018), and have also begun to consider and explore the relationship between the Wangye Boat's exorcism and the ritual of patrolling (Hong, 2023). In Malaysia, Wangchuan Ceremony is known as Wangchuan Ceremony. Scholars believe its purpose is to pray for peace in the country, agricultural and commercial prosperity, and economic prosperity (Shi, 2017:47-48). Its core purpose is to expel evil spirits believed to cause epidemics and chaos, while also praying for peace and prosperity. The Wangchuan Ceremony is considered to revolve around the worboat of the Wangye, making it a vibrant cultural venue (Neo & Ngo, 2024: 109).

Second, the social functions, cultural values, and significance of the Wangchuan Ceremony are examined. Some argue that the practice facilitates the coexistence and prosperity of various religions (Liao, 2012), energizes politics, economy and culture, and provides spiritual comfort (Guo et al., 2016). Other scholars have explored the relationship between religious art and folk crafts (Xie, 2019). Seizing the marine cultural characteristics of the Wangchuan Ceremony, explore the cultural spirit and values it embodies (Tian, 2022).

Third, the preservation, inheritance, and contemporary application of the Wangchuan Ceremony. A study proposes methods and means to preserve, protect, and disseminate the Wangchuan Ceremony through digital technology (Guo, 2019). A focus is on the design of the Wangchuan Ceremony and its cultural and creative products (Wang, 2022). Another study, drawing on specific design cases and focusing on the user experience dimensions of scene experience and product innovation, has identified two experiential design strategies for the Wangchuan Ceremony culture (He & Jiang, 2024).

The above literature review and analysis of the relevant literature on the Wangchuan Ceremony reveals that these previous studies primarily focused on its preservation, inheritance, functional value, contemporary applications, and anthropological perspectives, providing preliminary historical material for this study. However, relatively few scholars have examined the overall aesthetics of the Wangchuan Ceremony from the perspective of its folk aesthetics. Furthermore, relatively few have delved into the ritual space itself, particularly its role in promoting the spiritual aspects of marine culture, such as the perception and experience of this ritual space.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data

This article primarily conducted a questionnaire survey on the marine folk culture of Wangchuan Ceremony, focusing on collecting data on people's perceptions and experiences of this practice, informed by folk aesthetics and ritual spaces. Through both offline fieldwork and online distribution, this survey collected 359 valid questionnaires, achieving a 97.8% response rate. The data revealed that the respondents were primarily aged 20-29 (44.57%) and 30-59 (29.53%). Their residences ranged from Xiamen (22.01%), other cities within Fujian Province (50.42%), other provinces (17.83%), and overseas (9.75%), providing comprehensive coverage. At the same time, 88.85% of them believe that the folk culture of Wangchuan Ceremony can increase people's understanding of the related marine culture ; 88.3 % believe that the process of Wangchuan Ceremony deeply stimulates their spiritual world ; 86.63% believe that the cultural connotation and atmosphere of the Wangchuan Ceremony can be fully displayed by moving the space from offline to online platform live broadcast ; and 87.46 % believe that the folk culture of Wangchuan Ceremony can make people feel the historical and regional cultural differences.

Methods

The data from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS software for correlation and regression analysis.

Correlation Analysis

This study used Pearson correlation coefficients to analyse the interrelationships between various dimensions of the folk custom of Wangchuan Ceremony. Five variables were randomly selected. Variable One: Does the Wangchuan Ceremony enhance your understanding of its associated marine culture? Variable Two: How rich is the content and imagery of the Wangchuan Ceremony? Variable Three: Does the Wangchuan Ceremony give you

a sense of historical and regional cultural differences? Variable Four: Has the Wangchuan Ceremony profoundly stirred your spiritual world? Variable Five: Can the online livestream of the Wangchuan Ceremony adequately convey its cultural significance and atmosphere?

