



RESEARCH PAPER

Chinese Revolutionary Heritage: Exploring Revolutionary Culture in Huanggang

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to investigate Huanggang, a city in Hubei province known for its rich historical legacy, strong educational traditions, and growing economy. The study focuses on Huanggang's Chinese revolutionary heritage, examining the city's diverse cultural landscape shaped by its significant role in China's revolutionary movements. The study explores historical sites, artifacts, and intangible cultural practices that together form Huanggang's revolutionary legacy. It also analyzes the connections between major national revolutionary movements and local dynamics, highlighting the specific contributions of Huanggang's leaders. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research examines the opportunities and challenges of preserving and promoting this heritage, including the restoration and dissemination of revolutionary cultural artifacts through advanced technologies within the film and drama industry, aligning with Xi Jinping's soft power strategy. The findings highlight the vital importance of protecting Huanggang's revolutionary culture for its educational potential, cultural significance, and historical value. The study recommends that local authorities adopt sustainable tourism strategies and encourage community-led conservation efforts to safeguard the authenticity of Huanggang's revolutionary heritage. Additionally, it suggests developing educational programs—particularly those that highlight the region's unsung heroes—with universities, colleges, and institutes to deepen understanding of this revolutionary legacy and its enduring impact on regional and national culture and identity.

Keywords: China, Revolution, Huanggang, Wen Yiduo, Chen Tanqiu, Normal University

Introduction

Huanggang, a city located in Hubei province, is distinguished by its deep historical roots, strong educational legacy, and steadily developing economy. Celebrated for its revolutionary significance, dynamic intellectual environment, and scenic beauty, this paper explores Huanggang's unique contribution to the Chinese revolutionary movement. Huanggang is under the jurisdiction of Hubei Province. It is located in the eastern part of Hubei Province, at the southern foot of the Dabie Mountains, on the northern bank of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, and in the central section of the Beijing-Kunming Railway. Seven counties (Honggan, Luotian, Yingshan, Xishui, Qichun, Huangmei and Tuanfeng), two cities (Wuxue and Macheng), Huangzhou District, There are also Longgan Lake Management Zone, Huanggang High tech Zone, Huanggang Airport Economic Zone, and Bailianhe Demonstration Zone. The total area of the city is 17,446 square kilometers, accounting for 9.4% of the total area of Hubei Province [1-2]. By the end of 2022, the city's resident population was 5.7902 million people. In 2022, the city's GDP will reach 274.79 billion yuan.

Historical Context

The Chinese Revolution: The term *Chinese Revolution* refers to a transformative era of sweeping social and political change that dismantled China's imperial system and led to the founding of the People's Republic of China. It began with the Xinhai Revolution in 1911,

which toppled the Qing dynasty, and spanned decades of turmoil, reform, and armed struggle, ultimately resulting in the Chinese Communist Party's triumph in 1949. The 1911 Revolution (Xinhai Revolution) In October 1911, revolutionaries in southern China launched an uprising that successfully overthrew the Qing Dynasty, ending centuries of imperial rule and establishing the Republic of China. Starting on October 10, 1911, this revolution was driven by rising nationalism, widespread discontent with Qing rule, and a collective push for national revitalization. Sun Yat-sen (12 November 1866 – 12 March 1925) was a Chinese physician, revolutionary leader, statesman, and political thinker who founded the Republic of China (ROC) and created its first political party, the Kuomintang (KMT). As the key figure of the 1911 Revolution, Sun served as the first president of the Republic of China's Provisional Government in 1912. Sun Yat-sen emerged as the key leader, promoting his three Principles of the People: nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood.

The Chinese Communist Revolution: This term refers to the extended conflict between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), which escalated after World War II. Under Mao Zedong's leadership, the CCP eventually defeated the KMT and proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. The KMT retreated to Taiwan, where it continued to function as the Republic of China government.

Other Revolutionary Movements

China's revolutionary history also encompasses other significant uprisings, such as the Second Revolution (1913), the Constitutional Protection Movement (1917–1922).

