

# On Buddhism Conception of White Horse Temple of Huili County

Qiangchun Wang<sup>1, a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Fusion Media, Sichuan University of Media and Communications, Chengdu 611745, China

<sup>a</sup>ems@qq.com

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**Abstract:** The Buddhist conception of the White Horse Temple of Huili County in Sichuan can be found in four aspects: the name evolution, the building layout, the Great Buddha's Hall, and the Steles Forest of Calligraphy. It successfully presents a solemn and beautiful Buddhism from the aesthete, the social utility, and politics.

**Keywords:** White Horse Temple; Buddhism conception; Great Buddha's Hall; Tsteles forest of calligraphy.

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## 1. Introduction

In Huili County of Sichuan Province [1], the White Horse Temple [2] is located at the foot of Chimney Mountain, about two kilometers to the east of the town of Huili County. In the period of Nanzhao [3] in the Tang Dynasty, the Theravada of Mahayana Buddhism [4] spread from Dali Prefecture, west of Yunnan Province, to Huili County. The White Horse Temple was built in the Ming Dynasty. At first, it was the ancestral hall. Later, it was turned into White Horse Temple. Because of the change of the dynasties with wars of disputes, the white horse temple decayed, leaving only historical remains. In 1993, it was reconstructed and turned into the official temple of about 100 mu, endowing the landscape with Buddhist conception, which attracted numerous visitors throughout the year.

"The scenery of Buddhism refers to the visible scenery and the deep meaning under the scenery. What concealed deeply in the scenery of Buddhism is right the scenery out of the scenery, the images beyond the images, and the refinement out of rhyme." [5] From four aspects, such as the evolution of the name, the layout of the building, the structure of the Great Buddha's Hall, and the Steles Forest of Calligraphy, we will explore the Buddhist conception from the aspects of aesthetic level, social utility level, and political level.

## 2. The Origination of the White Horse Temple in Huili

The White Horse Temple became well known for enshrining Princess King Zhuang (Descendants Goddess) of the ancient Nanzhao Kingdom and General Baima (White Horse in English). Maybe the name of the temple originated from the general. He was the ancestor of Baizu, a minority of the 56 nationalities in China. It has the same name as the first Buddhist temple in China – the White Horse Temple in Luoyang of Henan Province. Although the two have the same name, the origination is vastly different. The White Horse Temple in Luoyang originated from the story that the white horse carried the Buddhist scriptures to the temple. At the same time, the White Horse Temple in Huili was named after General Baima, whose statue was consecrated there. By 1993, the Huili County Government made tourist planning to change the Bodhisattva into the Buddha. Thus, it turned into the White Horse Temple.

The Buddhist Temple signifies the grade of honor and worship. [5] In the reconstruction, it was cleverly changed into an "Official Temple" instead of an "Ordinary Temple", which upgraded the temple to distinguished status. In formalism, it inherited more than 600 years of history; in essence, the statue was replaced with the more popular Buddha. It reflected a workaround when the Buddhists converged with the local religion. It was consistent with the political need to resolve the contradictions of the people with Buddhist power and by the cultural mentality of blessing to avoid disaster for the people. The upgrade of the temple mainly depended on the strength of ideology, belief, power, and spirit. The reconstruction was abreast of the times, which could be directly perceived by a large number of tourists annually.

## 3. The Buddhist Conception of The Layout of The Temple

"The artistic treatment in architecture and garden is the art of the processing space." [7] White Horse Temple of Huili was built at the western foot of Yancong Hill. It was constructed according to the shape of a mountain facing to the west, a more extensive modification of the traditional temple facing to the south. The Whitehorse Temple of Huili backs on a giant rock wall as a solid backrest; both sides are high convex hillsides just as handrails of the armchair – as if the White Horse Temple is located in a giant chair, and the Buddha seems more grand and serene. The mountain ranges behind the White Horse Temple stretch long and endless, connecting with the other mountains, which demonstrates the location is the most promising land near the Town of Huili County. The architecture of White Horse Temple is surrounded by red ocher walls and covered with golden glazed roofing tiles, which feels simple, solemn, and magnificent. The Great Buddha's Hall, the Goddess of Mercy Pavilion, the Purify House, and the Palace of Jade are well arranged.