The results showed significant correlations across multiple dimensions of participants' understanding and experience of the custom. First, participants' belief that the custom enhanced their understanding of relevant marine culture (Average Value: 3.70, Standard Deviation: 1.13) correlated strongly with the richness of information content and imagery (Average Value: 3.53, Standard deviation: 1.18), with a correlation coefficient of 0.75 ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that the richer the information content, the deeper the participants' understanding of marine culture. Second, the correlation between the custom's ability to experience historical and regional cultural differences (Average Value: 3.58, Standard Deviation: 1.02) and its impact on their spiritual well-being (Average Value: 3.64, Standard Deviation: 1.01) was 0.68 ($p < 0.01$), also demonstrating a positive correlation. This suggests that, through experiencing this cultural activity, participants were able to deeply appreciate the uniqueness of history and region, thereby stimulating a spiritual resonance. Furthermore, participants' opinions on the online livestream of the Wangchuan Ceremony (Average Value: 3.69, Standard Deviation: 1.16) showed significant correlations with other dimensions, particularly with perceptions of historical and regional cultural differences (Correlation Coefficient: 0.64, $p < 0.01$) and spiritual engagement (Correlation Coefficient: 0.73, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that even with the shift to online livestreaming, participants were still able to experience the cultural connotations and atmosphere. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Correlation Analysis Statistics.

Project	Average Value	Standard Deviation	Variable One	Variable Two	Variable Three	Variable Four	Variable Five
Variable One	3.70	1.13	1				
Variable Two	3.53	1.18	0.75**	1			
Variable Three	3.58	1.02	0.74**	0.70**	1		
Variable Four	3.64	1.01	0.68**	0.60**	0.64**	1	
Variable Five	3.69	1.16	0.73**	0.69**	0.64**	0.73**	1

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Source. Rongxiang Lin (29 August 2025).

Regression Analysis

This regression analysis used understanding of Xiamen's marine culture of Wangchuan Ceremony as the dependent variable and four factors extracted from the questionnaire as independent variables. The regression analysis showed that the adjusted R^2 value of the multiple regression model was 0.703, ranging from 0 to 1 and relatively close to 1, indicating that the independent variables explained approximately 70.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, demonstrating that the model had good explanatory power and good fit. The F-test result was $F(4,354) = 213.198$, with a P-value of 0.000, indicating that the model was significant overall and that at least one independent variable had a significant effect on the dependent variable. Further analysis was conducted on the regression coefficients and significance of each independent variable. The regression coefficients for independent variables 1 and 2 were both 0.30, with P-value of 0.000, indicating that these two factors were equally important and highly significant in increasing understanding of marine culture. The regression coefficient for independent variable 3 was 0.17, with a P-value of 0.001, indicating that it also had a significant effect on the dependent variable. The regression coefficient for independent variable 4 was 0.22, with a P-value of 0.000, indicating that its impact on the dependent variable is also highly significant. The VIF values are all less than 5, indicating that there is no serious multicollinearity problem between the independent variables. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Regression Analysis Statistics

Project	Regression coefficient	T-value	P-value	VIF
constant	0.13	0.99	0.325	-
How rich is the content and imagery of the Wangchuan Ceremony?	0.30	7.03	0.000**	2.41
Does the Wangchuan Ceremony give you a sense of historical and regional cultural differences?	0.30	6.26	0.000**	2.31

Has the Wangchuan Ceremony profoundly stirred your spiritual world?	0.17	3.51	0.001**	2.38
Can the online livestream of the Wangchuan Ceremony adequately convey its cultural significance and atmosphere?	0.22	4.72	0.000**	2.72
Sample size	359			
R ²	0.707			
Adjusting R ²	0.703			
F	F(4,354)=213.198,p=0.000			
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01				

Source. Rongxiang Lin (29 August 2025)

RESULTS

The above analysis reveals that the richer the folk aesthetics and other information presented in the Wangchuan Ceremony, the deeper people's understanding of marine culture. Furthermore, the Wangchuan Ceremony significantly enhances participants' understanding and spiritual experience of marine culture through its spatial dimension. Participation in this ritual, in particular, allows participants to deeply experience the uniqueness of history and region, thereby stimulating resonance at the spiritual level. Digital platforms such as livestreaming have shifted the ritual space from offline to online, from the physical to the virtual, yet people can still experience much of the cultural connotations and atmosphere of Wangchuan Ceremony. This demonstrates the necessity of studying Wangchuan Ceremony based on folk aesthetics and ritual space to promote the presentation and utilization of its marine cultural connotations.

