

# Esteemed educator's former home opens

Tan Weiyun

The former residence of Ma Xiangbo (1840-1939), esteemed educator, visionary and patriot, has been opened free to the public after rounds of renovations.

The house in Sijing Town, built in the 1700s, has five halls and four gardens, covering an area of 850 square meters. Prior to being renovated, the house was used as a warehouse, village activity center and highly partitioned residence. Today, the old architecture, which showcases rich collections of Ma's photos, calligraphy, letters and daily items, tells the great man's life story, full of twists and turns.

Ma is revered as a progressive educator and founder of the prestigious Fudan University.

His illustrious students included Cai Yuanpei, who later became head of Peking University, and Yu Youren, a high-ranking official in the Republic of China (1912-49).

Ma was a child prodigy. He started studying astronomy at the age of 5, and was studying French, Latin, Greek, math, physics and philosophy by the age of 12.

In 1870, he graduated as a doctor of theology and became headmaster of Xuhui School in Shanghai.

He is remembered as a man of great compassion and patriotism. In 1876, he collected 2,000 silver ingots to help victims of a famine.

The young Ma studied in Japan, the United States, France and Italy. He was greatly influenced by Western culture and ideas, and developed the conviction that only education could save China.

In 1900, he returned to China and devoted 200 hectares of Songjiang farmland he inherited from his family as the site for what would become Fudan



A portrait of Ma Xiangbo — esteemed educator, visionary and patriot

University. His one-time residence in Sijing Town, Songjiang, is located at the end of a lane off Kaijiang Road M.

Visitors to the restored home can see numerous exhibits, documents, photographs and the books he once read in his early years, tracing Ma's life and accomplishments.

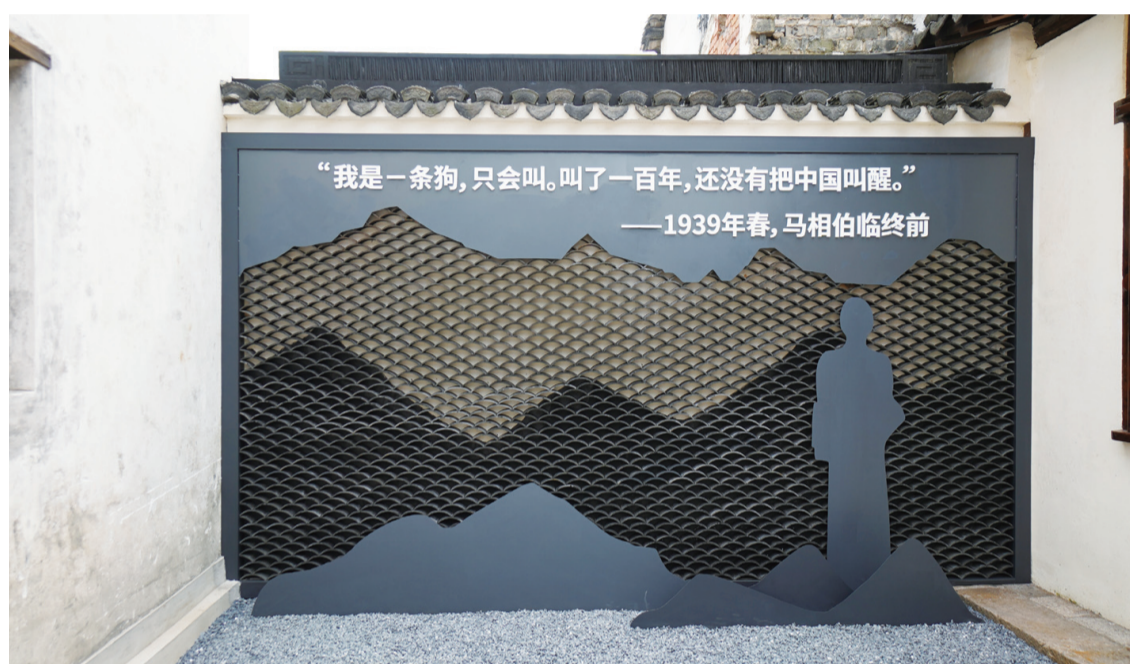
The fourth hall revives his study called "Leshan Hall," a barely furnished room with a simple desk and full bookshelf. In the garden, Ma's sitting statue is situated in the center, with rockeries as the backdrop.