Literature Review

Many previous studies have examined the causes and dynamics of revolutions worldwide, including in China. However, the specific role of Huanggang city and its impact on the city's and the nation's contemporary life remains largely unexplored. This is a brief summary of selected works that helped shape the conceptual framework *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow — This classic account of the rise of Chinese Communism holds an average rating of 4.10 out of 5 stars from 1,444 readers. It remains essential reading for understanding the origins of the Chinese Revolution. *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945–1957* — With an average rating of 4.13 out of 5 stars from 2,515 ratings, this book offers a detailed narrative of the Revolution's formative years. *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962–1976* — Averaging 4.05 out of 5 stars from 1,913 ratings, this book provides an in-depth look at one of China's most turbulent eras. *Maoism and the Chinese Revolution: A Critical Introduction* — With an average rating of 3.80 out of 5 stars from 95 readers, this book delivers a nuanced study of Maoism and its role in shaping revolutionary China. *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* — Widely acclaimed, this memoir offers a deeply personal perspective on the Revolution's impact on three generations. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* — This comprehensive volume surveys China's rich history, including detailed coverage of the Chinese Revolution. *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* by Louisa Lim — A thought-provoking account that examines the Tiananmen Square protests and their enduring legacy. (He, Evolution of Power-Development of Urban Space in Huanggang. Advanced Materials Research, 671, 2424-2430., 2013) argues that rooted in China's urban-rural divide and rapid post-1978 urbanization, "urban villages" emerged as "villages inside the city." Initially seen neutrally, they became viewed as urban "problems" by the 1990s—described as "tumors" harming cities' form, safety, and modernization—prompting renewal strategies inspired by Western urban redevelopment. (He, Evolution of Power-Development of Urban Space in Huanggang. Advanced Materials Research, 671, 2424-2430., 2013). (Smith N. R., 2014) discusses using Lefebvre's "history-space-society" approach, this article analyzes Huanggang's urban space evolution within a historical

framework. It explores spatial perception, productivity, and power networks through synchronic and diachronic analysis, revealing links between spatial features and power relations, exposing urban planning gaps, and offering insights inspired by historical patterns. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's generalized theory of urban space and his "history-space-society" trinity research method, this article situates the evolution of Huanggang's urban space—a representative city in Central China—within a historical framework. It examines the perception of urban space, spatial productivity, and the role of power networks from the perspective of various historical synchronic slices. Through diachronic historical observation and comparison, it identifies the transactional and interactive relationship between the historical features of urban space and power networks. This analysis highlights shortcomings in the urban planning system and offers multiple insights drawn from history. (Smith 2014)

Shenzhen's urban villages, which persist as ritual spaces despite rapid urbanization. These villages transform tradition into heritage sites, blending secular and religious realms. They reveal how urbanization reshapes, rather than erases, ritual life, sustaining a "ritual economy" through heritage, tourism, and revival. (Oakes, 2020) Huanggang has over 2,000 years of history and is rich in tourism and cultural resources. Huangmei Opera, originating in Huangmei County within Huanggang, is renowned as one of China's five major traditional operas, alongside Peking, Yue, Ping, and Henan operas. This article analyzes Huangmei Opera culture and Huanggang's existing tourism assets to develop a unique local tourism and cultural industry that highlights the artistic appeal of Huangmei Opera while integrating the region's rich tourism resources. (Ke, 2017)

Hypothesis

The central hypothesis of this study is that revolutionary movements form a lasting legacy in China, particularly in Huanggang City, where their continued presence is especially noteworthy. The revolutionary spirit, dedication, and commitment have been instrumental in shaping the Chinese people into a resilient and unified nation, fostering national cohesion and integrity (van Dijk, 2025).

Material and Methods

A historical and anthropological approach was employed to recontextualize the causes, contributions, and impacts of the region's key actors at both local and national levels.

Sample

From June 3 to June 6, 2025, at the invitation of Huanggang Normal University, I visited the university's School of Media and Film for a three-day academic exchange and lecture series. According to the itinerary, I had the opportunity to visit and study renowned red cultural sites across three districts and counties in Huanggang City, Hubei Province, China, gaining valuable insights into their historical significance. (Cao, 2025). In addition to observing these sites, I also conducted interviews with scholars, professors, and local residents to my understanding of their collective past. I also received valuable feedback from the professors and students at Huanggang Normal University, China, and I am especially grateful to my dear student and colleague, Tian Xiefeng from Anshan University's Faculty of Arts and Humanities, for serving as my interpreter from English to Chinese.