The Marine Culture Embodied in Xiamen's Wangchuan Ceremony is Explored from a Folk Aesthetics Perspective

Folk Aesthetics studies objective folk customs in social life. From this aesthetic perspective, it examines the general patterns in people's aesthetic relationships with various folk customs (Song, 1986:121). Wangchuan Ceremony incorporates numerous Folk Aesthetic elements related to the ocean, such as the Wangye's Boat, painted paintings, wood carvings, and the battle procession.

The Marine Cultural Elements Contained in the Wangye's Boat

The hull of the Xiamen's Wangchuan Ceremony was chiefly designed and constructed based on the prototype of a "Fuchuan. This term, a generic term for the pointed-bottom seagoing vessels of the Fujian and Zhejiang coastal areas, is so named because most were built in Fujian or by Fujian craftsmen (Wu et al., 2023:65). It was an important means of marine transportation and an excellent representative of ocean-going vessels during the Ming and Qing dynasties in China. The high-angled design of the hull creates a strong visual tension and sense of volume. The hull's proportions, which evolved over time, now have a length-to-width ratio of approximately 5. This ratio gives the hull a shuttle-like shape, which not only possesses a modern streamlined structure but also creates a harmonious aesthetic.

The hull structure is principally composed of the keel, planking, and watertight bulkheads. The Fuzhou boat's sturdy keel, combined with the ribs that connect the hull transversely, forms the boat's overall structure. The master-slave relationship is congruent with the aesthetic principle of master-slave, thereby clearly distinguishing primary and secondary components, creating a visual sense of hierarchy and giving the boat an overall aesthetically pleasing sense of order and harmony. The watertight bulkheads are unique, dividing the hull into several compartments using bulkheads, creating independent, watertight spaces, is a pivotal aspect of the ship's design, contributing to enhanced safety during oceanic voyages.

The dimensions of the mainsail, namely its height and width, are determined by the mast height. The sail is cut to create a reasonable proportion and scale with the overall hull size. As demonstrated in offshore production, the product has been shown to exhibit both aesthetic appeal and the capacity to withstand harsh weather conditions at sea, including strong winds, rapid currents, high waves, and variable weather patterns.

Marine Cultural Elements Contained in Wood Carvings

The decoration of the Wangye's boat is meticulously crafted, especially the wood carvings, which blend traditional craftsmanship, religious symbolism, and marine culture, resulting in a visually striking and culturally significant aesthetic. For instance, the lion's head on the prow. During field research, Zhong Qingfeng, a representative inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Wangye's boat construction, explained that the prows

of ancient Fujian merchant boats also often featured lion heads, symbolizing warding off evil and auspiciousness. Moreover, the introduction of lions to the region from foreign countries via marine trade may have facilitated cultural exchange with Arab countries, which frequently traded with ancient Fujian. This historical interaction suggests that the image of the lion may have been more familiar to merchants from these regions. Consequently, the lion shape persists and functions as a symbol of traditional marine culture.

Additionally, the boat features wooden carvings of the "Ten Sailors", representing sailors with diverse duties, including punting, towing, sailing, steering, anchoring, lookout, and communication. Each character is portrayed through dynamic modelling and detailed features, recreating the poses of authentic seafaring scenes. Through simple yet expressive portrayals, the characters' spirit and temperament are conveyed, showcasing the vibrant spirit of sailors at sea, a vivid embodiment of marine culture.

Marine Cultural Elements Contained in the Painted Patterns

Firstly, the prow features painted designs. The bottom of the bow is decorated with a "Kaishan Mirror" and a "Ploughshare wall". The "Kaishan Mirror" is a white circular design at the bottom of the bow. In ancient times, a bronze mirror would be suspended aboard Fuchuan, utilizing its reflective properties to navigate the dark seas. Later, when depicting these vessels in paintings, a white circle came to symbolize the boat's ability to ride the wind and break the waves. The "Ploughshare wall" is a symmetrical combination of two waves, forming the character "shan" (mountain). Together with the white circular "Kaishan Mirror" above, it forms a new image, resembling a sun lifted from the waves (See Figure 1). It symbolizes the universal illumination of sunlight and the interconnection of mountains and seas. It's as if the ploughshare-like bow of the Wangye's boat appears to cleave through the waves, creating a truly magnificent sight.



