

Ma Xiangbo's Role in the Success of Zhang Chongren

by Chen Yaowang

Ma Xiangbo's place as an eminent authority in modern Chinese history's academic circles is indisputable. Whether Nationalist or Communist, or among academics worldwide, all without exception speak of Ma with admiration. Ma Xiangbo was born in 1840 in Dantu, Jiangsu Province, to an influential Catholic family. At the age of twelve he went by himself study at Shanghai Xuhui Public School, and in 1862 he entered the Jesuit College. In 1870 he earned his Doctorate of Divinity, was ordained a priest, and was appointed principal of Xuhui Public School, and held other positions. In 1876 he left the Jesuits to enter politics, and following Li Hongzhang, entered foreign affairs, serving as a diplomatic envoy in Japan, Korea, the United States, England, France, and other countries. In 1897, he resigned from his position as a wealthy, high Qing official, and embracing the ideal of "saving the country through education," he returned alone to Xujiahui, Shanghai, donated his family property to the Church, and established schools. He destroyed his home for the promotion of learning, and in order to enlighten the people, and one after another, Ling Qichao and other leaders of the Reform studied under Ma. After the 1898 Coup d'état [Wuxu zhengbian], Liang fled to Japan, and Ma retired from public life. In 1902 Ma Xiangbo moved to the south of Xujiahui, and provided the capital to construct the three-story Tushanwan Orphanage School. Cai Yuanpei, Huang Yanpei, and others traveled with him, and at the beginning of the next year they set up Aurora Academy [Zhendan Xueyuan], and Quan Lizhi, Yu Youren, and others one after another went there to study. In 1905, because of the proposed changes in the school's administration by the foreign missionaries, Ma, together with Yan Fu and others, separately established Fudan Public School, with Ma himself as the principal, and he personally taught French. In 1912 Ma Xiangbo served as acting president of Peking University. In the winter of 1920, at the age of 81, he retired from public life and returned to Tushanwan, and continued without ceasing to read and write books, denounce warlords, oppose internal strife, foster virtue among the people, and promote government by the people. He was especially active in education, and together with Ying Lianzhi he founded Fujen University. Ma achieved proficiency in Latin, Greek, French, and English, and also became well-versed in mathematics, astronomy, theology, and Chinese and western philosophy; it may be said that he was accomplished in religion, philosophy, and science. Even in his advanced age, he took on the role of editor-in-chief of Shanghai's *Tianmin Bao*.

In the fall of 1921, 14-year-old Zhang Chongren, after graduating from primary school, went to study art at the Tushanwan Orphanage Art School. From childhood, Chongren adored Ma Xiangbo, calling him "Lao Lao." Every Sunday morning he went upstairs to see Lao Lao. Ma lived on the third floor, in apartment number 5. Apart from the bedroom which doubled as a study, and the small chapel, there was also a living room which doubled as a dining room. Right in the center of the living room hung a horizontal tablet bearing his own inscription, "Hall of Joy and Kindness," and on both sides hung a couplet, inscribed by Lu Zhixiang, which read, "Take pleasure in the Will of Heaven; Be Skillful at Relations Among Men." On the four walls hung treasured scrolls inscribed with calligraphy by famous scholars such as Zhang Taiyan, Yu Youren, Feng Yuxiang, and Wu Zhihui, making the living room bright and glorious. Ma arose early in the morning, studied morning lessons, attended Mass, received Holy Communion, and after eating a simple breakfast, practiced his calligraphy. Zhang Chongren stood beside the old man, receiveing his instructions, and made rapid progress! Old Ma saw that Chongren studied diligently, and was bright and naturally gifted, and believed that he was a teachable child, and thus enjoyed teaching him in such subjects as the *Guwen Guanzhi*, the poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties, and he also wanted him to study