Procedure

At the beginning of the data collection process, both primary and secondary documents were gathered. To ensure an in-depth analysis, field visits were conducted to historical sites, and informed consent was obtained from each participant before the

interviews (Bianco, *Origins of the Chinese revolution, 1915-1949*. Stanford University Press., 1971).

Ethical Considerations

In this research, all ethical guidelines were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully aware of the study's objectives. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured at all stages.

Results and Discussion

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), also known as the Communist Party of China, is the founding and sole governing party of the People's Republic of China. Established in 1921, the CCP emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War and founded the PRC in 1949. Its core ideology, socialism with Chinese characteristics, has shaped China's development under the leadership of figures such as Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping. However, the study was carried out to explore the influence of revolutionary movements in China at the grassroots level, with Huanggang City selected as the case study. (Bianco, (1971)) The present author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Huanggang Normal University administration for facilitating travel and providing logistical assistance. The author sincerely thanks Dr. Zhang Long, Dr. Zhou We, Dr. Hara Yu Hao, and their students for accompanying the field trip and organizing the seminar, which provided an opportunity to share my findings and receive valuable feedback. Engagements with local scholars and professors contributed to a broader and deeper understanding of the regional impact of the Chinese Revolution



Huanggang is located in the eastern part of Hubei Province, under its jurisdiction. It sits at the southern foot of the Dabie Mountains, on the northern bank of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, and along the central section of the Beijing-Kunming Railway. (Chan, 1971). The city governs seven counties — Seven counties (Honggan, Luotian, Yingshan, Xishui, Qichun, Huangmei and Tuanfeng, Two cities (Wuxue and Macheng), Huangzhou District, There are also Longgan Lake Management Zone, Huanggang High tech Zone, Huanggang Airport Economic Zone, and Bailianhe Demonstration Zone. Covering a total area of 17,446 square kilometers, Huanggang accounts for 9.4% of Hubei Province's total area. By the end of 2022, the city's permanent population reached 5.79 million, and its GDP totaled 274.79 billion yuan.

Wen Yiduo (闻一多, 1895–1946) was a renowned poet, scholar, and democratic martyr from Xishui County, now part of Huanggang, Hubei. Educated at Tsinghua University and later in the U.S., he combined Chinese classical traditions with modernist poetry, becoming a key figure in the New Poetry Movement. His influential works, such as *Red Candle* and *Dead Water*, expressed deep patriotism and criticism of social decay (Brown, *The Chinese Revolution. Student volunteer movement.*, 1912).

Elaborating on Mr. Wen's literary contributions, Dr. Ms Zhou We, of Huanggang Normal Univeristy, stated that 'Mr. Wen taught at leading universities such as Qingdao, Wuhan, and Tsinghua, and carried out pioneering research on ancient Chinese poetry'. Initially supportive of the Kuomintang (KMT), he grew disillusioned by its corruption and turned to democratic activism. (Mazur, (1993)) During the Second Sino-Japanese War, he joined the China Democratic League and openly criticized authoritarianism (Isaacs, 2010). Amid the unrelenting crises of the 1940s, political awareness grew sharply, drawing many people into political engagement — even those who had long remained distant. Among them was Wen Yiduo, who was arrested by Kuomintang secret agents and later assassinated by the Kuomintang in 1946 after he condemned their authoritarian rule.