Figure 1. The Painted Patterns on the Bow.

Source. Rongxiang Lin (15 June 2025).

Secondly, the hulls of the vessels are painted with patterns. Sea loaches, often called sacred fish, are often seen on both sides of the stern. According to folklore inheritor Chen Wenbin, during field research in Xiamen Port, sea loaches, commonly known as 'sea eels', are a unique totem and symbol of Fuchuan. Legend has it that when a large vessel sprang a leak, a giant sea loach suddenly appeared to plug the hole, saving the entire boat. Thus, the sea loach became a symbol of good fortune for boats. Local boat-dwelling fishermen also recount that this fish, commonly known as the 'true warrior', is revered as a benevolent divine creature. Even great sharks and whales dare not cause trouble in its presence, earning it the deep respect and veneration of fishing communities. Another theory is that these fish are the 'fish leader' of the ocean, possessing special abilities to command and dispatch fish, shrimp, and water creatures, as well as the ability to suppress demons and waves, thus helping fishing boats achieve a bountiful harvest (Chen, 2014: 104).

The Clothing of the Personnel in the Formation

It is evident that Dan people constitute an integral element of the marine culture inherent to the Wangchuan Ceremony. In the region of southern Fujian, a Tanka procession is always present at the head of the Wangchuan Ceremony. In Xiamen, where the Wangchuan Ceremony is performed, there is a distinctive community of water dwellers known as the Dan people, also referred to as "Haiyuezhai" (Liu, 2003). The unique history and marine environment have shaped a distinctive Dan culture, particularly their clothing. The 'oiled shirts and trousers' worn by the Wangchuan Ceremony procession are handcrafted from natural materials and are designed to withstand the ravages of wind, rain, and waves. The simple, natural materials and comfortable styles of their clothing are closely linked to their marine aesthetic practices. Such oilskins are comfortable and practical, withstanding the onslaught of wind, rain and waves. Through their attire, the riverine people express their love for nature, the sea and life itself, embodying their pursuit of an ideal existence and their collective yearning for a more prosperous future.

The Spiritual Experience of the Wangchuan Ceremony Marine Culture in the Ceremonial Spatial Dimension

The concept of ritual space encompasses not only physical space but also social space and imaginary space. The imaginary space is not only a visualization and storytelling of belief systems but also an extension of the meaning of social relations and material arrangements, thus forming a space that transcends physical space and possesses emotional and spiritual effects. During the process of Wangchuan Ceremony, through both embodied and disembodied participation, the audience's imagination is profoundly stimulated, recreating numerous scenes of marine culture and experiencing its charm.

The Ritual Space of Wangchuan Ceremony Enriches the Audience's Spiritual World

The rituals associated with Wangchuan Ceremony allow believers to participate in and observe the ritual space, generating a unique perception and experience. This experience is not only a reverence and connection with supernatural forces, but also a profound affirmation of community identity and cultural memory. Throughout the Wangchuan Ceremony, numerous symbols and objects symbolising marine culture create a strong visual impact for believers, allowing them to interpret the symbolic meaning through viewing.

Firstly, the procession route of the Wangchuan Ceremony stimulates the spiritual realm of its audience. Take the Wangchuan Ceremony in Zhongzhai, a minority ethnic village in Xiamen, as an example. The She ethnic group in Xiamen predominantly maintains equilibrium with the natural world through boat rituals, with their sacrificial arrangements rooted in the natural environment, particularly modelled on the marine environment upon which they depend for survival. Zhongzhai Village's topography resembles an unfurled fan, nestled along the eastern bay of Xiamen Island, forming a distinctive village layout. The local Wangchuan Ceremony parade route forms a geographical space that runs along the seashore, circles Zhongzhai Village, and finally reaches Zhongzhai Bay for the burning procession. This entire space encompasses the once-cultivated marine mudflats, the rebuilt She community after demolition, and the relocated and preserved ancestral homes. It symbolizes a nostalgia for a bygone marine life and the remembrance of She history. These spaces evoke the She people's historical memories and allow the audience to experience the charm of local She ethnic minority culture and its marine heritage (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Parade Route of the Wangchuan Ceremony at Zhongzhai/
Source: Rongxinag Lin (18 August 2025).

