Research on Construction of Historical and Cultural City of Ezhou: A Case Study of West Hill Scenic Spot

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Abstract. The paper intends to research the construction of famous historical and cultural city of Ezhou, making a case study of the West Hill Scenic Spot. The scenic spot boasts not only beautiful landscapes, but also rich historical and cultural resources like the Three Kingdoms culture and the Buddhist culture. However, the scenic spot in the context of Ezhou urban planning and design is not satisfactory and it has its own problems, such as historical factor and long-term planning defect. In light of the realities, we propose long-term, overall and scientific planning, various resources integration and coordinated, rational development.

1. Introduction

Culture is the soul of city whereas city is the carrier of culture. History and culture are the crystallization of the past and present life of a city, thus the important source of sustainable development of the city. A successful city must always develop and innovate while preserving its historical and cultural traditions. Adherence to excellent historical and cultural traditions, and cultural innovations in line with the times, are the key to the sustainable, healthy development of a city. How to build a city’s cultural brand and enhance its soft power, how to define a city’s culture and highlight its hallmarks, how to deal with the relation between cultural preservation and cultural development, how to utilize Ezhou’s historical and cultural resource: these issues are the top priorities that we must consider before constructing the famous historical and cultural city of Ezhou. The article intends to research the construction of famous historical and cultural city of Ezhou, making a case study of the West Hill Scenic Spot.

2. General Survey of Ezhou City

Ezhou is a prefecture-level city in eastern Hubei Province, China. It lies on the southern bank of the Yangtze River east of Wuhan city, across the river from Huanggang city, and west of Huangshi city. Sandwiched between the cities of Wuhan and Huangshi, Ezhou has a relatively small area of 1,504 square kilometers. In its long history, Ezhou has earned numerous good reputations, such as City of One Hundred Lakes, Ancient Capital of Wu in the Three Kingdoms Period, Home of Wuchang Bream, Home of Bronze Mirror, Cradle of the Pure Land Sect of Buddhism, Home of Calligraphy and Painting, Excellent Tourist City of China, Garden City of Hill and Water, Famous Metallurgical City and Medicinal Valley of China, etc.. It is also an important part of the Wuhan City Circle Experimental Area.

Ezhou boasts the superior humanistic environment as well as the favorable natural one, blending into the hill, water and garden. The West Hill Scenic Spot and the Lotus Hill Scenic Spot are noted for their cultural heritage and natural beauty. The three lakes, Liangzi, Honglian and Yanglan, are well-known tourist attractions. The city also has a long history and splendid culture. During the reign of Emperor Yao, it was the Fan State; in the Xia Dynasty, E City; in the Shang Dynasty, the E State. During the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, it was part of the Chu State. Prior to the Eastern Han, it was E County. It became the capital of the Wu State ruled by Sun Quan (261-303),
who proclaimed himself king there, and was renamed Wuchang during the Three Kingdoms period. The name remained in use until the founding of the Republic of China in 1912. Throughout China’s history Ezhou has remained an important city politically, economically, and militarily with its strategic position along the middle section of the Yangtze River. A great number of celebrities, such as Tao Kan (259–334), Li Bai (701–762) and Su Shi (1037–1101), visited or lived in the city, leaving a lot of cultural and historical treasures. Ezhou’s cultural and historical resources include the Chu culture, the culture of the capital of the Wu State in the Three Kingdoms period, the religious culture, the bronze mirror culture, the calligraphic culture and the culture of mountain and water, etc. In building the city image, Ezhou features its culture and water.

3. West Hill Scenic Spot

Reputed the resplendent pearl in Ezhou, the West Hill is a cornucopia of natural, cultural and historical treasures. It was called the Fan Hill in ancient times. It is situated in the west of the Ezhou city proper, hence the name West Hill. Lu Ji (261–303), a noted literal critic, in the Western Jin Dynasty, lauded the hill as “the suburbs of the capital”; Li Bai, a great poet in the Tang Dynasty, acclaimed it as “the emperor’s home”; Su Shi, a celebrated man of letters in the Northern Song Dynasty, compared it to “a paradise on earth”; Chen Yi (1901–1972), a poet-marshal, regarded “the West Hill as good as Mount Lu”. One of the earliest 4 provincial tourist attractions in Hubei, the West Hill is a national 3A-class scenic area. It is also the core component of the Wu and Chu Famous Historical and Cultural City and the Scenic Area of the Capital of Wu in the Three Kingdoms Period the Ezhou Municipal Government is building.