Wen Yiduo was a *zhishi fenzi* — a term for intellectuals that is rooted in unique Chinese traditions and stands as an independent concept. (Fang, (2009))

Li Gongpu (1902–1946) was a prominent Chinese intellectual, educator, and democratic activist dedicated to social reform and national salvation during the Republican era. Born in Sichuan, he belonged to the wave of “new intellectuals” who promoted democracy and progressive ideas while China faced warlordism and Japanese aggression. Li studied at Peking University and actively participated in the May Fourth Movement, which called for science, democracy, and anti-imperialism. He later taught at various institutions and, with figures like Wen Yiduo, openly criticized authoritarianism while rallying students and the public for democratic causes. Professor Yuan Bolan Professor of Three Georges University Yichang city Hubei , by giving his input he said that ‘as a co-founder of the China Democratic League, Li worked to unite democratic forces beyond the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. His unwavering advocacy for free expression and national unity ultimately led to his assassination in Kunming in 1946, alongside Wen Yiduo. Li Gongpu remains a symbol of sacrifice for democracy in modern China. (Dikötter, (2013)

In 1946, after condemning the murder of his friend Li Gongpu, Wen Yiduo was assassinated by KMT agents in Kunming. His last words—*“You can kill me, but you cannot kill the truth!”*—cemented his status as a symbol of intellectual resistance.

I observed several scholars from Wuhan University of Technology visiting the Wen Yiduo Museum to study his writings and draw inspiration from his life and work. What began as a chance encounter turned into a group discussion. When I asked about their purpose, they explained that they were there to explore his books, manuscripts, and archival materials for their assignments and theses. It was evident that they were well-versed in the key ideas and contributions of this remarkable figure, who had once been both a student and a professor at Wuhan University of Technology (Perry, 2008). Their body language and enthusiasm convinced me that young people in China are deeply engaged with the legacy of regional leaders, which instills a sense of pride. Such sentiments and motivation have helped shape China's unity, transforming ethnic distinctions into a broader sense of Chinese nationalism.



Sitting Left to Right: TanBiyou, Dr Iqbal Chawla, Zhang Xingang

Standing: Left to Right Yu Hao, Zhang Long, Yang Li

Another group discussion was held at Huanggang Normal University with professors from the Film and Media Studies Department. In fact, Huanggang Normal University in China has a School of Film and Television Arts, which offerse. programs in film, television, digital media, and related fields. In response to my questions about local heroes and the department's goals, they expressed great pride in China's progress and demonstrated a strong awareness of their local leaders' contributions. They shared that they are actively working to promote and project the lives and works of these notable figures, and other unsung heros through their research, internationally. Dr. Zhou Wei completed her PhD dissertation on Chinese film and drama, including a comparative study of the Pakistani film and drama industry. Dr. Ms Hara Yu Hao further noted that this collaboration demonstrates China's dedication to applying the insights from her PhD study to promote cultural diplomacy with Pakistan and her BRI partners, aligning with its wider soft power objectives. Meanwhile, Dr. Ms Yang Li, while expressing satisfaction with women's empowerment in China, conveyed her interest in examining gender equality in the West and comparing it with contemporary Chinese society.

From these interactions, I gathered that whether professors or scholars, they take pride in their past, are content with the present, and aspire to see their work represented on a global stage (Brown, *The Chinese Revolution. Student volunteer movement.*, 1912).

The professors at Huanggang University appeared confident that film and drama offer China a subtle way to showcase its accomplishments and foster global peace. They pointed out, however, that the roles of local leaders and the city have been largely overlooked within the wider revolutionary story. Despite this, they remain optimistic that, through their vision and dedication, these contributions will eventually gain the recognition they deserve. Therefore, my humble attempt to shed light on local history, heritage, and heroes through this brief piece of writing is merely a modest contribution. However, I fully believe that China's soft power strategy is strengthening its position as a global power, and that cultural diplomacy should be pursued on a win-win basis with countries involved in the BRI and CPEC initiatives (Li, 2025).



