

An Analysis of the Human Geographic Evolution of Mount Emei, China

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ABSTRACT

An ancient Chinese poet wrote: The moon of Emei Mountain is half a wheel of autumn, and its shadow enters the waters of the Pingqiang River. With its emerald green peaks and majestic atmosphere, Mount Emei is a world-class cultural heritage recognized by the world. From the perspective of geologists, it is a rich geological museum. It has preserved more than 400 million years of sedimentary records and recorded more than 800 million years of geological history. As a famous cultural mountain, Mount Emei also preserves a rich historical and cultural heritage. In this paper, from the perspective of human geography, we adopt the literature analysis method to sort out the human history of Mount Emei. It explores the cultural genes and cultural changes of this famous mountain. It is found that Emei Mountain, as a mountain range with rich cultural precipitation, has been indelible in traditional Chinese culture and is of great significance to Chinese culture.

Keywords: China, Emei Mountain, human geography, Chinese culture

1. Introduction

Mount Emei is a well-known peak in Sichuan Province, China. It stands out among other well-known Chinese mountains and rivers due to its exceptional geological significance as well as its rich cultural legacy. The article's aim is to further investigate the special charm of Mount Emei and its significance in geology and cultural inheritance. The research basis of the piece is the rich geological value

and cultural legacy of Mount Emei. This research attempts to investigate in detail the distinct allure of several well-known Chinese mountains and rivers, together with their importance in geology and cultural legacy, through an examination of Mount Emei.

The literature method and the historical research method are the two primary research techniques used in this work. This study attempts to get a thorough knowledge of the special charms of Mount Emei and expose its significance in geology and cultural heritage via an in-depth investigation of the geological background and cultural inheritance of the mountain. This dissertation seeks to further the in-depth investigation of the distinctive charms of China's well-known mountains and rivers by using Mount Emei as a case study for a number of the country's most well-known mountains and rivers.

2. Regional Geological Background and Tectonic Overview of Mount Emei

Emeishan is located on the western edge of the Yangtze Plateau and belongs to the Central Sichuan Basin. It is also a typical fault block mountain. The Emeishan fault, which runs in a northeast direction, and the Fengdu Temple fault, which runs in a northwest direction, divide the Emeishan region into three primary blocks. The western side is the Emeishan block, the southeastern side is the Er'e Mountain block, and the eastern side is the Emei Plain block (Zhonglan Liu, et al, 2015).

The Emeishan block is an overall large anticline, the Emeishan anticline, belonging to the Emei-Washan fault block belt. Except for the lack of Middle Ordovician-Silurian strata in the Emeishan region, other strata of different ages are well developed. In the early part of the Early Sinian period, the Emeishan mountain area was still a vast ocean. In the late part of the Early Sinian period, due to the Jinning movement, Emeishan transformed from a geosyncline region to a platform region. In the late Cretaceous Yanshan movement, tectonic activity intensified and subsidence basins developed. Since the Paleogene period, due to the collision between the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and Eurasia, Emeishan began to rise continuously. The block tectonic features of Mount Emei can be divided into north-northeast, northeast, near south-north, northwest, and near east-west structures. On a macro scale, they are manifested as folds and faults (Wang Yunsheng, et al, 2015). During the Sinian-Eocene epoch of the Paleogene, there were many tectonic uplift and subsidence activities in Mount Emei. In the early Proterozoic era, Sichuan was naturally divided by the Longmen Mountain-Yanliu line, with the western part being immersed in seawater and the eastern part being relatively stable. In the late Jinning and Chengjiang movements, the Tethys oceanic plate subducted eastward along the Kangdian-Longmen Mountain island arc belt, forming the prototype of the current Yangtze plate (Li Chuanlin, 1986). After the Triassic period, the Indosinian movement led to the emergence of the Middle and Upper Yangtze. Mount Emei slowly rose with the basin until the late Yanshan movement in the Cretaceous period, when tectonic activity intensified and a depression basin was formed.

Since the Cenozoic era, Mount Emei has undergone two major periods of tectonic compression deformation. The first deformation mainly formed two structural systems that controlled Mount Emei, namely the Mount Emei anticline and the Mount Emei strike-slip fault. The second deformation developed on the basis of the first deformation, with the stress mainly concentrated on the top of the blunt-cone-shaped faulted mountain. During this period of deformation, a series of sinistral strike-slip faults such as the Da'e Temple fault and Wannian Temple fault were formed (Zhonglan Liu, et al, 2015). In the Quaternary period, due to tectonic stress in the western region, the Da'e Mountain area rapidly rose, and the foreland basin fell apart, resulting in new watersheds and further development of tectonic movement.