Secondly, the ritual of Wangchuan Ceremony for good fortune has been shown to stimulate the spiritual well-being of the audience. The burning of the Wangye's boat for good fortune is the climax of the entire ceremony, exhibiting a high degree of fluidity, transience and emotionality. After a thorough inspection, the Wangye's boat is towed to the beach on the north shore of Wuyuan Bay (Zhongzhai Bay). Once all preparations are complete, the flames on the boat suddenly soar into the air amid the cheers of the crowd. The inhabitants chant "xing, wang, and fa" in unison, praying to the heavens for peace, good fortune, and auspiciousness. The sounds of fireworks and firecrackers, the shapes of various decorations, and the light from the burning of the royal boat all contribute to the fervent atmosphere of the folk festival, further embellishing the unique world of yin and yang harmony. At this moment, flames, smoke, and drifting paper ashes intertwine on the sea surface, instantly transforming the previously motionless wooden hull and its decorations into a dynamic energy field. The flames engulfing the boat not only dissolve the physical space of the boat but also symbolize a farewell and a blessing. Led by the resounding drums and horns of the Taoist priests, the boat gradually sails away on the flames. When the tide rises, the boat's ashes, along with the rising tide on the beach, are forever returned to the sea. The entire process presents a scene where sound, form, and light complement and intertwine with each other, profoundly inspiring the audience's

spiritual world. They feel a sense of remembrance for their ancestors, awe for the ocean, and a spirit of exploration into the unknown world (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. The Wangye's Boat was burned at Zhongzhai Bay.

Source: Rongxiang Lin (16 November 2024).

The Onlineization of the Wangchuan Ceremony Creates a New Channel for Cultural Dissemination

In traditional societies, people primarily experienced their local spaces through perceptual actions and physical practices. However, in the era of deep mediatization, the separation of time and space influences the transformation of the subject's spatial perception. Therefore, the emotional experience of place generated through physical practice and perception will shift to an immersive experience through direct visual and perceptual participation. This construction process itself can be understood as the generation of a digital sense of place (Pei, 2023). The development of mobile internet has erased the temporal and spatial boundaries of many social behaviours. In traditional offline ritual spaces, participants use their bodies to participate in ritual activities. In online spaces, however, participants cannot directly use their bodies to engage in action. Therefore, for the Wangchuan Ceremony, physical participation must find new expression within online platforms. Within these online platforms, various elements of absence are cultivated, and the space is detached from the specific location of the ritual. This frees participants from the constraints of the old logic of presence and allows them to utilize a variety of new media and platforms to overcome geographical constraints (Yan & Shen, 2020).

The Internet has enabled a connection between livestreaming platforms and physical ceremonies. Participants share their ritual experiences through images, videos, and text within this shared social space, thereby spreading ritual culture. For example, during the 2024 livestream of the King's Boat Sending Ceremony at Xiamen's Zhongzhai, many online participants engaged in conversation and discussion, asking questions about the King's Boat Sending Ceremony and its marine characteristics. This method of communication through livestreaming platforms goes beyond simply disseminating culture; it also creates a new ritual space that perpetuates faith and sustains society.

DISCUSSION

Previous studies of folk aesthetics have analyzed relevant folk customs through the aesthetic characteristics of their carriers. For example, they have examined the external aesthetics of the long drum dance, exploring its value through the ritual and ceremonial beauty (Li, 2019). Others have explored the folk aesthetics inherent in traditional Chinese paper art (Wang, 2021). While these studies examine relevant carriers of folk aesthetics, beyond superficial aesthetic characteristics, these carriers are also influenced by social, cultural, power-related, and religious factors. In particular, the internal mechanisms underlying the folk aesthetic elements of marine culture, such as those found in the Wangchuan Ceremony, warrant further investigation. Regarding ritual space, previous scholars have examined its spatial construction, functional construction, and order-building, attempting, for example, to interpret the distinct functions of individual caves within a cave complex through the spatial structure of the grottoes and the layout of the sculptures (Xia, 2022). Taking the Hantian Festival as a research object, a study using the perspective of power to depict the process and characteristics of the reconstruction of festival space during the process of festival tourism (Li et al., 2024). This reveals how scholars analyze ritual spaces from perspectives such as social order and the distribution of rights. They provide a reference for the study of the ritual space of Wangchuan Ceremony. However, none of these studies elaborate on how ritual space adapts and innovates in response to changing influencing factors.