Chen Tanqiu (1896–1943) was a prominent early leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and a key figure in China's modern revolutionary history. He was one of the thirteen delegates who attended the CCP's First National Congress in Shanghai in 1921, representing Wuhan, and helped formally establish the Party. Chen was also a pioneer of the labor movement, organizing workers in Wuhan and leading major strikes like the Hankou–Beijing–Hankou Railway Workers' Strike, which strengthened the influence of Marxist ideas among Chinese workers (Ho, 2025). To my query one professor proclaimed that as a regional Party leader Chen Tanqiu built local Party branches and expanded the CCP's reach in Hubei Province and Central China. During the First United Front (1924–1927), Chen worked to unite labor movements and revolutionary activities with national efforts to resist warlords and imperialism. After the split between the CCP and the Kuomintang in 1927, Chen continued underground revolutionary work despite severe repression. (石一琨, 2025). As per Prof Yuan Bolan, Chen Tanqiu was eventually arrested by reactionary forces Warlord Sheng Shicai in Xinjiang in 1943, becoming one of the Party's honored martyrs. According to Prof Long 'Chen Tanqiu's dedication as a founder, organizer, and revolutionary martyr remains celebrated in Party history as an enduring example of sacrifice and commitment to China's revolutionary cause (Jo, 2025).' Chen Tanqiu's contributions lie mainly in his roles as a Party founder, organizer, labor movement pioneer, and revolutionary martyr, all of which were vital to the CCP's early survival and development. His legacy remains commemorated in Party history as a symbol of sacrifice and commitment on China's revolutionary journey (Liu, 2025). A remarkable aspect of this trip to Huanggang was the presence of my friends and colleagues, including Prof. Tan Biyou, Tian Xuefeng, Yuan Bolan, and Li Jugang. Two of them had traveled from Changsha — Chairman Mao's hometown — and they expressed great pride in Chairman Mao's legacy and his connections with Huanggang's local leaders. However, they candidly admitted that these local figures, together with many other overlooked heroes, still lack adequate recognition within the national narrative.

Thanks to Professor Zhang Long, the primary organizer and host of my visit to China, I had the chance to engage with faculty and students and present my findings to gather their feedback. Professor Wang Shaoming critically reviewed my lecture and offered valuable constructive input. I learnt that the memorials in Huanggang commemorate their lives, and their works continue to shape Chinese literature by merging national tradition with a spirit of freedom and reform. The findings emphasized the significant influence of these legendary figures on the Chinese nation (Cao, 2025). Future research should focus on formulating policies and strategies to promote cultural exchange and the growth of cultural tourism within the context of China's global governance. (Chawla, 2025)

Conclusion

Revolutionary culture represents the most significant and influential aspect of Huanggang's traditional heritage, and the city has developed numerous revolutionary cultural tourism sites. For this research, I visited only two of these sites as part of my academic study. In addition to these, the region is home to several other notable revolutionary landmarks, such as the former residence of President Li Xiannian. Furthermore, Hong'an County is famous for having produced 223 generals of the Chinese Communist Party. The narrative of this cultural heritage would be even richer if all related sites were studied as well. Nevertheless, this is a modest effort to enhance the dissemination and impact of these cultural heritage resources within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

In short, by adopting a regional lens and combining anthropological and historical methods to explore the roots of revolutionary sentiments at the grassroots level, this study shows that a convergence of internal and external pressures—such as misgovernance, corruption, the Opium Wars, flawed economic policies, a weakening central authority, the advance of imperialism and challenges of World War 11—drove the Chinese people to rebel. Inspired by the Russian Revolution (Pantsov, 2013) and communist ideology, they founded the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) in 1921 and quickly expanded its reach across the country. Within this broader movement, the people of Huanggang played a vital role, contributing through literature, manpower, resources, and armed struggle. Local intellectuals and leaders like Wen Yiduo and Chen Tanqiu maintained strong ties not only with national figures such as Chairman Mao but also with other regional leaders like Li Gongpu, who hailed from Beijing, fostering a cohesive revolutionary network. Their remarkable sacrifices and unwavering commitment from 1921 onward were instrumental in realizing the vision and goals that culminated in the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Their legacy of resistance and dedication continues to inspire today.

Recommendations

Viewed through a regional historical lens, this study makes a valuable contribution to the field. While there are many ways to advance global peace and prosperity, films and dramas hold a unique position by nurturing national pride and shaping China's global image through a combination of entertainment and cultural diplomacy. Aligned with Xi Jinping's vision for global governance and soft power, highlighting Chinese success stories alongside those of Belt and Road Initiative partner countries underscores shared values and promotes cultural exchange within the BRI framework. This research suggests that similar studies should be conducted in other Chinese cities to examine the role of local actors in raising awareness before, during, and after the Chinese revolution—a dynamic that has contributed to China's rise as the world's second-largest economy and an emerging global superpower.

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