

# Huachung University

*Hua zhong da xue*

華中大學

[Wuchang District](#) (Wuhan Sheng, China)

While some of the Christian colleges and universities in China seem to arise and thrive as if by destiny, the post-secondary educational scene in Central China remained unconsolidated well into the twentieth century. By 1920 there were twenty-three Christian middle schools in the provinces of Kiangsi, Hupeh, and Honan. At least seven institutions offered post-secondary courses, but the need for a first-class union university was felt, so five mission agencies met together in 1922 and proposed that a "Central China University" be organized, possibly located in Wuchang. The schools to be joined in this proposed university were the British Methodists' Wesley College in Wuchang, the London Missionary Society's Griffith John School in Hankow, the Reformed Church in America's Lakeside College in Yochow, the Yale-in-China, or Yali, institution in Changsha, and the American Episcopal Boone University in Wuchang.

Due to conflicting opinions about an appropriate site for the union institution and a great deal of political unrest and upheaval in Central China, it was several years before a stable Central China (or Huachung) University actually came into being. Huachung operated from 1924 to 1927 but then was closed for two years because of student unrest and political events. Spurred on by the Nanking Incident of 1927 the Huachung students formed a committee to take over the campus and run their own affairs without interference of the school administration. Meanwhile, an opposition army was advancing on Wuhan while the troops of the Wuhan Government were engaged elsewhere. In the face of this uncertain and dangerous situation, the student body abandoned the campus and went home. In 1929, the school reconstituted itself on the western part of the Boone compound in Wuchang. Over the next few years existing buildings were gradually adapted for the use of Huachung, including Ingle Hall, the Administration building, and part of St. Paul's Divinity School.

1931 brought more upheaval for Huachung, but this time not of a political character. The summer of 1931 was marked by a number of heavy storms in quick succession along the Yangtze Valley, causing record-setting floods. The city of Wuchang, built on higher ground, had escaped harm throughout the summer but on August 18 a big dike gave way and much of the city was flooded. The athletic field on the Boone Compound was under two or three feet of water. Most of the campus buildings were on higher ground and escaped the water, but they were soon inundated by flood refugees who camped out in every building except the administrative offices, science laboratories, library stacks, and residences. Numerous refugees packed the University chapel, sleeping between the pews.

Renovation of Yen Hostel was undertaken in 1933, with the support of the Yen family, in order to make it better fitted for a women's residence and to increase its capacity. Huachung remained small at this time, graduating only eight students in 1933, but it had hopes that a period of stability and calm would allow for increased enrolment. In fact, by the spring of 1937 Yen Hostel was overcrowded and an addition to it was constructed over the summer.

Between 1935 and 1937 Huachung was able to purchase an additional twenty-seven acres outside the city wall, adjacent to the old campus. Architect J. Van Wie Bergamini of the American Episcopal Mission was engaged to prepare plans for the new campus. Among the proposed new buildings, new administration building was planned that would be capped by a copy of the Yellow Crane Tower, a famous landmark of Wuchang.

Huachung's brief era of peace and optimism was not to last long, however. During 1937 many people were moving through Wuhan, headed west in advance of the Japanese occupation. The school managed to complete the 1937 academic year, despite some bombings of Wuhan but by June 1938 it was evident that Huachung would be forced to relocate. Equipment, books, and office records were packed up and shipped by river to Hengyang, and then by train and truck to Kweilin, where Huachung opened its academic year in September 1938. Kweilin was increasingly the target of Japanese bombing however, so Huachung had to move again, first to Kunming, and finally to Hsichow. Hsichow, a small country village twelve miles north of Tali on the Erh Hai Lake, was the home of the wealthy Yen and Tung families. A group of three temples outside the village became Huachung's campus from 1939 to 1946.

When Huachung returned to Wuchang in 1946, it found many of its buildings in need of rehabilitation. Plans again were made to expand the campus and the decision of the American Episcopal Mission to erect a new plant for its Boone School outside the city meant that there would be more room on the original campus. Just as Huachung seemed to have cause for optimism, political upheaval hit again, with the Communist occupation of Wuhan in May 1949. The last Western faculty members left Huachung two years later, in June 1951.

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### **Further reading**

Coe, John L. [\*Hua zhong da xue\*](#). Wuhan: Hua zhong shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2003.

Zhang, Anming. [\*Jiang han tan Hua lin: Hua zhong da xue\*](#). Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiao yu chu ban she, 2003.