3.1 Natural Landscape.

Landscape refers to the visible features of an area of land. It includes the physical or natural elements of landforms such as mountains, plains, rivers, lakes and indigenous vegetation, and human or cultural elements such as forms of land use, buildings and structures. Combining both their physical origins and the cultural overlay of human presence, often created over millennia, landscapes reflect a living synthesis of people and place that is vital to local and national identity. The character of a landscape helps define the self-image of the people who inhabit it and a sense of place that differentiates one region from other regions. It is the dynamic backdrop to people’s lives. Landscape can be as varied as farmland, a hill or wildness.[1] The natural landscape is usually associated with the word scenery, viz. the natural features of a landscape considered in terms of their appearance, esp. when picturesque: spectacular views of mountain scenery.[2] A humanistic or cultural landscape, as defined by the World Heritage Committee, is the “cultural properties [that] represent the combined works of nature and of man”. [3] The World Heritage Committee identifies three categories of cultural landscape, ranging from (i) those landscapes most deliberately ‘shaped’ by people, through (ii) full range of ‘combined’ works, to (iii) those least evidently ‘shaped’ by people (yet highly valued). [4]

The West Hill Scenic Spot comprises the natural landscape and the humanistic or cultural landscape. Facing the Red Cliff in Huangzhou across the river, the hill lies on the Yangtze River on the north, overlooks the wide expanse of misty Yanglan Lake to the south, adjoins the Fan River on the west and abuts on downtown Ezhou on the east. Covering an area of over 4,000 mu, the spot is approximately 1,600 meters long from south to north and approximately 1,200 meters wide from east to west, with the highest peak Shimen Peak at an elevation of 167 meters. From afar, the West Hill looks as though it were a reclining Buddha on the Yangtze River.

With 9 peaks and 6 valleys, the West Hill twists and turns a lot. The 6 streams in the hill links the 7 springs, 3 ponds, one lake and 2 cascades. The underground water, which is beneficial to health, gushes out of the hill all the year around. Blessed with a mild climate and plentiful rainfall, the area is thickly vegetated and the vegetation coverage rate reaches over 95%. There are 123 kinds of animals and 330 kinds of plants there. Temples, pavilions, palaces, towers and bridges and the like are scattered around the hill. The scenery is characterized by antiquity, tranquility, oddity and magnificence. The most peculiar landscapes include “Cold Streams Washing the Jade”, “the Night
Rain Accompanying the Study”, “the Greenness of the West Hill” and “Pine winds in the Valley”, etc. What a paradise on earth it is!

3.2 Humanistic Landscape.

The scenic spot boasts not only enchanting natural landscapes, but also gorgeous cultural or humanistic landscapes, viz. abundant historical and cultural resources. They play an important role in inheriting culture and history, highlighting local colors, elevating cultural tastes and enhancing tourism competitiveness. In terms of development, the cultural landscape in the West Hill can be classified into 3 types: extant, restored and new. In terms of history and culture, it can be divided into 3 kinds: history and culture in the Three Kingdoms period, history and culture in other periods, and Buddhist culture.

3.2.1 History and Culture in the Three Kingdoms Period.

The Three Kingdoms period is an important one in Chinese history, which gave birth to a galaxy of heroes and legends. In 221, Sun Quan made E the capital of Wu and renamed E to Wuchang. He declared independence and proclaimed himself the king of the State of Wu in the following year, and started to build forts and palaces in Wuchang. Ezhou thus ushered in the most glorious era in its history. It was the planning place, command post and rear area of the decisive Battle of Red Cliffs. Sun Hao (242–284), the last emperor of Wu, moved the capital back to Wuchang in 265. They left a generous historical and cultural legacy of the Three Kingdoms on Ezhou. There are over 60 vestiges of the Three Kingdoms period on the West Hill, such as the Summer Palace of the King of Wu, the Sword-Testing Stone, Sun Quan’s Leopard-Hunting Site and Pang Chong’s Reading Site, etc.

(1) The Summer Palace of the King of Wu.

Built between 221 and 229, it used to be Sun Quan’s Xanadu where he read and spent the summer. With the numerous towering trees and running stream, the residence is deemed the “paradise for summer” in Ezhou, as the temperature there is 2 or 3 degrees Celsius lower than that in the urban area. At the former site stands the Gulingquan Temple today. In 1999, the Summer Palace of the King of Wu was rebuilt on the top of the Yizi Peak. Covering an area of over 80 mu, it includes Summer Palace, Reading Room, Discussion Hall and Wuchang Tower, etc., which are in the Han Dynasty style.

