

= Ma Chengyuan =

Ma Chengyuan (3 November 1927 ? 25 September 2004) was a Chinese archaeologist , epigrapher , and president of the Shanghai Museum . He was credited with saving priceless artifacts from destruction during the Cultural Revolution , and was instrumental in raising funds and support for the rebuilding of the Shanghai Museum . He was a recipient of the John D. Rockefeller III Award , and was awarded the Legion of Honour by French President Jacques Chirac .

Ma was an authority on ancient Chinese bronzes and published more than 80 books and academic papers , including a 16 @-@ volume encyclopedia of the bronzes . He was responsible for recovering ancient relics including the Jin Hou Su bells and Warring States period bamboo strips , which are now considered China 's national treasures .

Ma suffered from depression in his final years , and committed suicide in September 2004 .

= = Early life and career = =

Ma Chengyuan was born in 1927 in Shanghai . In 1946 , he joined an underground cell of the Communist Party of China , and graduated from the history department of Daxia University in Shanghai , a predecessor of East China Normal University , in 1951 . He worked for the education department of the Shanghai Municipal Government before joining the Shanghai Museum in 1954 . Ma was originally assigned to be a manager and Communist Party secretary of the museum , but he resigned from his political positions in 1956 to focus on academic work , and later became director of the bronze research department .

= = Cultural Revolution = =

As the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966 , Chairman Mao Zedong called for the destruction of the Four Olds , and teenage Red Guards rampaged through people 's homes to destroy relics of pre @-@ Communist China . Desperate Shanghai collectors sought protection of their antiques at the Shanghai Museum , and Ma slept in his office to take phone calls and to dispatch museum employees around the clock .

Ma initially kept the Red Guards out of the museum by organizing his employees as fake Red Guards , and protected the relics by painting Maoist slogans over the display cases . However , some of his own staff were soon swept by the revolutionary fervour . The extremist faction of the museum workers seized Ma along with other senior officials , and imprisoned him in a storage room for nine months . Trying to coerce the officials into confessing that they were " traitors " , the extremists repeatedly lifted them up and dropped them onto the marble floor . Several of Ma 's colleagues died . Ma survived the torture , and was sent to a labour camp in Hubei province for five years .

In 1972 , after American President Richard Nixon 's historic visit to China , Ma was brought back to Shanghai to organize an exhibition of archaeological treasures to tour the United States . The Cultural Revolution ended after the death of Mao in 1976 .

= = Rebuilding the Shanghai Museum = =

In 1985 , Ma was appointed the Director of the Shanghai Museum . When the museum was omitted from Shanghai 's five @-@ year reconstruction plan in 1992 , Ma lobbied Mayor Huang Ju for its rebuilding . After seeing the dilapidated rooms of the Zhonghui Building where the museum was then housed , Huang agreed to allocate a prime site on the People 's Square , but the museum had to raise its own building funds . Ma raised US \$ 25 million by leasing the old building to a Hong Kong developer . He also made many trips abroad to solicit donations , mainly from the Shanghai diaspora who had fled to Hong Kong after the Communist revolution , raising another US \$ 10 million . The money still ran short , but he eventually persuaded the city government to allocate another 140 million yuan to complete the building .

The museum reopened on 12 October 1996 to wide acclaim , and Ma gained international fame . He won the John D. Rockefeller III Award from the Asian Cultural Council in that year . French President Jacques Chirac awarded Ma the Legion of Honour in 1998 , and invited Ma to accompany Chinese President Jiang Zemin to a private dinner with him in France . The South China Morning Post of Hong Kong commented that Ma seemed to have " willed [the Shanghai Museum] into existence . "

= = Recovering cultural relics = =

After the opening up of China from the 1980s , tomb robbery was rampant and many artifacts were looted and smuggled across the border to Hong Kong , then a British territory . Ma Chengyuan was active in recovering many of the items from the Hong Kong antique market . In 1992 , he purchased the 3 @, @ 000 @-@ year @-@ old Jin Hou Su bianzhong (????) , which were listed by the Chinese government as one of the first 64 national treasures forbidden to be exhibited abroad in 2002 .

In 1994 , Ma recovered more than 1 @, @ 200 Warring States period bamboo slips from the Kingdom of Chu , now known as the Shanghai Museum bamboo slips . Several ancient texts were written on the strips , including the Kongzi Shi Lun , a previously unknown commentary on the Confucian Classic of Poetry attributed to Confucius himself . The discovery caused a sensation in academia , and the texts have been the subject of intense studies by numerous scholars , including Ma himself .

= = Academics = =

Ma was an authority on ancient Chinese bronzes and published more than 80 books and academic papers . His book Ancient Chinese Bronzes , translated into English and published by Oxford University Press (ISBN 9780195837957) , is highly influential and widely used as a university textbook . His 16 @-@ volume encyclopedia , Zhongguo Qingtongqi Quanji (??????? , " Complete Compilation of Chinese Bronzes ") , is the most comprehensive book on Chinese bronzes ever published . He was also the chief editor of Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (????????? , " Warring States Chu Bamboo Books of the Shanghai Museum ") , a groundbreaking research on the Warring States bamboo strips recovered by Ma himself . Other books he published include Zhongguo Qingtongqi Yanjiu (??????? , " Research on Chinese Bronzes ") , a collection of 40 of his academic papers , Yangshao Wenhua de Caitao (??????? , " Painted Ceramics of the Yangshao Culture ") , and Shang Zhou Qingtongqi Mingwen Xuan (??????? , " Selected Bronze Inscriptions of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties ") .

In addition to his main position as Director of the Shanghai Museum , Ma also taught as a part @-@ time professor at Shanghai 's East China Normal University and Fudan University . He was also a council member of the Archaeological Society of China , and vice chairman of the China Museum Society .

= = Retirement and suicide = =

Ma retired in 1999 , but still served as an advisor to the Shanghai Museum . However , he had conflicts with the new management which became increasingly bitter . He was accused of misusing US \$ 250 @, @ 000 donated by a Chinese @-@ American collector , but an investigation cleared him of wrongdoing . There were also rumours that some of the ancient bamboo strips he purchased for a high sum from public funds were fake .

In his final years , Ma allegedly suffered from high blood pressure and kidney problems , yet followed his doctor 's advice meticulously . It is also said that he suffered from depression , and committed suicide on 25 September 2004 . Official newspapers in China reported his death but did not initially disclose the cause . When President Chirac organized his visit to Shanghai in October , he insisted on meeting with Ma , without realizing that he had died .

= = Personal life = =

Ma Chengyuan was married to Chen Zhiwu . They had a daughter , who lived in Australia . Before Ma 's death , he invited his daughter to spend two weeks with him in Shanghai . He committed suicide three days after his daughter returned to Australia .