3. Emei Mountain mantle plume and basalt

Emeishan basalt is the only large igneous province recognized by the international academic community in China. Due to its potential to cause global climate and environmental changes and mass extinction events, it has received widespread attention from scholars both at home and abroad. Therefore, the author has also conducted corresponding data compilation.

A large-scale volcanic eruption event occurred on the western plate of the Yangtze Plate during the Middle and Late Permian, forming the famous Emeishan Basalt. The distribution range of basalt is usually considered to be a rhombus with a long axis near the north-south direction (Wang Denghong, et al, 2007). The formation of large igneous provinces in the world is mostly related to mantle plume activity, as the mantle plume model provides a feasible dynamic mechanism to explain the production of massive magma in a relatively short period of time (several million years). Although there are still some controversies about the eruption mechanism of Emeishan Basalt, most scholars still classify it as a mantle plume event (He Bin, et al, 2006). Mainly due to research showing that the eruption volume of Emeishan Basalt is large, and its composition indicates that it comes from deep crust. The eruption is centered on the Kangdian axis, and the mantle plume first arches up to form a volcanic dome centered on the Kangdian axis, then the volcanic eruption occurs, and finally the basement sinks down (Wang Ruihua, et al, 2001).

The Emei Mountain mantle plume experienced multiple stages of magmatic deep activity, volcanic dome formation, volcanic eruption, and crustal subsidence. The magma began to activity during the Maokou period, formed a volcanic dome during the late Maokou period, and erupted during the Longtan period. After the Longtan period, the crust subsided, and the subsidence continued until the end of the Middle Triassic. Although the theory of mantle plume for the Emeishan basalt is still controversial, based on current evidence, it is still relatively consistent.

4. The cultural meaning of Mount Emei

4.1 Blend of myth and reality

Emei Mountain got its name from the Spring and Autumn Period. "Huayang Guozhi·Shu Zhi" recorded: "Du Yu took Baoxie as the front door, Xiong'er and Lingguan as the back door, and Yulei and Emei as the city walls (Chang Qu, 1984). One theory about its name is that it is "high mountain and beautiful water", while another theory is that it is because of the "two mountains facing each other". There is also a saying that Emei Mountain stands on the Dadu River, which was called "Bushui" Mountain in ancient times, so it was called "Bumei Mountain". From "Bushui" to "Emei", it was discussed by modern scholar Zhao Xizhi, "The mountain is the eyebrow of the water. The eyebrow is also the Mei, which is named after the water. Since the Spring and Autumn Period, Emei Mountain has always been known as "the most beautiful mountain in the world".

However, in the early myths before the Wei and Jin dynasties, Emei more than shared the functional role of the sacred mountain Kunlun. In ancient times, people were ignorant and worshipped mountains as gods. It was the ancestors' reverence for nature. In the oracle bone inscriptions unearthed in Anyang, there were many records about the worship and sacrifice of mountains (Han Kun, 2010). There were also many references to mountain gods in the oracle bone inscriptions, and there was a phenomenon of joint sacrifice of mountains.

Kunlun Mountain was based on this phenomenon as a mythological object. The complete expression of Kunlun Mountain was first seen in the "Book of Mountains and Seas", such as the "Book of Mountains and Seas: Western Mountains": "It is 400 miles southwest of Kunlun Mountain, which is actually the lower capital of the Emperor. The god Lu Wu is in charge of it." The "Book of Mountains and Seas: Inner West": "The emptiness of Kunlun Mountain is 800 miles square and 10,000 feet high. ... There are nine gates on the surface, guarded by the open-minded beast, where 100 gods are located ... There are meat-eating animals, pear trees, jade trees, immortal trees... all of which are able to take immortal medicine to avoid death." The "Book of Mountains and Seas: Great Wilderness West": "There is a mountain called Kunlun Mountain... This mountain has everything" (Yuan Ke, 1980). Kunlun Mountain has a strong symbolic meaning. It is the embodiment of ancient people's pursuit of longevity and natural power. It exists more in myths and beliefs. However, since the Qin and Han dynasties, with the formation of the sacrificial system of the central plains mountains, the five sacred mountains have shared the mythological function of Kunlun Mountain.