"The house is a connection between Ma and visitors, between the old days and modern China," said the curator Zhou Ye from Fudan University. "A tour in the house is a walk into Ma's life, which helps us better understand the hardship the country was suffering before and the great contribution Ma made."

In fact, Kaijiang Road is rich with more relic houses, which are all in the



The former residence of Ma Xiangbo has been opened free to the public. — Ti Gong



Ma's dying words expressing his unfulfilled wish for education. — Ti Gong

final phase of their renovation projects. They're kept as true as they were 100 years ago, due to strict preservation regulations applied according to traditional Chinese architecture methods.

Each old brick from the houses is numbered. For those too broken to be used again, the construction team travelled around China to find traditional kilns that still produce handmade bricks.

Old wooden beams and pillars are mended, strengthened and painted by experienced carpenters, while the old tiles are cleaned, fixed and re-carved.

The old houses have been transformed into a bookstore, coffee shop, tearoom, handwork studio and comics gallery, some of which are now open.

The old residence of Ma Xiangbo  
Address: 356 Kaijiang Rd M., Sijing Town,  
Songjiang District  
Admission: Free

**A PLACE TO LINGER**

# A pioneering champion of women's education



A portrait of Ding Yuexin, a regional pioneer who promoted women's education.

Yang Yang

DING Yuexin (1867-1953), a neighboring Jinshan resident who relocated to near the Xiuye Bridge in Songjiang after getting married, is a regional pioneer who promoted women's education throughout her life.

Ding was appointed Chinese teacher and school administrator at Jingxian Girls School in Songjiang in 1905. The school was financed and founded by a couple — Yao Wenying and Song Zhanmei. Ding, accountable and diligent, was deeply trusted by the couple.

Before long, Song passed away, Yao left Songjiang and Ding took over the girls school. In addition to carefully administering the school, Ding managed to appoint renowned scholars Ma Junwu and Wang Xiumei as teachers to raise the school's teaching quality.

Ding also set an example by sending her own daughter Wu Caizhi to school. She encouraged her relatives and friends to allow their daughters to attend school, and would waive some students' tuition fees if their families couldn't afford them. All these measures helped to create a trend of women attending school in

Songjiang at that time.

To facilitate the students's studies, Ding rented residential houses and repurposed them as dorms near the Yangjiaqiao Bridge. She also set up a branch school in east downtown Songjiang. The girls school was well evaluated by educational officials in successive years.

During the nine years of Ding's administration, she donated a huge amount of money and sold off her property of more than 200 *mu* (1.47 hectares) of land and her dowry to finance the school. For doing so, she was criticized by some of her male clan as the family's "black sheep."

Finally, at wit's end, she transferred her position as the school's administrator to another person.

Wu, her beloved daughter, contracted pneumonia and died after she returned from Belgium, where she had been studying. "I pitied my weak daughter and also pitied my weak motherland. I had hoped my daughter, after fulfilling her studies abroad, could contribute to the development of her motherland. But I hadn't thought she would die so early," said Ding.

The death of her daughter became the last straw for Ding, already frustrated by her career. She in turn converted to Buddhism, set up a Buddhist Society in Songjiang and was recommended to be its president.

In 1937, Jiang Zhaolin, a graduate of Jingxian Girls School who was later appointed head of the school's east branch, was ordered for arrest by the Kuomintang government. Jiang had joined the Communist Party of China and secretly fought against the Kuomintang party.

Jiang sought help from Ding and was taken in and sheltered at the Songjiang Buddhist Society until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

After the country's liberation, Ding was selected to be among the first batch of representatives of the People's Congress in Songjiang. She was later recommended as librarian of the Sunan Institute of Culture and History.

Ding died of breast cancer in Songjiang in 1953.

Dr Sun Yat-sen used to praise Ding's noble and unsullied personality during his visits to Songjiang after learning about her devotion to women's education.

**FAMOUS NAMES**