

Striving Towards a Modern Coastal Metropolis

Qixi Festival: the Most Romantic Traditional Chinese Holiday

By Jin Lu

Qixi Festival, or Chinese Valentine's Day, falls on the seventh day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. This year, it is on August 4th. According to Chinese mythology, the immortal heavenly weaver Zhinü is allowed to meet her mortal husband once a year on this day. Couples in Ningbo enjoy this Festival in both modern and traditional ways.

The Story of Qixi

According to legend, once, there was an orphan cowherd, Niulang, who lived with his abusive elder brother and sister-in-law. They eventually kicked him out of the house and gave him nothing but an old cow.

The cow, however, was a former immortal sent to earth in bovine form as punishment for violating the heavenly court's rules. One day, the cow led Niulang to a lake where fairies often took baths. There, Niulang saw Zhinü, the most beautiful fairy and a skilled weaver.

The two fell in love at first sight and were soon married. They had a son and daughter and their happy life was regarded as the ideal by everyone around them.

Yet in the eyes of the Jade Emperor, the Supreme Deity in Taoism, marriage between a mortal and immortal was strictly forbidden. He ordered his minions to bring Zhinü back to the realm of fairies.

Niulang was devastated when he discovered Zhinü had been taken away. Moved by Niulang's sadness, the cow sacrificed its own life so that Niulang could use its hide to make a pair of magical shoes, which gave him the power to fly. Niulang put his two children in two baskets strung from a shoulder pole and chased after the minions who captured Zhinü.

The pursuit enraged the heavenly empress, who took her hairpin and slashed it across the sky to create the Milky Way, separating husband from wife.



A sculpture of Niulang and Zhinü formed by plants in Sanjiangkou.

[Photo by Xin Zhicheng]

But all was not lost, as a flock of magpies, touched by Niulang and Zhinü's love and devotion, formed a bridge across the Milky Way to help the family reunite. Even the Jade Emperor was touched. He allowed Niulang and Zhinü to meet once a year on the seventh night of the seventh month.

This is how Qixi came to be. The Festival can trace its roots back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

Traditions Old and New

Traditionally, after dusk on Qixi, people would turn their gaze to the night sky, searching for Altair and Vega. These two stars, situated on opposite sides of the Milky Way, are named

"Niulang" and "Zhinü" by the Chinese.

In the past, Qixi was not only a special day for lovers, but also a time for girls to pray for nimble fingers in needlework and making handicrafts. In some parts of China, girls would throw a sewing needle into a bowl full of water on the night of Qixi. If the needle floats on the surface instead of sinking to the bottom, then it is proof that the girl is a skilled embroiderer.

The love story of Niulang and Zhinü has been handed down for generations, yet certain traditions associated with the Festival are at risk of dying out, which is why some Ningbo schools are organizing activities to revive them. Students can try their hand at threading a needle and the needle-floating game.

Both activities were popular among noblewomen during the Qing Dynasty.

Festive Shopping Boom

In the days just before Qixi, Ningbo was enveloped by a festive atmosphere. Jewelry stores, restaurants, beauty brands, and other retail businesses launched Qixi-themed sales campaigns.

The sales of jewelry, chocolate, and other gift items increased significantly. Pre-orders for flower deliveries and restaurant bookings rose as well.

According to Baidu Index, there was a spike in the number of searches for the word "Qixi" this month. Data from Meituan, China's largest on-demand ser-

vice platform, also showed the same trend.

A spokesperson of Heyi Avenue Shopping Center said the sales of many luxury brands during the Qixi Festival soared this year. The mall saw a footfall of almost 50,000 shoppers per day.

Ningbo Wanxianghui, located on Qianhu North Road in Yinzhou District, was also very popular on Qixi.

"The popularity of Qixi Festival has grown significantly in the past three years to surpass Valentine's Day and even Mid-Autumn Festival in terms of malls' revenues and foot traffic. This suggests that Qixi is gradually becoming one of the busiest shopping days of the year," said the Heyi spokesperson.

SPOTLIGHT

This Season's First Catch of Crabs is Here!

By Dong Na

"Here comes the first haul of crabs!" Around 7 PM on August 1, with a shout from a fisherman, a crowd immediately formed at the dock. Everyone was eager to buy the first crabs of the season.

The fisherman Wang Mingming was too busy dealing with customers to tie the crabs' claws. He plucked the crabs one by one from the net and threw them into a bucket, to be weighed and sold by his wife. "More than a hundred swimming crabs came up in one haul. The fishing net was full to bursting. What a great harvest to start off the new fishing season," he said happily. "Thanks to the summer fishing ban, there seems to be more crabs this autumn than in previous years. I am overjoyed!"

With an area of 20 km², Ninghai Bay is not large. It only takes half a day for a ship to make one fishing trip. On the first day of the new season, the fishermen prepared their nets and gear early, setting off from the piers at 12 noon sharp. As the tide did not recede until late in the day, it was already dark when they returned to shore.

"Newly-caught crabs taste particularly fresh." According to local old fishermen, August is the time when swimming crabs and green crabs are at their fattest in Ninghai Bay. Since Ninghai Bay is an estuary where salty and fresh water meet, the seafood here is highly nutritious and well-loved by coastal residents.

Local fishermen focus on catching swimming crabs at the start of the fishing season. This year, Ninghai Bay's first haul is especially good, containing high-quality crabs and yellowtail fish. On the first day of the season, swimming crabs were priced at ¥100-120/kg and green crabs at ¥260-300/kg. Prices are expected to come down as more seafood comes ashore.

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双语汇 Different Tongues

抱珠楼：历经风雨，重现华光

By Gou Wen

On July 23, the Baozhulou, a historical private library located in Cicheng Town, Jiaxing District, officially opened after meticulous restoration. It plans to grow its collection by accepting book donations from the public.

7月23日，位于江北区慈城镇的抱珠楼在精心修缮后正式开馆，并以“从空向满”的理念广纳众藏。

Baozhulou was established by Feng Benhuai, an ancestor of Feng Jikai, the famous writer. The building is 183 years old and held tens of thousands of books in its heyday. The restored Baozhulou consists of four main buildings covering an area of 5,090 m².

抱珠楼由著名作家冯骥才祖上冯本怀创建，距今已有183年历史，极盛时藏书数万卷。修缮后的抱珠楼占地面积5090平方米，包括抱珠楼本体等4幢主体建筑。

"The reopening of Baozhulou is meaningful for protecting and passing down historical and cultural heritage. It is not only a library, but also a community space. I hope more citizens could come to read books and donate their favorite books to the library. In this way, we can expand the collection together," said Feng Jikai.

“抱珠楼重启，对保护和传承历史文化遗产具有积极意义。它不仅是一个图书馆，更是人民的空间。希望大家不仅能走进抱珠楼读书，也能把自己喜欢的书放在里



The Baozhulou. /抱珠楼。

[Photo by Shen Guofeng] 沈国峰 摄

面，共同参与建设。”冯骥才说。

In the future, Baozhulou will become a community cul-

tural venue for exhibitions, cultural preservation, cultural exchange, and other functions.

未来，这里将成为一个集展览展示、文化传承、交流体验和服务配套等功能于一体的公共文化空间。

