

Study on Public Activities of Ancient Baita Temple in Nanchong City, Sichuan Province, China

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Abstract: Chinese culture is one of the oldest cultures in the world. Many ancient temples have been built in ancient Chinese cities. They have more than thousand years of traditional history. The temples which were built at the ancient Chinese cities were a master piece, there are many such kinds. These temples are not only places where people go to worship. It is also the venue for people to carry out folk activities, and it is also the garden for the literati.

In this paper we discuss about the study we have done at the ancient Baita temple which is our research object at Nanchong City in Sichuan Province. Taking historical literature into account as the clue, relying on the details of the archaeological discovery, and using the field exploration data as a reference to explore the historical context of Baita Temple and the familiarity of the ancient activities at the Baita Temple among people.

Keywords: *ancient temples; Baita temple; historical literature*

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1 Introduction to Baita temple in Nanchong city

1.1 Nanchong ancient city

Nanchong City is located in the northeast of the Sichuan Basin, Jialing River flows from the south to north. It is adjacent to Dazhou in the east, Guang'an in the south, Suining and Mianyang in the west, Guangyuan and Bazhong in the north, and Shunqing,

Gaoping and Jialing are notable among the subdivisions within the city. The city is located in the south of the country, hence it was named Nanchong. Here, the mountains and rivers are beautiful, surrounded by lot of water streams along the mountain valleys, the ancient city is neighboring the big river, and connecting with Tongchuan. According to the Seventh Year of Xianfeng in the Qing dynasty (1857), the "Nanchong County Annals" records: "The Wufeng and Zhufeng flanking the Jaling River north and south; the Dragon City and the Golden City masking each other; the zigzag Jialing River encircling the cities, passing through Longmen and falling through the Three Gorges; the Qingju town range extending towards the dam located upstream."^[1] During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Nanchong was the political, economic, and cultural center of the northeastern region of Sichuan province.

1.2 Geographical location of Baita temple

Baita Temple is located in Gaoping District of Nanchong City. It is situated on the Mount Heming on the east bank of the Jialing River, facing the ancient city of Nanchong across the river. According to the Seventh Year of Xianfeng in the Qing dynasty (1857) "Nanchong County Annals" records: "Mount Heming is located in Zhi (now Nanchong city), one kilometer away from the Jialing river bank, connected with Dayun Mountain, Baita temple was built on the Mount Heming, one among the eight scenic spots in Nanchong city."^[1]

1.3 The historical allusion of "White Tower Morning Bell"

In ancient times, there was a big bell in the Baita temple. The monks at the temple got up early in the morning and they used to ring the bells loud every

day. The sound of the bell was reached to the farthest distance along with the morning breeze. In addition, Baita is a 13 level structure; each and every level of the tower has copper bells at the four corners. The wind blows the copper bells on the tall tower. The people hear the melodious ringing of the bells and wake up every day, since the bells ring was adopted by the people living around surrounding of the temple as a wakeup call it would have been named as the "White Tower Morning Bell", and became one of the eight scenic spots in Nanchong.

During the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, Wang Yifeng, an official (Tongpan) in Shun Qingfu had a poem "The Morning Bell of Baita Temple": "There is a tower on the other side of the river, the monks on the mountain wake up early and stay up late. The bell rang before the cockcrow, kitchen smoke rises slowly from the city by the river."^[1] Yuan Dingyuan of the Qing Dynasty also has a poem: "In the east of the city, there is a mist-shrouded temple, and the Baita tower stood by the bank of the river. The winter moon had not yet set, the people were still asleep, and the temple bells were ringing across the river."^[1]

2 Space layout of Baita Temple

2.1 Temple space layout

Baita Temple was built over Mount Heming. The layout of the temple space was temple at the front and the tower at the back or rear. The temple had a traditional courtyard layout. The tower is the tallest structure and most central building in the temple. Baita, commonly known as "White Tower of the Song Dynasty", formerly known as "Infinite Pagoda"^[2], was built in the northern Song dynasty Jianlong Period (AD 960), more than thousand years ago, and is now a national cultural relics protection unit. According to the Seventh Year of Xianfeng in the Qing dynasty (1857) "Nanchong County Annals" records: "The White Tower (Baita) is a bell tower which was built by Song Taizu is in Mount Heming^[1]. The tower is ninety feet high, slightly more than twenty feet in width and has twelve floors." Baita has unique shape, exquisite craftsmanship, high historical art and value. The tower is square in shape and 39.56 meters tall. It is a 13-story pavilion-style brick tower. The stone masonry base is originally a sacred seat surrounded by intricated dragons and dragon motifs around. The tower has a total of thirteen levels. The first level has arches to enter and exit, and

the first to tenth levels have small niches, every niche has a statue, in the tower there are a total of ninety-three small niches, ten doors and nine windows. The surrounding of the tower used to be painted by white lime, and the pillars, urns and arches are all painted with yellow dye. It is especially bright in the sun^[3]. At the top of the tower is a dome-shaped roof made of disc-shaped cast-iron, which does not only prevent lightning strikes, but also people used to climb to the top of the tower to have a scenic view of the Nanchong City.