From the Terakado, the Great Buddha's Hall in the front is solemn and majestic, beyond hundreds of steps. Due to topographical constraints, there are no buildings on the left; on the right, there are the Goddess of Mercy Pavilion, Tea Porch, and the steles forest of calligraphy. The entire layout is not asymmetrical, but it is very solemn. There is only one center in White Horse Temple, the Great Buddha's Hall,

whether it is watched from the county town or is looked at from the temple area. This center highlights the hierarchical order of the whole temple, well proportioned with a solemn atmosphere, which embodies the charm of reality into fantasy.

Since the temple is harbored in the mountain forest, it naturally requires the architecture to be harmonious with the landscape. The architecture of White Horse Temple merges the landscape theory and feng shui theory of Chinese culture. Look around the mountain range from the top of Yanchong Mountain, and you'll find that the White Horse Temple perfectly coordinates the shape, extension direction, and feng shui of the mountain, which puts the Mountain in the air of Buddhism.

#### 4. The Buddhist Concept of the Great Buddha's Hall

The Great Buddha's Hall, 22 meters long and 14.95 meters wide, consists of 5 rooms constructed with nine ridges and double eaves. Under the roof is a large plaque with the Chinese character "Buddhism Land" written by Master Mingshan, the nationally famous eminent monk from Jiaoshan, Zhejiang Province. The ridges and warped eaves are decorated with little dragons, owl tails, and squat beasts, with glazed tiles on the roof, which makes the temple splendid. Over the door is the plaque with Chinese characters "Great Buddha's Hall" against the black background. The hall is richly ornamented and colorful, with narrow but long flags, sticks, and shielding caps. In the niche, the statue of the Buddha is covered with excellent shielding caps, sitting on the golden lotus. The statue of Sakyamuni Buddha is eight meters high, sitting above the lotus tower with a lotus position. In the back of the temple are the statues: on the left is Monju, on the right, is Samantabhadra, in the middle are the Western Three Bodhisattvas (in the middle of Amitabha, on the left is Mahasthamaprapta, and on the right is Arya Avalokiteshvara). There are 18 Arhat[6] on both hall wings with a natural and elegant air. The statues in the hall are gilded with solemn postures.

"The secular society of Han people features a structure of distinct level, in which the Han Buddhism regards the happy land in the west as a paradise with strict hierarchies." [7] In the Great Buddha's Hall, the learned and refined Bodhisattvas and the Arhat with supernatural power make all the living creatures feel the far-reaching magical power and form the statues arranged by the ancient courts to invite a majestic mental response. The isostructuralism of Buddhism and the upper level of earthliness further encourage people to approve of the existing system, which makes the identification more decriminalized and rationalized and images the hierarchy of the earthly world as the happy land in the West.

#### 5. The Buddhism Concept of The Steles Forest of Calligraphy

The White Horse Temple integrates religion, literature, and art. Huili County, with a long history and rich natural resources, is located in remote mountainous areas. Still, it maintains an excellent cultural atmosphere, which is present in the steles forest of calligraphy. A total of 89 calligraphy works are engraved on the stone tablets with high value for appreciation and research, including 23 masterpieces of great men, celebrities past and present, such as the calligraphy of Qing Dynasty Imperial Tutors Weng Tonghe and Weng Fanggang, ancient calligrapher Xie Yuanliang, Chairman Mao Zedong (seven-character lines *Long March*), Kuomintang patriarch Yu Youren, and Huili's modern painter and calligrapher Liu

Wenxuan.