Zhuangzi and other pre-Qin philosophy, saying that the mental framework of the *Zhuangzi* was vast, and would be of great help to his imaginative power in painting. Old Ma lived with his daughter-in-law Qiu Renwo, granddaughter Ma Yuzhang and every time he met with Chongren, they all engaged in rich and interesting conversations on subjects ancient and new, telling thrilling tales from China and foreign lands, and discussing how to get along well with people in society. Thus, spending six years under Ma's influence laid a solid foundation for Chongren in calligraphy, classical Chinese, and philosophy. In 1928 after Zhang Chongren completed his apprenticeship, through Ma's introduction, he became the editor of the weekly pictorial magazine in *The Times*. In order to help him increase his salary a little, Ma's daughter-in-law helped Zhang Chongren to become a private tutor in the home of English businessman [英商] Tan Rongpu. Tan's wife Hong Zhang had been a poor orphan from childhood, but through tireless self-improvement, starting with nothing, she established an independent middle school for girls, encouraging the girls to strive to stand on their own. When she saw Chongren's diligent study, she became very fond of him, and regarded him as an adopted son. Having been without a mother since childhood, Chongren experienced this kind of bond with Mrs. Tan, speaking a common language, and their relationship was very amicable. The second year Mr. and Mrs. Tan decided to provide travel expenses and financial aid for Zhang Chongren to study abroad in Europe, but Chongren, whose family was poor, still could not manage to come up with the huge amount of money needed for tuition and living expenses. At this time, Ma was 92 years old, with little money, at home entertaining the envoy to Belgium Wang Jingqi, and the government official in charge of the "China-Belgium Boxer Indemnity Scholarship," Chu Minyi. He asked them to think of a way for Chongren to compete for a scholarship; envoy Wang Jingqi also introduced Zhang Chongren to Joseph Hers, the Belgian consular official in charge of the "China-Belgium Indemnity." When Hers came to know Zhang Chongren's talent, he helped him to settle the formalities for him to go to Belgium. Before he left, Ma wrote a letter to Wei Chenzu, former envoy to Belgium who now lived in the Belgian capital, asking him to take good care of Zhang Chongren. In the fall of 1931, Zhang Chongren successfully passed the entrance exam and enrolled in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels advanced oil-painting class. Two months later, he achieved a second success by winning the "China-Belgium Indemnity Scholarship." Zhang Chongren studied painstakingly. On the weekends he often went to the Wei home, and they took him in as a family member. In fact, they wrote a letter to Ma, which said, "Chongren here studies earnestly, lives an upright life, and achieves good results in his studies, the misrepresentation in Shanghai (that in Belgium he is squeamish, and keeps a mistress) are pure fiction." One can see the Wei family's good care for him!

In the spring of 1934 Zhang Chongren received a letter from Ma, wanting him to go visit a monk at the St. André Monastery in Bruges, Lu Zhixiang, former Chief of Foreign Affairs. Since the fall of 1927 Lu had been an ordained priest at the monastery, but had still continued to write, using his exquisite French, writing informed opinions, exposing the truth about Japan's aggression against China, publicizing the cause of resistance against Japan in Europe, promoting Chinese civilization, the strength of his love for China being no less than in the past! Zhang Chongren traveled with, and was profoundly influenced by him. Before long, Lu Zhixiang introduced Zhang Chongren to the chief cartoon editor of the weekly *Vingtème Siècle* [Twentieth Century], George Remi, and Chongren helped him with his newly created book, *Tintin in the Far East--The Blue Lotus* (*Le Lotus Bleu*). George Remi used the pen name Hergé to create the series of comics, *The Adventures of Tintin*. At that time Belgium had already been ruined by news, but still in a stage of improvisation based on of groundless imaginings,* Zhang Chongren helped Hergé firmly establish his creative train of thought on the foundation of well-researched facts, stimulating his creative potential, and in their

collaborative effort in the *Blue Lotus* they exposed the truth about Japan's aggression in China, and Hergé incarnated Zhang Chongren into the story as the character "Zhang," in order to commemorate their friendship.

