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Huanggang's newly opened Memorial Museum of Su Dongpo attracts a large number of visitors from home and abroad.



museum exhibition hall



Liu Shanqiao (front center), secretary of the Huanggang Party Committee, visits the city's newly opened Memorial Museum of Su Dongpo.



Huanggang Mayor Liu Xuerong (second from left) introduces an exhibit to visitors.

Huanggang celebrates life and works of Su Dongpo

The ancient artist and poet is honored in a new museum

By ZHUAN TI

Huanggang, in Hubei province, recently opened the Memorial Museum of Su Dongpo (1036-1101), famed Song Dynasty (960-1279) poet, artist, calligrapher, pharmacologist and statesman.

Born in Meishan near Mount Emei in Sichuan province, Su's extant writings are of great value to contemporary understandings of 11th century Chinese travel literature and the iron industry.

Formerly known as Su Shi, the multi-talented artist was often at odds with a political faction headed by Prime Minister Wang Anshi. He once wrote a poem criticizing Wang's reforms, notably a government monopoly on the salt industry.

Banished to Huangzhou, now Huanggang in Hubei province, he occupied a lowly government post with no stipend.

Near penniless, Su built himself a small residence on Dongpo (Eastern Slope) farm, from which he took his literary pseudonym and drew much of his artistic inspiration.

His most famous piece of calligraphy, Han Shi Tie, was written at Dongpo.

Su spent only four years in Huangzhou before returning to the capital to witness the creation of a new government. He was later banished to Huizhou in Guangdong province and again to Danzhou in Hainan island.

But it was in Huangzhou that Su reached his literary zenith. There, he wrote most of his 2,300 poems and 800 surviving letters.

It was about the settlement's Red

Cliffs that he authored his best-known piece of prose, Chibifu (Red Cliffs Rhapsody).

The work commemorates the fierce battle at Red Cliffs (AD 208-209) in which the direly outnumbered forces of the southern warlords Liu Bei and Sun Quan cunningly vanquished the massive military might of northern general Cao Cao. The victory sustained the national schisms that trisected the collapsing Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25-220) into the Three Kingdoms (AD 220-280).

Su's ode to the victory is essential reading for the country's primary school students.

Su died at the age of 66 in Changzhou, Jiangsu province.

Post-mortem popularity

After word of his death spread, people began feverishly collecting Su's calligraphy and paintings. They created stone inscriptions marking his visits to numerous places and built shrines in his honor.

Although he only dwelled in the settlement of Huanggang for four years, his legacy will live on in the city forever.

The story of his four years in the settlement of Huanggang is showcased at

the Su Dongpo Museum.

Alongside the essential displays and artifacts are several high-tech interactive exhibitions that give the museum's presentation of this ancient character a futuristic twist.

Visitors can row a pair of oars affixed to a stand set up in front of a projector that shows the digitally rendered helm of a boat navigating the waters near a cliff. The simulation allows visitors to pretend they are Su paddling along the river to his home near Chibi.

Near the nautical simulation is a computerized touch-screen display that allows guests to try their hands at replicating Su's calligraphy.

Visitors copy samples that flash on the screen by tracing the characters with their fingertips. Upon completing a line of prose, scribes are scored according to their penmanship.

Specimens of the calligrapher's handiwork hang on the wall nearby as additional reference points for those who get a real feel of how the master

manipulated his writing brush.

The museum also has several exhibits of robotic wax figures portraying scenes from the polymath's life. With a hoe in hand, one Su android tells his life story.

Now, Huanggang hopes to capitalize on Su's artistic success.

"We aim to deliver general prosperity to our 7.3 million residents by promoting tourism," said Mayor Liu Xuerong.

Huanggang is an agricultural city, home to part of the Dabie mountain range and the Red Cliff. The cliff owes its enduring fame to two pieces of prose by Su, who reflected on its role in the ancient battle.

Today, several Huanggang landmarks are named after the poet and his works. Among them are the Hall of Two Fu's, the Pavilion of Dongpo's Immortal Poet and the Pavilion of Libation.

