

The Three Kingdoms Culture and the City of Chengdu

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Abstract: The Three Kingdoms Culture is regarded as the most influential part in the colorful traditional cultures of Chengdu. In this paper, the relationship between the Three Kingdoms Culture and the City of Chengdu is discussed in three respects based on the definition of Three Kingdoms: (1) Chengdu is the core of the original culture of the Three Kingdoms; (2) it is the center for inheritance of the Culture; (3) it is the research center of the Culture. The research of the Three Kingdoms Culture is a topic worth considering in the process of Chengdu's growing into an International metropolis.

Keywords: The Three Kingdoms Culture; Chengdu; core area; center for inheritance

1. Definition of Three Kingdoms Culture

People have frequently used the term Three Kingdoms Culture since the late 1980s. There has not been any clear definition for its connotation and extension. During the International Seminar of the Three Kingdoms Culture of Sichuan in China in Sichuan Province in November 1991, Chinese and foreign scholars did not have in-depth and concentrated discussions about the definition of the Culture, but here were two viewpoints raised. Some historians believed the Three Kingdoms Culture is rooted from, and developed in the period of the Three Kingdoms, while I understand it is rooted in the broad background of a grand culture and believe that the concept of the Three Kingdoms Culture is extensive, which does not simply refer to nor is equal to the culture of the Three Kingdoms. It refers to the comprehensive culture's root in the history and culture during the Three Kingdoms period, with the stream and spread and evolution of the stories from that period, including the work *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. I published the

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article *Preliminary Exploration to the Three Kingdoms Culture* in 1994, in which I clearly stated that the concept could be understood and interpreted in three stages.

The View of the Three Kingdoms Culture in historical perspective represents the first stage. It holds that the Three Kingdoms Culture is a spiritual culture including philosophy, literature, arts, history, technology, and so on. Thus, comprehensive research has been made for a long period. The Three Kingdoms Culture in historical perspective has eternal value for study.

The View of the Three Kingdoms Culture in historical and cultural perspective represents the second stage. It states that the culture sums up the material and spiritual civilization of the Three Kingdoms in history, covering politics, military, economics, culture and so on. In-depth study has been made in some areas, while there remain many open questions in others. The concept of the Culture of Three Kingdoms in historical and cultural perspective undoubtedly proves to be reasonable, which is of eternal value for research as well.

These two views of the Three Kingdoms Culture differ from each other in scope, but both views are placed in a specific historical period, and agreed that the Three Kingdoms Culture is the Culture of Three Kingdoms Period. However, in the connotation and extension of the definition, they differ greatly. Both prove to be convincing with sufficient facts, and provide abundant elements for study. However, they fail to totally account for many phenomena of the Three Kingdoms Culture. This failure leads to the third arrangement.

The View of the Three Kingdoms Culture in the perspective of macro culture represents the third stage, referred to as the Three Kingdoms Culture in an extensive sense. I put forward this view as early as 1991. The Culture itself is not considered to be equal to the Culture of the Three Kingdoms

Period. Instead, it is regarded as a comprehensive culture derived from the work *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The Three Kingdoms Culture in an extensive sense covers a wider scope and is applicable in a broader area, than the other two stages. In the third view, it is easier to recognize and interpret the complex phenomena of a spiritual culture.

To review in the broad vision of a macro culture, the Three Kingdoms Culture accumulated over several generations. It is the crystallization of the people's psychology over a long history, which had a profound influence on the spiritual life and national character of the Chinese people, and has spread widely throughout the world.

Both macro and micro researches are applicable to the three views in different independent stages. Their relationships could be comparatively regarded as the relationships between micro, medium and macro studies. Thus, the three definitions are not completely opposite to each other. They are just like a group concentric circles extending their scopes with the identical center. The center is the basic kernel of the Culture of the Three Kingdoms Period, while the increasingly extended scopes are all aspects of its revolution, absorption and derivation. The views of the Three Kingdoms Culture in three stages jointly undertake the tasks of interpretation and research of the Three Kingdoms Culture. Without a clear understanding of these dialectical relationships, if we rigidly adhered to the traditional understanding from an historical aspect, it would lead to a rejection of various derivative cultural phenomena, and we would be caught in a trap of our own making and we would have difficulty justifying many issues.