The painting method exceptionally agrees with the deep meditation of Buddhism. The calligraphy can be appreciated as pure calligraphic works or be interpreted as history. The works also can be used as zen to comprehend Buddhism, which connected all ages and all corners to Huili. Therefore, Buddhism is no longer limited to only one place and is spread far and near; time no longer pauses at this moment and relates the past with the present and the future. Buddhism is no longer too lofty to reach, for they can immerse themselves in Buddhism as long as they practice piously in some ways.

"Buddhism enlightens people to remain calm and undaunted on the external pursuit, obsession, and persistence."<sup>[10]</sup> Perhaps it is the central concept of the White Horse Temple. The Buddhist concept of the White Horse Temple embodies the philosophical, aesthetic, and social utility levels. The White Horse Temple in Huili reminds the public to temporarily eliminate their daily tasks and ask themselves what dimensions of mediocre life they are in. But for the local government, the reconstruction of the White Horse Temple plays various functions in aspects such as alleviating the people, prospering the culture, and boosting tourism.

#### 6. Conclusion

In a word, the White Horse Temple in Huili County shows grand and colorful Buddhist concepts at the aesthetic level, the social utilitarian level, and the political level from four aspects: the name evolution, building layout, the Great Buddha's Hall, and the Steles Forest of Calligraphy.

#### 7. Biography

Qiangchun Wang, Master of Arts, an associate professor at Sichuan University of Media and Communications, mainly engaged in literature, culture and media studies. Email: emsn@qq.com.

#### 8. Note

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#### References

- [1] Huili County is south of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, southwest of Sichuan Province. It is located in the center of the Panxi Resource Development Zone. On the west is Panzhihua City; to the south are Kunming City and Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture. There are Han, Yi, Lisu, Dai, Hui, Bai, and other 22 kinds of ethnics. The prominent ethnic minority, Yi, accounts for 16.6% of the county's population. Huili County, founded in Yuanding 6 in the Western Han Dynasty (111 BC), has a history of 2120 years. It is on the critical west main line of the Southern Silk Road to Yunnan Province.
- [2] The Chinese Buddhist temple is known as the "temple", which originated from the White Horse Temple, built after Buddhism was transmitted into China ... The temple consists of Buddhist halls, pagodas, and by "the Hindustan Style". (Zhang Fa. Buddhist Art [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2004: 135.)
- [3] In the 23rd year of the Tang Dynasty (AD 649), "Xi Luluo claimed as Qijia King, the establishment title of the dynasty

- was Great Mongolian State, also known as Nanzhao State". After 13 emperors of Nanzhao State, in 2nd of Tianfu of Southern Tang in the period of Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (AD 937), "Duan Siping, the Khrom in Tonghai sent a punitive expedition against Yang Ganzhen. Yang Ganzhen sent his brother Yang Zhao and four other people to resist the enemies. Unfortunately, Yang Shao was defeated, and Yang Ganzhen had to escape. Then, Duan Siping founded the kingdom. The title of the reigning dynasty was the Dali Kingdom."
- [4] The essential characteristics of the Mahayana are trying to participate and intervene in secular life, which requires involving all living creatures, to put the ideas of "beneficial to people" and "convenient to people" to a position of religious doctrine principles. (Du Jiwen. Buddhism History [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2006: 77-78.)
- [5] Zhang Fa. Buddhist Art [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2004: 4, 136, 175.
- [6] The Buddhist name Arhat is the abbreviation of Arahant. It has the meaning of foe destroyer, Lokavidu, and infinity, which is the highest Buddhahood of the Buddha. The six roots of sensations are pure and clean – free from human desires and passions. The ignorance trouble has already been removed (foe destroyer), and he is in Nirvana, out of the cycle of life and death, so he deserves to be respected and fended by the ordinary world and heaven. Before the end of life, he lives in earthiness. He preaches the Buddhist doctrine with little desire and abides by the discipline to preach and cultivate living beings according to conditions. Zhang Fa. Buddhist Art [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2004: 175.
- [7] Zhang Dainian, Fang Keli. Introduction to Chinese Culture [M]. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1994: 328.