In the fall of 1935, Zhang Chongren graduated with outstanding success in his studies, winning the honor of the Belgian Royal Ya Er Pei* Award, and the Brussels City Government award; under the encouragement of Fr. Lu Zhixiang, he returned with resolve to his disaster-ridden motherland. The 96-year-old elder Ma Xiangbo was extremely happy to see Zhang Chongren, and joining with Cai Yuanpei and other famous cultural figures, as well as the Belgian Ambassador to China, Ji Youmu, held a welcoming party for Zhang Chongren. During the banquet, Ma spoke up, saying he wanted Zhang Chongren to carve a statue, and Chongren knew full well that this was Lao Lao intentionally wanting to see whether his talent truly merited his reputation, or was nothing but an empty title, so he sped up his pace in sculpting, and after he had finished the beard and hair on the statue of Ma, the facial expression was as if he were alive, his slightly closed eyes were as though they could penetrate to one's heart, and his smiling lips as if they had breath and speech. Old Man Xiangbo, after examining the details carefully, said as though he were suddenly decades younger, "Wonderful, it has rhythmic vitality!" He said to Chongren, "The atmosphere in China has not yet opened up to sculpted images of people, first you have to put on an exhibition, and then I will introduce some celebrities and ask you to carve statues of them, and you can have a career, however, have you ever read the Nine Debates? Eat but don't steal to become full, wear clothes not to be lax, but to keep warm...what does this mean?" Its general idea is to not drag out a shameful existence in exchange for a comfortable life. Chongren answered and said, "A slug is soft but you don't eat it, hard but you don't spit." When old Xiangbo heard this, he beamed with pleasure, and said in loud praise, "What a soft one doesn't cheat, not a strong one, eh?" Chongren, you can walk your path." After this, Cai Yuanpei, Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu, and Belgian envoy Ji Youmu, and others together held the Zhang Chongren Homecoming Exhibition, Sun Ke, Cai Yuanpei, Ye Gongchuo, Mei Lanfang, and other noted public figures attended, their words like a tide of high praise! After seeing this, Ma said, smiling, "Why are your images not cut off at the neck (meaning images of the head), but chopped at the chest (meaning busts of the head and chest), will people understand?" Zhang Chongren answered, "Exactly because people don't understand, I will explain to make them understand." Ma one by one introduced the Republic of China's senior statesmen, Yu Youren, Ju Juesheng, Tang Shaoyi, and others, and asked Zhang Chongren to make busts of them, and then to make a half-body bust of Vice-Committee Member Feng Yuxiang. Zhang Chongren's bust of Feng brought out his disposition as a common man, and his stately bearing of wholehearted resistance to Japan; this famous, patriotic general's heroic spirit shining through the statue was highly praised, and, as a gift, to show his patriotic feelings, he picked up a brush added in the words, "Let us restore our lost land!" In order to help Chongren's business, and to promote art, Ma instructed his daughter-in-law to rent her own western-style building with a French garden, at Fr. Lao Road, number 608, to Zhang Chongren in order to establish China's first private western art studio, "Chongren Studio." At the end of 1936, before the outbreak of the Songhu war, the aged, 97-year old Ma Xiangbo left Shanghai and went to Nanjing, making haste with his walking stick, calling on the Nationalists and the Communists to work together to resist the Japanese. In March of the next year, he served as a committee member in the Nationalist government. Living in Nanjing at #12 Dafang Lane. Ma's [place of residence also became Zhang Chongren's office in the capital. Following the Anti-japanese "7-7-1937" Incident at Marco Polo Bridge, Ma moved west to Guilin, and the following winter headed to Kunming, by way of Vietnam. At Ma's 100th birthday party in the spring of 1939, the whole nation sent its greetings from afar, the

Nationalist government issuing high praise upon him, and the CCP Central Committee also sent him a telegram, praising Ma as "a light to the nation, a sign of good fortune for humanity." on November 4, at Liang Mountain in Vietnam, Old Man Ma died of illness, and all China mourned his death. The government again issued high praise; Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong and other Nationalist and Communist leaders all sent telegrams. In Shanghai, Zhang Chongren attended a large mourning service held by five organizations, including Fudan University, and gave a thank-you address on behalf of Ma's family. In 1952 the People's Government sent an officer to Vietnam to receive Ma's coffin and return with it to Shanghai for burial.