My definitions of the Three Kingdoms Culture have been commonly agreed upon in academic circles.

The City of Chengdu today is different from the County of Chengdu as the capital of the Shu

State in the Three Kingdoms Period of the late Han Dynasty. It consists of 11 districts; Jinjiang, Qingyang, Jinniu, Wuhou, Chenghua, High-tech Zone, Longquanyi, Qingbaijiang, Wenjiang, Xindu, and Shuangliu. There are four county-level cities; Dujiangyan, Pengzhou, Qionglai and Chongzhou and five counties; Jintang, Pi, Dayi, Pujiang and Xinjin. Chengdu today really deserves the name of Big Chengdu, a big modern city with a population of over 10 million.

Therefore, the topic of the Three Kingdoms Culture and the City of Chengdu should be discussed in the broad vision of Big Three Kingdoms and Big Chengdu.

2. The Three Kingdoms Culture and the City of Chengdu

There are many things to be discussed about the relationship between the Three Kingdoms Culture and Chengdu. Here are some specially mentioned.

2.1 Chengdu is the core of the original culture of the Three Kingdoms.

As the capital of the Kingdom of Shu Han, Chengdu is the core of the whole original culture of the Three Kingdoms as well as the political, military, economic and cultural center of the Shu Group under the rule of Liu Bei.

The development of the Liu Shu Group can be roughly divided into four stages.

(1) The initial stage, from 184 AD when Liu Bei stepped on the political stage to 207 AD when he made three visits to the hut of Zhuge Liang and Zhuge Liang took an important post. During this period, Liu Bei had to temporarily attach to Liu Biao, the highest official Mu of Jingzhou, after he was repeatedly defeated and had no place to shelter himself, despite that he had gained a world reputation by his hard work over twenty years.

(2) The period of prosperity, from 208 AD, the Battle of Red Cliff, to 221 AD when Liu Bei proclaimed himself emperor. During this period, Liu Bei won four prefectures located in the south of the Yangtze River with the victory of the Battle of Red Cliff. After Liu Qi passed away in the 14th year of the Jian'an reign period (Jian'an 14th), 209 AD, Liu Bei took the position of Mu of Jingzhou. After Zhou Yu's death in Jian'an 15th in 210 AD, Liu Bei kept control over large parts of Jingzhou, the seven prefectures of Jingzhou in the Eastern Han Dynasty, by borrowing Nanjun Prefecture from Sun Quan. Liu Bei entered Shu in Jian'an 16th 211 AD, pacified the whole of Yizhou in Jian'an 19th 214 AD, further took the position of Mu of Yizhou, and realized the first strategic target put forward in the Longzhong Plan, the strategies raised by Zhuge Liang for Liu Bei's ruling over the Shu area, namely occupying Jingzhou and Yizhou. He seized Hanzhong in Jian'an 24th 219 AD, and proclaimed himself Hanzhong Wang when he was at the pinnacle of his career. He proclaimed himself emperor in the lunar April in the first year of Zhangwu, 221 AD, and became the successor of the Han Dynasty and

Liu Bei



the organizer in reviving the Han Dynasty, which perfectly justified his attacks on Cao Cao and Sun Quan. Unfortunately, the Liu Shu Group suffered a major setback at this stage. In the winter of Jianan 24th 219 AD, he lost Jingzhou and many of his finest soldiers and generals after the Eastern Wu broke alliance and launched a sudden strike on Jingzhou and captured and killed Guan Yu, Liu Bei's first sworn brother, who guarded three prefectures of Jingzhou for Liu Bei.

(3) The period of consolidation, from Liu Bei defeat in Yiling in 222 AD to the death of Fei Yi in 253 AD. There were three parts in this period. First, from June of leap year Zhangwu 2nd 222 AD to May of Jianxing 1st 223 AD, when there were major events like the defeat in Yiling, the last words of Liu Bei at Baidi City, the death of Liu Bei, and the succession of Liu Shan. Second, from May of Jianxing 1st to August of Jianxing 12th 234 AD, the 12 years when Zhuge Liang assisted Liu Shan and governed the state, developed the economy, fought up and down the state, and consolidated the regime of Shu Han as a result. Third, from August of Jianxing 12th to the lunar January of Yanxi 16th 253 AD, when the successors selected by Zhuge Liang like Jiang Wan, Fei Yi, and Dong Yun worked together with one heart and successively assisted Liu Shan for 19 years and achieved a stable situation for the people and maintained the state.