In the "Records of the Grand Monarchy", it is mentioned that: "Since ancient times, emperors who have been given power have never failed to hold a sacrifice ceremony... The emperor sacrifices to heaven and earth, famous mountains and rivers. The five sacred mountains are regarded as equal to three officials, while the four sacred rivers are regarded as equal to princes. Princes sacrifice to their own territories' famous mountains and rivers." (Wang Lizhi, 1988) The specific locations and functions of the

five sacred mountains were embodied, while Emei Mountain shared the functions of Kunlun Mountain as a mythological object because it was located in the southwest border with Kunlun Mountain and was majestic and beautiful. It also added images such as immortal residence and immortal medicine to it. The "Book of Wei: The Records on Buddhism" recorded: "The origin of Taoism comes from Laozi... He taught Emperor Huang about Taoism at Mount Emei, and taught Emperor Yu about Taoism at Mount Mu" (Xiang Yannan, 1993). The Records of Huayang State, Records of Shu mentioned that there is Mount Emei in the south... The Map of Confucius said that "there is an immortal medicine in Emei, and Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty sent envoys to sacrifice it. If you want to give it medicine, you can't get it" (Chang Qu, 1984). Baopuzi also said that the ancient Taoists who cooperated with divine medicine must enter famous mountains, not just ordinary mountains... There are people who can think about cooperation with immortal medicine, such as Qingcheng Mountain, Mount Emei, and Mount Sui (Er'e Mountain)... These are all true gods in their mountains, and some of them are local immortals (Wang Ming, 1985). This actually reflects the Chinese culture's pursuit of the unity of the Tao and the object, and the idea of combining the virtual and the real, giving it objectification from the outside to the inside. Making myths pursuable is also a manifestation of the spirit of ancient Chinese ancestors who worked tirelessly to open up mountains and forests, striving for self-improvement.

4.2 Interweaving of Buddhism and Taoism

In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhang Daoling founded Taoism on Heming Mountain, which is more than 100 miles away from Mount Emei. Since then, Mount Emei has been closely related to Taoism. The Three Emperors' Scripture in the Western Jin Dynasty wrote: The imperial person is sent by the Emperor Tai. On Mount Emei, he teaches the emperor the five-talent method. It is also said that there are 36 caves in the world, and this is the seventh cave. It is called Xu Ling Cave and Xu Ling Tai Miao Cave (Chang Ming, 1984). Since then, Mount Emei has been included in the Taoist system of cave places and became the seventh cave of Taoism. Zhang Junfang further identified when discussing the origin of Taoism: "The current transmission of the Lingbao Scripture was given by the innocent emperor to Xuanyuan Huangdi on Mount Emei, and the innocent emperor gave it to Emperor Ku on the Mude Terrace. Xia Yu felt it on Zhongshan, and He Lu stole it from Juqu. Afterwards, Ge Xiaoxian and Zheng Siyuan's disciples, with their teachers passing on, continued to spread it" (Zhang Junfang, 1996). The "Cave Xuan Lingbao Scripture" is one of the three fundamental caves of Taoist scriptures. This record elevated the status of Mount Emei in the Taoist system. Mount Emei became the place of Taoism's origin, completing its transformation from a mythical mountain to a famous mountain in Taoism.

Until the Northern Song Dynasty, due to the rise of Buddhism, it became the current Puxian Taoist Temple. According to Shao Shi's Record of After Seeing Shao Bo in the Northern Song Dynasty, the light of Buddha in Mount Wutai has been passed on

Mount Emei Puxian Temple, with stunning scenery and no less than five platforms, is unknown in the Tang Dynasty. Li Taibai's poems on Mount Emei are about immortals but not about Buddhas. The Huayan Sutra is mainly about Samantabhadra Bodhisattvas. Elder Li's *On Harmony* is about Mount Wutai but not about Mount Emei. In addition, all the Buddhist temples in the mountain have no inscriptions on stones in the Tang Dynasty, which is doubted to be particularly popular in this dynasty (Shao Bo, 1990). As Liao invaded the north, Mount Wutai was occupied as the Buddhist center in the north, and the Northern Song Dynasty court was eager to support a new Buddhist center, so Mount Emei was attached as "Daguang Mingshan", a place for all the sages. Prior to this, since Huizhi, the younger brother of Huiyuan in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, built a temple on the mountain, Mount Emei had been in a pattern of coexistence of Buddhism and Taoism for a long time, until the early Northern Song Dynasty. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Buddhism flourished among the people, and people often referred to Mount Emei as a mythological fairy mountain and a famous Taoist mountain. As a result, its status was gradually forgotten.

