

# Shrine to loyalty a lure for tourists

Chengdu's Temple of Marquis Wu is dedicated to Zhuge Liang, highly regarded since ancient times

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Long before Spring Festival, Yan Hong, a resident of Chengdu in Southwest China's Sichuan province, planned to bring her 8-year-old son to the Temple of Marquis Wu to visit the temple fair.

"Each year, visitors can see a lantern show and taste traditional Sichuan snacks at the temple fair. I want my son to learn something about this tradition," she said.

The Temple of Marquis Wu in downtown Chengdu consists of a park on one side and relics from China's Three Kingdoms period (AD 220-280) on the other.

While the former is a big draw for locals during the temple fair, the latter attracts visitors all year round due to the popularity of the novel *Romance of Three Kingdoms*.

One of China's most famous classical novels, it tells dozens of dramatic stories of betrayal, loyalty and bloodshed from the war-torn period.

After the 195-year reign of the Eastern Han Dynasty collapsed in 220, China was divided into three kingdoms — the Wei, Shu and Wu.

Competing to reunify the country, the three kingdoms were perpetually locked in war, leaving behind stories and historical relics strewn throughout the country.

One such relic is the Temple of Marquis Wu, whose reputation as an important historical site dates back to the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). It is a shrine dedicated to Zhuge Liang (181-234), prime minister of the Shu Kingdom and the personification of Chinese wisdom and loyalty.

During Zhuge's youth, the Eastern Han Dynasty's royalty was in a weak position and warlords were constantly embroiled in battles. Resolved to help restore the dynasty's power, Zhuge lived on a remote mountain, analyzing the situation while waiting for the opportunity to give full play to his talents.

Admiring his ability, Liu Bei, a distant but ambitious relative of the royal family, paid Zhuge three visits in 208, asking him to devise strategies to reunify the country and invit-

ing him to be his top adviser.

Moved by his sincerity, Zhuge left the mountain and decided to use his wisdom to help Liu found the Shu Kingdom, where he served as prime minister for 13 years until his death.

Zhuce excelled in managing state affairs and commanding an army. During his tenure, people in the kingdom enjoyed political stability and economic prosperity. He died of overwork at the age of 53. His premature death caused widespread grief, and people erected a temple in his memory.

## Loyalty and respect

The ancient Chinese respected loyalty to their country and the emperor. But many courtiers of the time tried to overthrow the emperor if he turned out to be weak, rather than offering help.

Before his death, Liu asked Zhuge to help his son rule his kingdom. He also said if his son proved to be a hopeless, weak-minded man, Zhuge could become the ruler of the kingdom. Liu's son did indeed prove to be a poor emperor, but instead of dethroning him, Zhuge assisted him in managing the kingdom until his death.

This is the reason that Zhuge has been held in such high esteem among people since ancient times, said Tan Jihe, a historian from Chengdu.

Enclosed by high red walls and filled with ancient trees, the Temple of Marquis Wu boasts relics from several dynasties, as well as the Hall of Zhuge Liang and the mausoleum of Liu Bei.

In the Hall of Zhuge Liang, the seated statue of Zhuge, his son and his grandson are enshrined. Both died in 262 in a battle against the invading Wei troops that eventually toppled the Shu Kingdom. Together with Zhuge, they have been held in great esteem by following generations for their loyalty to their kingdom.

The statue of Zhuge shows him dressed in a white cloak holding a feather fan in one hand, the picture of scholarly composure.

After the death of Liu, Zhuge tried to realize his unfulfilled dream of reunifying China. He set out on a series of six expeditions to the north



People dressed in clothes inspired by the Han Dynasty exchange gifts for good fortune at this year's Spring Festival temple fair at the Temple of Marquis Wu. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of China over the space of eight years, trying to conquer the more powerful Wei Kingdom, which brought about the end to the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25-220).

Before the first expedition, he sent a missive to Liu's son, the new emperor, outlining his reasons for undertaking the expedition and expressing his lifelong devotion to the task of reunifying China.

His devotion to his country, as expressed in the document, influenced patriots of later generations, the most well-known being Yue Fei (1103-1142), a national hero of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279).

Yue's famous poem *The Whole River Red* can be seen on a wall as visitors enter the main entrance of the Temple of Marquis Wu.

The poem shows the general's determination to wipe out those who toppled his emperor and removed the royal family of the Northern Song Dynasty, and reclaim the vast tracts of land lost to his enemies.

## A cautionary tale

Liu's mausoleum is 12 meters high and overgrown with greenery. He and his two empresses are buried there.

A legend goes: After the Shu Kingdom collapsed, a grave robber broke into the mausoleum and found it lit with countless candles. Inside, Liu, Zhuge and Liu's two sworn brothers were drinking wine.

Seeing the unexpected visitor, Liu offered him a drink and gave him a jade girdle.

As soon as the thief drank the wine and donned the girdle, a clap of thunder drove him out of the mausoleum. All at once, the wine turned into poison and the girdle became a snake.

News spread quickly about the robber's demise and nobody has since dared to rob the mausoleum.



The Temple of Marquis Wu in downtown Chengdu, in Southwest China's Sichuan province, contains the Hall of Zhuge Liang (top) and the mausoleum of Liu Bei (above) as its major relics. PHOTOS BY DING HAO / FOR CHINA DAILY