(4) The period of decline, from 253 AD when Jiangwei governed the state to 263 AD when the Shu Han State ended. During this period, Liu Shan became idle and lazy after years of ruling and the crafty and fawning official Chen Zhi and the eunuch Huang Hao worked hand in glove with each other and tried their best to cater to Liu Shan's desire for enjoyment and monopolized power and finally threw the state into disorder. Jiang Wei, number one Minister of power, had spent years on conquests in other states without any attention to the management

of state affairs. Other loyal officials like Dong Jue, Fan Jian, and Zhuge Zhan failed to protest to Liu Shan and restrain the political power of the eunuch Huang Hao. Influenced by the three factors as well as the national strength of Shu Han being too weak to contend with Cao Wei, the Wei State ruled by Cao Cao, Shu Han State eventually ended.

Since Liu Bei's entry into Chengdu in 214 AD, Jianan 19th, he took the position of Mu of Yizhou, as the center of the Liu Shu Group had been naturally transferred to Chengdu. After that, there were 50 years, 214 - 263 AD, which was the major part of the development of the Liu Shu Group. Chengdu had been the most important center of the Liu Shu Group and thus was the core area of the whole original culture of the Three Kingdoms as well.

During the Three Kingdoms Period, the brocade industry of Chengdu rapidly developed and became the economic backbone of the Shu Han State. Zhuge Liang set up the special official of brocade to strengthen the management of the brocade industry. Brocades Street, Brocade Official City and City of Brocades have become the nicknames for Chengdu.

Here an important fact has been neglected, which should be stated in this paper. Chengdu is where Chen Shou studied and succeed, the author of the historical work *Sanguo Zhi* (*Annals of the Three Kingdoms*). Chen Shou, 233—297 AD, styled Chengzuo, was a native of Anhan County of Baxi Prefecture (Nanchong City of Sichuan Province today). It says in *the Chronicles of Huayang • Records of Chen Shou* that Chen Shou formally acknowledged Qiao Zhou, Sanji Changshi (an official position), as his master. Chen Shou thoroughly studied the *Shoo King* and the three classic annotation of *Ch'un Ts'ew* and had a good mastery over *Records of the Historian* and *the Book of Han Dynasty*. Smart and knowledgeable, he wrote gorgeous literary articles. In *The Book of Jin Dynasty • Records of Chen Shou*, it also says that Chen Shou respected Qiao Zhou, a

famous scholar in the same prefecture, as his teacher in his teen years. Qiao Zhou was appointed as the position of Quan Xue Cong Shi right after Zhuge Liang took the position of Mu of Yizhou as early as the first year of Jianxing, 223 AD, and had been an official in Chengdu. After Zhuge Liang's death in August of Jianxing 12th, 234 AD, Liu Shan followed Zhuge Liang's recommendation and appointed Jiang Wan, the Prime Minister (in ancient China), to be Chief Imperial Secretary and took the lead in the management of state affairs. Soon after that, Jiang Wan took a concurrent post of Prefectural Governor of Yizhou, and he was further promoted to the position of General in April of the next year. Qiao Zhou was promoted by Jiang Wan to Dian Xue Cong Shi, namely "Official in the Han Dynasty, the leader who managed learning and political issues." Chen Shou was born one year before Zhuge Liang's death, when Qiao Zhou had been official in Chengdu for many years. When Chen Shou "was determined to study at the age of 15," he had to go to Chengdu to acknowledge Qiao Zhou as his teacher. He started his official career after he successfully completed his studies, and took the positions of Dongguan Secretary and Sanji Huangmen Assistant Minister until the Shu Han State was destroyed by the Cao Wei State in the first year of Yanxing, 263 AD, when he was at the age of 37. It was in Chengdu that Chen Shou completed his studies and experienced personally the late period of the Shu Han State and had a deep understanding about the development and related materials of the Liu Shu Group. These laid a solid foundation for his writing of the *Annals of the Three Kingdoms*.