The Construction Mechanism of the Folk Aesthetics of Wangchuan Ceremony

Wangchuan Ceremony is not a set of pre-defined artistic norms, but rather a living system that is constantly generated, negotiated, and reconstructed through the participation of different groups. It has specific construction mechanisms, such as the self-renewal of traditional beliefs, the dynamic negotiation of power relations, and the practical needs of cultural and tourism integration.

The Self-Renewal of Traditional Belief

With shifts in social structure and values, the belief system of the Wangchuan Ceremony has also been continuously adapting and updating, and its aesthetic has also undergone corresponding changes. First, the shift from warding off plague to praying for blessings. With social changes, the Wangchuan Ceremony gradually shed its single purpose of warding off plague and evil spirits, significantly reducing its superstitious and feudal roots. It has gradually evolved into a comprehensive folk custom that combines blessings, disaster prevention, and universal salvation. As a result, the paper-made figures on the boats have become more subdued, and the painted patterns are primarily auspicious. Second, the shift from closeness to openness. With the development of history and environmental changes, the practice has become more open and transparent. Simultaneously, with the advancement of society, media and digital technology are reshaping the aesthetic of the Wangchuan Ceremony. The Wangchuan Ceremony tradition has gradually shed its original mystique, and its marine cultural connotations have been more widely presented and disseminated, garnering wider public attention.

The Dynamic Negotiation of Power Relations

Wangchuan Ceremony integrates religious beliefs, community life, and folk art. Its ritual practice is not a static cultural performance, but rather involves the participation of multiple actors, including temple groups, local communities, government, and media organizations. It embodies a dynamic negotiation of complex power relations. This profoundly influences the content, form, and aesthetics of the ritual. The protection of intangible cultural heritage, such as the Wangchuan ritual, primarily involves three parties and five key stakeholders. One party is the government, which recognizes intangible heritage preservation as a public cultural undertaking. Another is the professional team, which provides specialized services for this cause as a public welfare endeavor. The third party comprises the bearers of the heritage themselves, categorized into individuals, groups, and communities. No single entity should exert control over another; instead, dynamic consultation and collaboration should be fostered to collectively ensure the vitality of intangible heritage transmission. Thus, Wangchuan Ceremony is a practice of the aesthetics of power. The involvement and negotiation of various power actors not only determines the success of the ritual but also forms a complex negotiation between tradition and modernity, solemnity and entertainment, driving the continuous aesthetic transformation of the Wangye's boat. For example, the decision on the boat's maker and the content of its painting, as well as the route and venue for the Boat's tour, are all the product of negotiation.

The Practical Needs of Cultural Tourism Development

With the continuous development and integration of the cultural and tourism industries, the cultural and economic value of the Wangchuan Ceremony is becoming increasingly prominent. Cultural tourism development not only provides new avenues for its preservation and transmission but also profoundly influences the evolution of its aesthetic forms, directly giving rise to new aesthetic expressions. This new approach has gradually transformed the Wangchuan Ceremony from a local religious ritual into a comprehensive regional cultural performance. Firstly, cultural tourism development has enabled the Wangchuan Ceremony to achieve aesthetic expansion through spatial reconstruction. In Shapowei, one of Xiamen's most prosperous tourism core areas, elements of the Wangchuan Ceremony are widely incorporated into local tourist spaces. For example, visual elements of the Wangchuan Ceremony's marine cultural theme are incorporated into the wall beautification of Shapowei, as well as the design and application of landscape sculptures. Secondly, the Wangye Boat's itinerary supports local tourism development. While circling the communities around Xiagang, it also specifically designs routes through many tourist and commercial centers. This extended route has led to spatial reconstruction and directly influenced the creation of aesthetic experiences, attracting more non-believers and tourists to participate in on-site observation and experience. Thirdly, new decorations have emerged on the boat, such as the addition of LED lighting to the hull to accommodate nighttime viewing.