The Pavilion of Tablets houses 102 replica's of Su's calligraphy. Other nearby structures feature his trochee poem, Memories of the Past at Red Cliff, carved in stone and his painting Plums in the Moon.

In addition to Su, Huanggang was home to renowned ancient physician Li Shizhen (1518-1593) and moveable-type printing press inventor Bi Sheng (990-1051).

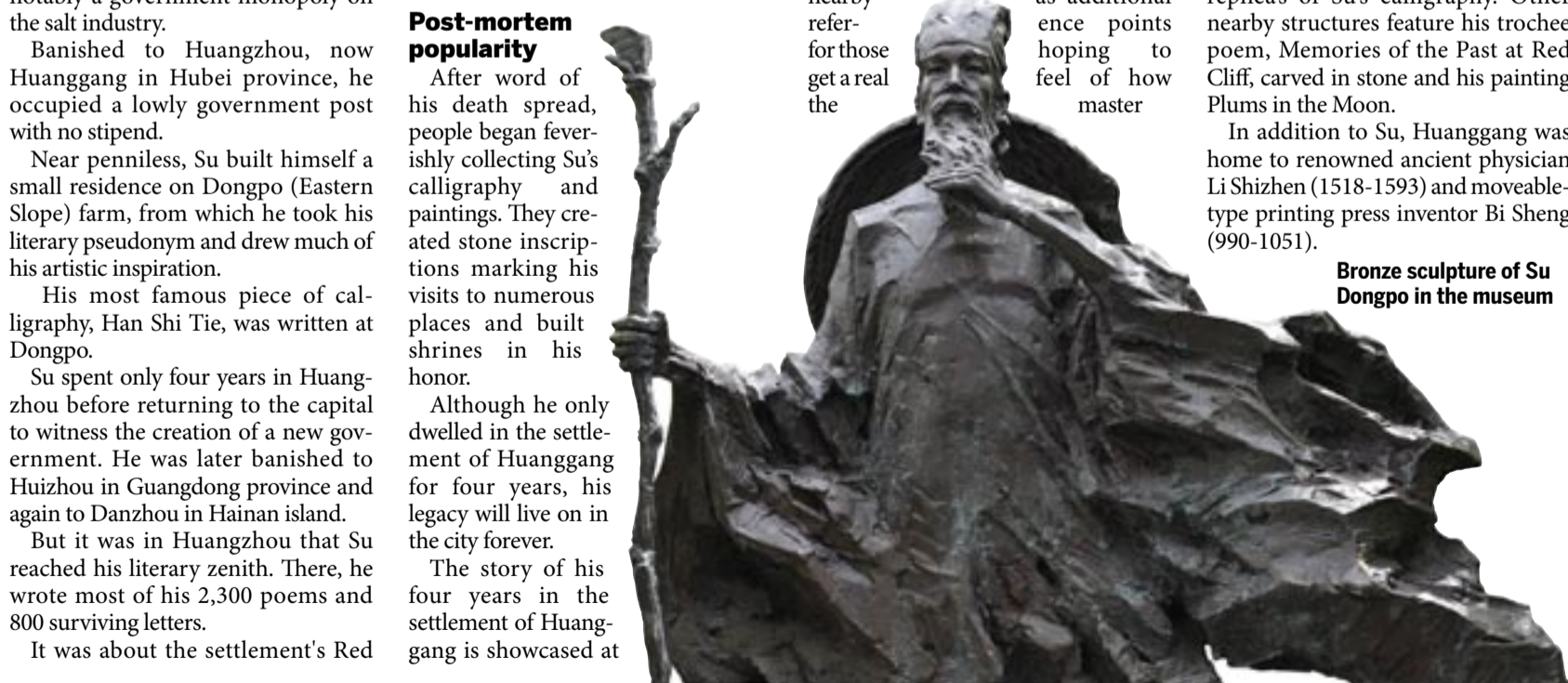
Bronze sculpture of Su Dongpo in the museum



Wax figure of Su Dongpo in the exhibition hall of the museum



Visitors examine the exhibition carefully.



View of the Dabie mountain range.