3. Chengdu Is the Center for Inheritance of the Three Kingdoms Culture.

China has witnessed times of succession of

dynasties and countless historical changes over the past 1,800 years. However, the historical events and figures of the Three Kingdoms have always been given particular attention to by scholars and the broad masses of people, and constantly recalled. Thus, the Three Kingdoms Culture has been passed down, derived, enriched and developed. In this long process, Chengdu is apparently in the center.

There are numerous famous historical sites of the Three Kingdoms in Chengdu, including Wu Hou Shrine, the combined temple to memorialize emperor Liu Bei and military marquis Zhuge Liang, named as "the sacred place of the Three Kingdoms," Wudan Shan Mountain where Liu Bei ascended the throne, Sanyi Temple in commemoration of the three oath brothers Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, Wanli Bridge where Zhuge Liang proposed a farewell toast to Fei Yi for his envoy to the Eastern Wu, Jiuli Dam built by Zhuge Liang for flood control, Eight Diagrams, the military tactics worked out by Zhuge Liang, Site in Mimou County, the Temple and Tomb of Zhao Yun in Dayi County, Ancestral Temple of Zhao Zilong (Zhao Yun) at Shijing Temple of Longquan Mountain, the Tomb of Ma Chao in Xindu District, the Temple of Yanyan along Shixiang Lake of Pujiang County, and others. The Wu Hou Shrine has particularly become the most famous cultural relics of Chengdu City and a must-visit place for tourists.

In recent years, Wu Hou Shrine has invested strongly in the restoration of the Ancient Street "Jinli" for the purpose of promoting the Three Kingdoms Culture and the traditional folk culture of Sichuan. The street is always jammed with visitors and has become a major highlight of Chengdu tourism.

The world famous Dujiangyan Irrigation System, is known as construction initiated by Li Bing, Magistrate of the Shu Prefecture in the later period of the Warring States, but it is not known

to many people that when Shu was under the governance of Zhuge Liang, he set up a special weir official commanding 1,200 soldiers. The weir official oversaw protecting and dredging of Dujiangyan Irrigation System throughout the year, which was followed in successive dynasties. In this way, the Weir has played its role in flood control and irrigation for more than 2,000 years. Li Bing was recognized for his pioneering of this renowned water conservancy project while Zhuge Liang was recognized for maintaining it. Dujiangyan Irrigation System could claim to be relics of the Three Kingdoms in this sense.

Today, events of the Three Kingdoms remain the biggest theme in various categories of favorite folk art of Chengdu people like the Sichuan Opera, storytelling, voiceless sound, Bamboo Qin, and Money Board. Take traditional Sichuan Opera as an example, there are as many as 150 dramas about the Three Kingdoms, far more than other themes. Almost every plot in *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is screen written and played in those

dramas, and other dramas are adapted from legends of the Three Kingdoms or created from artists' imaginations, like Zhang Fei's *Three Breaks of the Outer Gate of Military Camp*, *Rolling Drum Hill*, *Spy Camp and Cry Bitterly for Master*, *Accusation of Liu Shan* (by Liu Bei) at *Midnight* and many others. From the establishment of New China to the beginning of "the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," writers of Sichuan Opera created newly organized dramas. The most influential being *Heqin*, written by Li Mingzhang and based on the story of "Connection by Marriage between Sun Quan and Liu Bei," an event described in *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Since the reform and opening-up, writers of Sichuan Opera have created many new dramas in a more open vision and with clever techniques, including the influential ones like *Death of Diao Chan* by Long Xueyi, *Wife of the Hero* by Long Xueyi and Hu Mingke, *Tricks in the Bag* by Ni Guozhen and Li Chao, and *Sunset in Qishan* by Wei Minglun. These new dramas caught people's eyes immediately and aroused academic controversy due to their

Wu Hou Shrine



strong reflective awareness and bold plot design.