2.2 Relationships of Baita, Jialing River, the ancient city of Nanchong and Zhufeng tower

Baita is located on Mount Heming on the east bank of the Jialing River. The Jialing River flows slowly under Baita. The river is magnificent, with lush trees and beautiful scenery. It is natural scenery outside the Baita Temple. Baita and Nanchong ancient city corresponds to the Jialing River. The ancient city of Nanchong is "twelve feet high, nine li and seven fen in perimeter, 18,460 feet in total, and the city is surrounded by the moat"^[1]. It is a human landscape outside the Baita Temple. Baita and Zhufeng Tower are far apart from Qingxi, both are also known as Nanchong black and white Tower. Zhu Fengta, also known as the Black Tower, is a stone pagoda in Zhufeng Mountain (now Miaozui Village, Dujing Town, Gaoping District, Nanchong City).

3 Public activities of the Baita Temple

3.1 Folk activities of ordinary people

There are temple fairs every first and fifteenth of a month at Baita temple. Thousands of people, from two years old child to 90 years old person visit the temple during the occasion, in average the fairs are mostly attended by elderly people in their 70s. Activities include: burning incense, going around the deity of Buddha for three rounds, preaching about Buddha and eat vegetarian food. During spring festival, the celebration lasts from first to fifteenth, people worship Buddha, pray, visit temple and ring the bell. In addition, on the day of the September 9th Chongyang Festival, Baita temple also holds festival for the elderly. The participating elderly people are not only from the ancient city of Nanchong, but also from places like Xichong, Yilong and Peng'an. The programs include singing, martial arts, dance and so on, about twenty

different kinds, the scene is magnificent and it is a good place for the people to play.

3.2 The literati's mountain climbing

According to the field trip and the Seventh Year of Xianfeng in Qing dynasty (1857), "Nanchong County Annals-The Atlas", Baita was built on the high-lying Mount Heming. It is the commanding center of the ancient Nanchong city south. The surrounding scenery from the tower is unobstructed and the whole area around the temple was overlooked from the white tower. The scenery view has three levels visually: The first one is in the small field of view, from the Jialing River embankment till the ancient city of Nanchong

east wall as the "boundary". The scenery includes Jialing River, East Wall, big east gate, small east gate, small south gate, etc. (Figure 1); The second is in the middle field of view, with the north, west and south walls of Nanchong Ancient City as the "boundary". The scenery includes Nanchong Ancient City, big north gate, small north gate, big west gate, small west gate, etc. (Figure 2); the third is the large field of vision. The natural mountain bodies such as Qingquan Mountain, Wufeng Mountain, Zixia Mountain and Zhufeng Mountain are the "boundary". The scenery includes Zhufeng Tower, West Lake, Qingxi Lake, Gujing Pond, Wangping Tomb, etc. (Figure 3).

Figures:

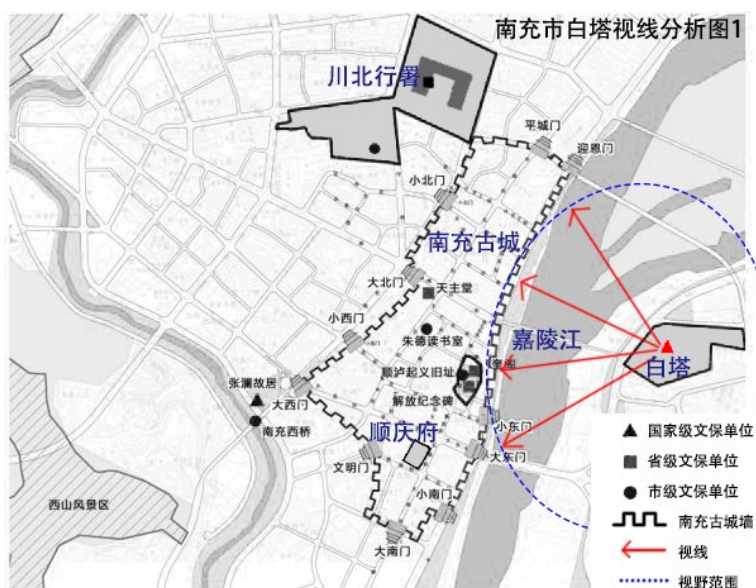


Figure 1. Baita tower sight analysis 1 (source: author self-painting)