(2) The Sword-Testing Stone.

Bao Tang, a well-known swordsmith from Kuaiji, made a sword with the bronze and iron mined in Wuchang for Sun Quan. In order to test the sword, Sun Quan cut a stone into two pieces on the West Hill at one fling, which boded well for his future.

(3) The Sword-Vying Stone.

It is next to the Sword-Testing Stone. Legend has it that Liu Bei (161–223) and Sun Quan tested their swords on the stone on the West Hill in order to vie for a special providence.

(4) The Elegance Garden.

It was first set up as Sun Quan’s royal garden. Rebuilt in 1991, Elegance Garden inherits elements of South China’s delicate classic architectures, located between the Jianshi Peak and the Shimen Peak. Though small, it is exquisite, with bamboos, flowers, ponds, rockeries and pavilions there.

3.2.2 History and Culture in the Other Periods.

Since ancient times, innumerable men of letters and social celebrities all over the country have come to the West Hill for its resplendent history and natural beauty. A myriad of personages in ancient times extolled the hill, such as Qu Yuan (340BC–278BC), Tao Kan, Li Bai, Wang’anshi (1021–1086), Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), Su Shi, Xin Qiji (1140–1207), Lu You (1125–1210), Ding Henian (1335–1424), Zhang Yuzhao (1823–1894), Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) and Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), etc. Countless contemporaries also eulogized the West Hill in various forms.

(1) The Wangchu Pavilion.

On the top of the Jianshi Peak, the pavilion was built in the Ming Dynasty to commemorate Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet in the Warring States period, who visited the West Hill during his exile.
(2) The Jiuqu Pavilion.

It is located on the Jiuqu Ridge. It was originally built in the Three Kingdoms period, but fell into disuse afterwards. Su Shi rebuilt the pavilion at the original site when he was denoted and exiled to Huangzhou across the Yangtze River.

(3) The Pine Wind Attic.

Below the Wangchu Pavilion, it covers an area of 4,200 square meters. With the gable and hip roof with multiple eaves, it is typical of the Song Dynasty architecture. Huang Tingjian (1045–1105), a literary man in the Northern Song Dynasty, slept in the house when he toured the West Hill and he enjoyed living there.

3.2.3 Buddhist History and Culture.

Buddhism on the West Hill can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty. After Sun Quan made Wuchang the Capital of Wu, he began to invite a lot of hierarchs to the West Hill to translate Buddhist sutras. During the Years of Taiyuan of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Huiyuan (334–416), First Patriarch of the Pure Land School of Buddhism, founded the Gulingquan Temple on the West Hill with the help of Tao Kan. The Gulingquan Temple, which is grand and magnificent against the hill, is the cradle of the Pure Land School of Buddhism in the southern China. The West Hill is imbued with Buddhism.

4. Problems

4.1 Residual Historical Problem.

While the West Hill Scenic Area boasts a lot of advantages, it has its defects and the first is the problem left over by history. In the early days of New China, many a city in China witnessed the improper or flawed urban planning and design. Ezhou is no exception. Against the background of socialist industrialization in the early years, a number of industrial and mining enterprises represented by Echeng Iron & Steel Plant were established around the West Hill. The enterprises made tremendous contributions to Ezhou in terms of economic development; meanwhile, however, they, in sharp contrast to the picturesque scenery, seriously polluted the hill. Some parts of the hill, which is rich in mineral resources, have been damaged due to mining there. In response to the clamor of the public, some heavy polluters like August 1st Iron & Steel Plant and West Hill Cement Plant were forced to relocate or shut down. At the foot of or even on the West Hill remain vast stretches of industrial and residential areas.

4.2 Long-term Planning Problem.

History repeats itself and it seems that we haven’t learned the lessons from history. In constructing the Wu and Chu Famous Historical and Cultural City, the Ezhou Municipal Government has invested heavily in the scenic spots along the Yangtze River, such as the Summer Palace of the King of Wu, the Wu Capital Museum, the Gulingquan Temple, the Hanxi Building, Sun Quan’s Altar of Heaven, the Yi Pavilion Inscription on the Precipice, the Sun Quan Square, the Guanyinge Park and the Wuchang Gate, etc., which constitute the Scenic Area of the Capital of Wu in the Three Kingdoms Period. The scenic spots and historical sites are beautiful, valuable and distinctive. For various reasons, however, large tracts of land near the scenic spots along the Yangtze River have been sold out to developers and scores of high-rise buildings have shot up and are shooting up. The modern edifices form a stark contrast to the Scenic Area of the Capital of Wu in the Three Kingdoms Period, constituting a real eyesore. They run counter to Ezhou’s long-term planning. One of the most important reasons is that some officials in the city ignore the long-term urban planning and effective policies in order to obtain the short-term achievements.