Today in Chengdu, writers and artists in every field are still, with great enthusiasm, engaged in various forms of adaptations and recreations of the materials of the Three Kingdoms. The production of 108 episodes radio series the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was completed at the end of 1993 by the Sichuan People's Broadcasting Station after more than ten years of effort with collective forces, and all the episodes were on the radio in April 1994. The script was published by the Sichuan University Press in 1995. It is a notable landmark in the progress of China's radio play. I list it as one of the "Three Major Works of Art" of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It has won the National Radio Show Special Award and "Five projects" Honor Award. Moreover, it was named one of the 60 Most Influential Programs at the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China and is the only work which received this honor in the whole Sichuan Radio and Television System.

4. Chengdu Is the Center for the Studies of the Three Kingdoms Culture

For a long time, Chengdu academic circles have always attached great importance to the study of the Three Kingdoms Culture, and have made various efforts and achieved good results.

In Chengdu, there are some dedicated research institutes like Center for Cultural Studies of the Three Kingdoms of Sichuan University, the Sichuan Institute of the Three Kingdoms Culture, and the Research Exhibition Department of the Wu Hou Shrine. There are also special academic groups; The China Society of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was founded in 1984, whose administrative body is affiliated with the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, and the Zhuge Liang Research Society of

Chengdu City, founded in 1983, is attached to the Wu Hou Shrine.

There are important academic fields in Chengdu. In the proceedings of the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, *Social Science Research*, which devoted a special edition to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms in 1982 and has published a number of research papers in their journal over the years. *The Journal of Chengdu University* has kept devoting a special column to the Three Kingdoms and Zhuge Liang (renamed "Study on the Three Kingdoms Culture") since No. 3 of 1986. *The Forum on Chinese Culture*, hosted by the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, has devoted a special column to "Study on the Three Kingdoms Culture" since its founding in 1994. These publications have become important fields for the study of the Three Kingdoms Culture and resulted in an extensive and far-reaching impact across the whole country.

A series of important academic research meetings of the Three Kingdoms Culture took place here. Some of them are of great academic significance and have profound influence. Three meetings are listed here as examples: (1) the first session of the academic seminar of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. This was the first national academic seminar in the research of the work the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, co-initiated by the Editorial Department of Social Sciences Research of Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences and Institute of Literature. The seminar took place between the 15th and 21st of April 1983 and was attended by more than 120 scholars from 17 provinces and cities across the country. (2) The International Academic Seminar on the Three Kingdoms and Zhuge Liang. This was the first International academic meeting on the research of the Three Kingdoms and Zhuge Liang, which took place from the 24th to the 29th of November 1985 in Chengdu. More than 130 delegates participated,

who were from scientific research institutions of universities and colleges, cultural relics museums from 11 provinces of mainland and Hong Kong, as well as foreign countries like Japan and Thailand. (3) The International Seminar on the Three Kingdoms Culture of Sichuan in China. This was the first international high-level academic seminar on the topic of the Three Kingdoms Culture, co-sponsored by the Sichuan Provincial People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the Sichuan Foreign Cultural Exchange Association, Sichuan University, and the Chinese Society of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. It took place from the 1st to the 7th of November 1991. More than 60 experts, scholars and artists from China, the Soviet Union, the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany, and Japan attended this seminar. The Chinese delegates included Sun Daolin, the famous artist who was planning to film the series film *the Three Kingdoms*, Wang Fulin, the noted director who was directing the TV series *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Bi Xi, Senior Editor of Sichuan People's Broadcasting Station, who was producing the radio series *the*

Romance of the Three Kingdoms, as well as the renowned experts on the studies of the history of the Three Kingdoms and the work *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It was a glorious feast for exchanges between historians, literary researchers and artists. Foreign scholars included Li Fuqing, Academician of Communications of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Ross Roberts, Professor of New York University and translator of the English version of *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Shosuke Tatsuma, Professor of Keio University and translator of the Japanese version of *the Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and Claudine Salmon, Researcher of France National Scientific Research Center. Their wonderful views were notable in the seminar and have had profound influence.

In Chengdu, several experts with international reputations have become the backbone strength in the promotion of the continuous development of studies of the Culture of the Three Kingdoms.

Thus, Chengdu is now the recognized research center of the Three Kingdoms Culture.

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