Time passed quickly, and Hergé, far away in Belgium, who had been thinking about Zhang Chongren but unable to find him, in 1960 wrote about Tintin seeking a friend--*Tintin in Tibet*, a fantasy in which Tintin seeks and at last finds, in a cave in Tibet, suffering in adversity, his friend Zhang, whom he knew in *The Blue Lotus*, causing Europeans once again to think of Zhang Chongren! However, it was not until 15 years later that Hergé, through Wei Xubu, the son of the former Chinese envoy in Belgium Wei Chenzu, in a turn of events he heard of Zhang Chongren's location. Hergé wrote Zhang Chongren an emotion-filled letter. Upon receiving the letter, Zhang Chongren was moved to the point of tears, but as it was just during the Cultural Revolution period, he was only able to write a letter, entrusting it to his student Jian Qingfu, to take to Hong Kong and send it to Hergé. In 1981, Zhang Chongren obtained permission to travel to Belgium to give a lecture, and the reunion between Zhang and Hergé after a separation of 47 years moved Europe. By that time, *The Adventures of Tintin* had published 24 books, been translated into the languages of over 60 countries, and published over 250 million copies, and Zhang Chongren was the only real character in them! Hergé had already contracted Leukemia, depending on blood transfusions to maintain his life, and Zhang Chongren made a statue of him [张充仁为他塑像]. In 1985 the head of the French Ministry of Culture asked President Mitterrand to personally travel to Shanghai to invite Zhang Chongren to travel to France to speak, to sculpt a bust of Hergé, to make a bust of musician Debussy, and even President Mitterrand posed as a "model" for Zhang Chongren, asking the 81-year-old Chinese sculptor to make a bust of him. In France, a "Zhang Chongren Fever" arose once again. Amidst this great reputation, Zhang Chongren did not forget his homeland, returning to China many times to sculpt busts of Deng Xiaoping, Nie Er, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, Jiang Qingfu and others, until in 1996, while ill, he sculpted *Wan Bi Gui Zhao* [Retrieving Our Rightful Property] to celebrate the return of Hong Kong to China! In 1998 Zhang Chongren quietly passed into the Lord's arms, at the age of 91, and France gave him a grand funeral ceremony. Zhang Chongren worked all his life with great diligence, he led an honest and clean life, devoted to art, and had an ardent love for his country! He was able to fulfill his life's ideal, even returning to glory in old age, becoming an emissary in the cultural exchange between China and the West, and the most famous Chinese sculptor in Europe. At the root of it all, it still was only through the painstaking education he received from the elderly Ma Xiangbo at the Tushanwan Orphanage Art School that he was able to achieve his goal of an artistic life!

Notes

1. Zhang Chongren, *The Autobiography of Zhang Chongren*, unpublished material, supplied by Ms. Zhang Yufei.
2. Chen Yaowang, *Nisu zhi Shen shou ye--Zhang Chongren's Artistic Life*, Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 2003.

3. Fang Hao, *Biography of Chinese Catholic Historical Persons*, Catholic Shanghai Diocese Guangqi Society, 2003.
4. Gu Weimin, *Annals of China's Catholic Church*, Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2003.
5. Li Tiangang, "Ma Xiangbo's Religious Character," in *Biographical Sketches of Ma Xiangbo*, Fudan University Publishers, 2005.
6. Zhang Chongren, "From Making Statues to Talking about Becoming an Upright Man," *Liberation Daily* [*Jiefang Ribao*], 3 Jan 1985.