Of course, traditional culture is not static but rather the most vibrant element within historical heritage. The history of the Wangchuan Ceremony is a narrative of preserving traditional culture while fostering continuous innovation. As societal structures and values evolve, techniques are refined and modern adaptations are embraced, thereby infusing traditional marine culture with contemporary vitality and achieving creative development. For instance, in terms of technical innovation, the boats crafted in Xiagang incorporate the distinctive hull contours of local fishing vessels onto the traditional Fujianese junk framework. This fusion of marine fishing craft design

elements with traditional Fujianese junks effectively traces the evolutionary trajectory of boatbuilding innovation within the Xiamen Bay region. Regarding modern adaptation, under local government guidance, the boat craftsmanship has been integrated with contemporary design principles and tourism experiences, forging a distinctive cultural tourism brand. To advance tourism development, aesthetic elements favored by visitors and consumer groups have been judiciously incorporated while preserving tradition. This includes enriching the boat's painted decorations with more diverse auspicious motifs. Through such explorations and practices, the Wangchuan Ceremony procession has achieved innovative development, expanding in scale and broadening its influence. These very endeavors embody the spirit of proactive exploration and pioneering innovation essential to China's marine cultural development in the new era.

Adaptation and Innovation of the Ritual Space for Wangchuan Ceremony

The villages in Xiamen where the Wangchuan Ceremony is performed, are all located within urban villages. With the implementation of urban renewal policies, the physical space for this ritual has been significantly deprived. However, at Zhongzhai, despite the entire village's relocation, thanks to the joint efforts of government departments, experts and scholars, and the local She people, the ritual space has been continuously adapted and innovatively developed. Furthermore, with the development of new media and digital technologies, the space for Wangchuan Ceremony is constantly changing, with offline and online activities taking place simultaneously, and the coexistence of the real and the virtual becoming increasingly apparent.

The Adaptation of Ritual Space under Urban Renewal Policies

Space is a crucial vehicle for urban community governance and a crucial perspective for understanding and resolving many community governance issues (Wang & Xiong, 2024:59). In particular, how to preserve a community's original culture during urban renewal has become a crucial issue. In the Zhongzhai community, the entire original She ethnic group village was demolished, directly altering the physical spaces—the beach, temples, and streets—that served as the foundation for the Wangchuan Ceremony. This fundamentally altered the original spatial layout of the ritual. However, through the joint efforts of government departments, experts and scholars, and local She people, the planning and construction of the new space was centered around safeguarding the She people's original memories and protecting their rights. First, innovatively recreating physical space. Actively documenting She ethnic culture, for example, by filming numerous documentaries before the demolition. Actively incorporating She ethnic cultural elements into new buildings, planning and constructing a She ethnic folk culture park and new residential homes with She ethnic characteristics, these efforts preserve Zhongzhai's historical context and allow She ethnic traditions to merge with modern development. Secondly, innovatively strengthening social spaces is crucial. With the entire village of Zhongzhai undergoing relocation and reconstruction, the question arises: how can we address the inherent needs of residents and foster sustained social connections and connect the She ethnic community through the development of physical and cultural public spaces? Zhongzhai has developed numerous solutions to this problem, such as the joint construction of the Zhongzhai She Ethnic Community Development Center and rental resettlement housing. Through these projects, which are jointly funded and benefited by the She ethnic group, the social connections of Zhongzhai residents have not been severed by the village's demolition; instead, they have been strengthened through this shared development and sharing.

Through the collective wisdom and collaborative efforts of local authorities and residents, the challenges posed by urban renewal to the Wangchuan Ceremony have been resolved. This demonstrates the multifaceted relationship between people and the sea, manifesting as the ecological harmony between humanity and nature, the social harmony among people, and the harmonious coexistence of people with traditional ways of life. The community forged by this culture of harmony is precisely what is required for marine cultural development in the new era, fostering the concept of marine cultural harmony and community building.