4.3 Origin and development of culture and heritage

In modern society, Mount Emei has become a popular destination for mountain culture tourism. From the object of Kunlun Mountain to the four famous mountains in the Qing Dynasty, to the tourist hotspot "Emei World Show", Mount Emei has completed the non-figurative transformation of the three-fold cognitive image of fairy mountain, famous mountain and real mountain (Wang Hao, 2022). The cultural cognitive landscape with the theme of "Emei" is rooted in the dual shaping of religious universality imagination and unique geography of Mount Emei. The painting and imagination of Mount Emei's fairyland is rooted in the pursuit of immortality by Taoism. The history of Mount Emei is also integrated with profound religious historical metaphors: the cognitive image of Mount Emei's Taoism shows its image from the fairy mountain of Taoism to the famous mountain of Taoism, while the gradual transformation of Mount Emei into a Buddhist famous mountain and "Puxian Taoist Temple" in the struggle between Buddhism and Taoism also represents the historical essence of Mount Emei. The cognition of cultural objects is a way for people to experience and imagine places, as well as the generation process of sense of place. This sense of place has become an important empirical cognition and imaginative perception of mountain culture for contemporary people. The name of a certain mountain, which includes both geographical location and cultural orientation, has become an indelible imprint in Chinese people's cultural vision and cultural tradition.

4.4 Emei Mountain in modern human society

In the modern era, Mount Emei, a dual landmark of tourism and culture, has established a close connection with human society and generated far-reaching significance for contemporary life. As a tourist landmark, Mount Emei is not only a holy place of pilgrimage for Buddhists but also an important place for tourists to experience Chi-

nese Buddhist culture and learn about religious history and art. The temples, Buddha statues, and murals on the mountain provide tourists with a rich visual and cultural experience (Zhao Tianrui, Qiu Ying, 2021). Meanwhile, Mount Emei's natural beauty, rare flora and fauna resources, and fresh air attract a large number of nature lovers and eco-tourists, providing an opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and get closer to nature. In addition, Emei Mountain's hot springs, health culture, and leisure facilities provide visitors with a relaxing vacation experience.

Secondly, as a cultural landmark, Mount Emei has a long history, witnessing the spread and development of Buddhism in China. The cultural relics, monuments, and traditional architecture on the mountain are important resources for the study of Chinese history and culture. At the same time, as an internationally recognized tourist attraction, Mount Emei serves as a window for cultural exchange between China and the rest of the world. Through tourism activities, people from different cultural backgrounds exchange ideas and enhance understanding and friendship here. The tranquility and sacredness of Mount Emei offer tourists a sense of spiritual solace and a connection to their inner selves.

Finally, Mount Emei is of great significance to contemporary life. The concepts of environmental protection and sustainable development serve to remind people of the importance of cherishing natural resources and promoting the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. The Buddhist culture and concept of healthcare at Emeishan have a positive influence on contemporary people's pursuit of physical and mental health and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle (Zhang Zhonglei, 2020). Furthermore, the history, culture, and natural knowledge of Mount Emei provide a wealth of resources for educating and inspiring the younger generation, fostering their cultural self-confidence and ecological awareness. In summary, Mount Emei serves not only as a venue for leisure and recreation but also as a vital platform for individuals to engage in cultural experiences, spiritual support, and ecological education. These activities have a profound impact on contemporary society.

5. Conclusion

Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai wrote that Sichuan has many immortal mountains, and there is no one that can compare to Emei. As a famous mountain with rich natural and cultural heritage, Mount Emei has both important geological value and profound cultural heritage. Many famous mountains and rivers in China have undergone hundreds of millions of years of geological and historical changes, and have long been the genes of the traditional Chinese culture. The unique position of mountains in Chinese culture remains to be explored and discovered by more scholars.

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