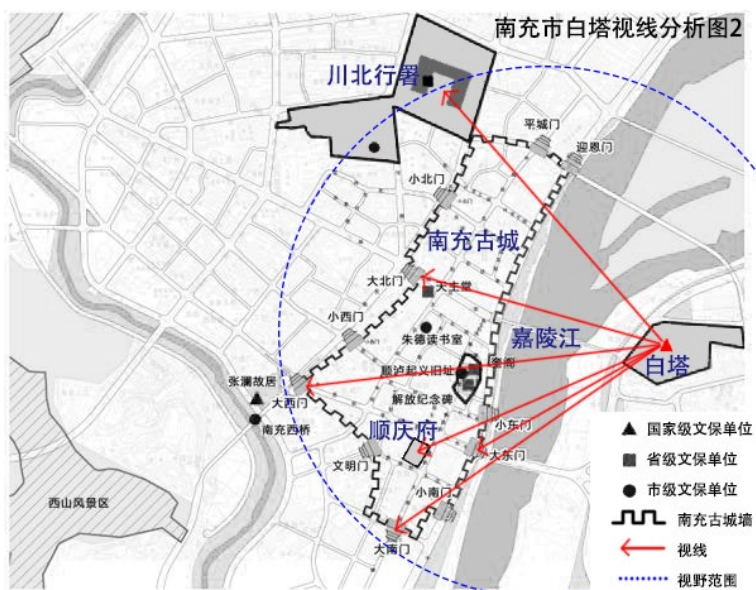


Figure 2. Baita tower sight analysis 2 (source: author self-painting)

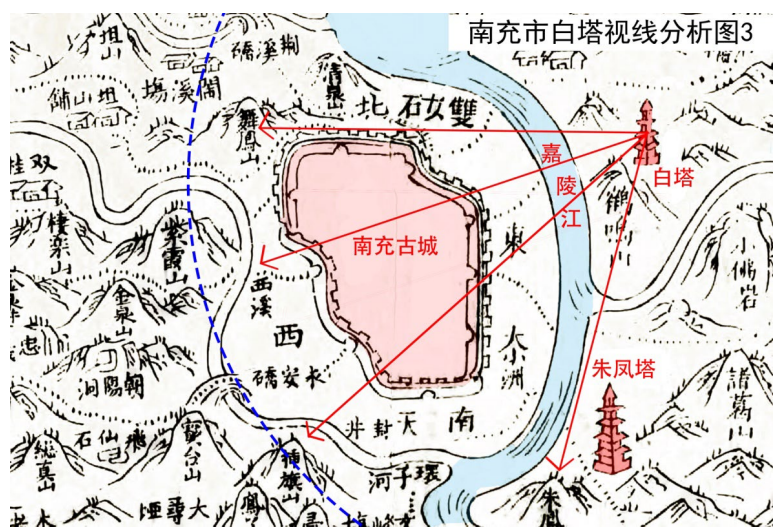


Figure 3. Baita tower sight analysis 3 (source: author self-painting)

Baita by the Jialing River is far away from the ancient city of Nanchong across the river and opposite to the Zhufeng Tower. It has a great advantage for its geographical position, and because Baita was built on the Mount Heming on the Jialing River in the east of the city, it is decorated with a mountain and becomes a famous spot in Nanchong, so it attracts many tourists for versify and painting. During the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, Cheng Yuanbin wrote the poem "Tour in Baita": “The momentum of Baita tower is like poetry, calming down the roaring waves of river. The Baita tower stands by the temple in solemn silence, surrounded by the radiance of the sun. Its reflection falls upon the cold, crystal-clear lake. Climbing on the tower and looking around, the beautiful mountains stretch on and on. Look far into the distance there are endless broad valleys. Every time the monks on the mountain are chanting, the tolling of bells echo into the clouds.”^[1]

4 Conclusion

Baita Temple is on the Mount Heming on the Jialing river, facing Nanchong city across the river. There are flowers and trees in the temple, ancient architecture, garden and related scenery, an ancient city was formed outside the temple. Natural scenery such as Jialing river, Wufeng Mountain and Zhufeng tower based on such a landscape, Baita temple has become a venue for folks to carry out folk activities. As well as the place where the literati climbed the high-pitched and made poetry paintings. It has also made the human landscape of "White Tower Morning Bell", one of the eight scenic spots in Nanchong. These are the public activities of the Baita temple.

References

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