Breakthroughs in Ritual Space within the Context of Digital Media

With the expansion of media formats, traditional geographical boundaries are inevitably broken down (Liao, 2014:56). First, the disembodied participation and cultural dissemination of livestreaming platforms. In the digitally mediated era, the separation of time and space influences the transformation of the subject's spatial perception. Participants are no longer constrained by the old logic of "presence" and can utilize a variety of new media and platforms to overcome geographical limitations (Yan & Shen, 2020). In new modes of cultural transmission, participants share their ritual experiences with others through images, videos, and text within the social sphere of a shared platform, thereby disseminating ritual culture. In 2023, the Wangchuan Ceremony in Xiangang Subdistrict attracted over one million viewers online through livestreaming. Second, the alienation of ritual space within digital virtual platforms. Designers of digital virtual platforms utilize various technologies to expand the boundaries of online ritual space. Through interactive practices within the platforms' virtual spaces, cultural memories from

various eras are extracted and placed within designed virtual scenes. Leveraging the power of participants as "mediators", this approach unleashes creative productivity while narrowing the gaps created by cultural differences.

The Wangchuan Ceremony has adeptly embraced the tide of digital media development, undertaking commendable experiments in both spatial arrangements and dissemination methods. This has yielded favourable communication outcomes, contributing significantly to the propagation of marine culture in the new era. Building marine culture in the new era demands innovative communication methods to effectively convey ocean narratives. For the principles of marine cultural development to gain broader public familiarity, understanding, recognition, and acceptance, communication approaches must be revitalised. Through multi-channel dissemination and proactive international exchanges, we can elevate the profile of Chinese marine culture within global cultural activities, enabling the world to gain deeper insight into its essence.

CONCLUSION

Based on questionnaire data, this article conducted correlation and regression analyses and found that the practice of Wangchuan Ceremony can enhance people's understanding of related marine culture. Specifically, the richer the folk aesthetics presented during the ritual, the deeper people's understanding of the marine culture it embodies. Furthermore, the spatial dimension of the ritual significantly enhances participants' spiritual experience. Participation in this ritual, in particular, allows participants to deeply experience the uniqueness of history and region, thereby stimulating resonance at the level of spiritual space. Therefore, this article conducts a comprehensive study of the practice from the perspective of folk aesthetics. It proposes that the folk aesthetics of Wangchuan Ceremony is a living system that is continuously generated, negotiated, and reconstructed through the joint participation of different groups, characterized by specific construction mechanisms. These include the self-renewal of traditional beliefs, the dynamic negotiation of power relations, and the practical needs of cultural and tourism integration. The folk aesthetics of the Wangchuan Ceremony continue to adapt and evolve against the backdrop of the new era. This pioneering spirit is precisely what the development of marine culture in the new era requires, representing its intrinsic trajectory. The cultivation of marine culture in this new epoch must harness the courageous spirit of exploration embodied by the Wangchuan Ceremony, forging ahead with bold determination.

Regarding ritual space, the article explores the adaptation and unique innovations of the She ethnic ritual space in Xiamen's Zhongzhai area to social development, as well as the breakthroughs of ritual space in the context of digital media. In the adaptation and evolution of the Wangchuan ceremony at the Zhong Residence, the creative development of ethnic and marine cultures is fostered through innovations in both physical and social spaces. The resulting philosophy of harmonious development represents an urgently needed aspect of marine cultural construction in the new era, aiding marine stakeholders in forming a sense of community. The key to cultural influence lies in widespread dissemination and the recognition of its concepts (Hou, 2022:55). Xiamen's Wangchuan Ceremony event uses rich marine cultural media to tell stories about the ocean and enrich audiences' spiritual experiences. Through innovative physical and social spaces, it promotes the creative development of ethnic and marine cultures. It also facilitates the wider dissemination of marine culture in the new era through online platforms.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

This study is based on secondary data, which is available in the public domain. Therefore, ethical approval is not required for conducting this study.

Disclosure Statement

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