4.3 Management System Problem.

The West Hill Scenic Spot needs to strengthen its management system indeed. Firstly, there are many organizations and institutions on or surrounding the hill, which belong to different departments acting on their own. Secondly, the hill is one of the oldest provincial scenic spots and its infrastructure and facilities need upgrading badly to keep up with the times. Meanwhile, protection of historical relics needs consolidating. Services also should be enhanced. In addition, the tourism products must
be diversified and there are too few tourism derivatives for the West Hill. All the shortcomings have something to do with the management system.

5. **Proposals**

The West Hill Scenic Spot is the resplendent pearl in Ezhou, playing an important role in construction of famous historical and cultural city. The spot and the city promise well. In the light of their actual conditions, we make the following proposals.

5.1 **Planning in the Long Run.**

In construction of famous historical and cultural city and development of the West Hill Scenic Area, Ezhou should emphasize long-term planning, dealing with the relations between the whole and the part; Ezhou should highlight the features, balancing traditionality and modernity; Ezhou should stress service, handling the relations between urban functions and culture; Ezhou should intensify environmental protection, coping with the relations between natural environment and social environment; Ezhou should heighten opening awareness, balancing culture and economy. Adhering to the road of sustainable development, the West Hill Scenic Area and other scenic spots in Ezhou must be incorporated in the city’s long-term planning and overall layout, featuring ecology, culture, trustworthy services and digitalized management. As for the chronic problems left over by history, the city must phase out the heavy polluters and irrelevant buildings, based on the future. It may take decades or even a hundred years to solve the problem thoroughly, but it doesn’t mean that the city can do nothing. The city can protect the hill’s environment, repair the hill and reduce the pollution.

5.2 **Integrating Various Resources.**

The West Hill must end the poor cooperation and establish a unified management system, enhancing the managerial level and coordinating various interests. So must other scenic areas in Ezhou. They must be all put under the uniform management of the government. The West Hill should cooperate with other scenic areas to achieve the synergistic effect. The Ezhou Municipal Government has invested heavily in the scenic spots along the Yangtze River, such as the Summer Palace of the King of Wu, the Wu Capital Museum, the Gulingquan Temple, the Hanxi Building, Sun Quan’s Altar of Heaven, the Yi Pavilion Inscription on the Precipice, the Sun Quan Square, the Guanyinge Park and the Wuchang Gate, etc., which constitute the Scenic Area of the Capital of Wu in the Three Kingdoms Period. As a matter of fact, Ezhou should unite with other cities, such as Huanggang, Jingzhou, Chibi and Nanjing, to explore the Three Kingdoms tourism resources.

5.3 **Developing Scientifically and Rationally.**

The West Hill, for that matter, any scenic area, is a contradictory entity. Preservation and development are the two sides of a contradiction which restricts and accelerates each other at the same time. The key lies in balancing preservation and development, in formulating the scientific plan suiting the local circumstances and in developing rationally. First of all, the department concerned should conduct a comprehensive and thorough investigation into the West Hill, exploring its natural resources and cultural legacies so that they can draw up the scientific and rational plan for development. Secondly, the department concerned should try to preserve the West Hill’s natural beauty, utilizing natural resources in a reasonable and scientific way. Besides afforestation and comprehensive geological hazard management, they can encourage irrelevant organizations to move out of the hill so as to advance ecological restoration within the scenic zone and upgrading of the industrial structure. Thirdly, they should highlight its cultural legacies, featuring the Three Kingdoms culture and Buddhist culture, since culture is the soul of tourism. Fourthly, they should diversify tourism products, developing tourism derivatives, so as to increase revenues. Last but not the least; they should improve the service level indeed.

6. **Conclusion**

The West Hill stands out as one of the notable landmarks in Ezhou city, embodying the distinctive natural beauty and cultural charm. It serves as a good example for Ezhou to construct the famous
historical and cultural city. As a matter of fact, the city has just been awarded “Home of The Three Kingdoms Culture of China”. Nevertheless, the West Hill and Ezhou leave much to be desired in construction of famous historical and cultural city for various reasons. It is hoped that the article will induce other scholars to come forward with more valuable contributions.

7. References

[1]. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape

