

YOUTH

A race to highlight excellence

Xiamen marathon showcases inspiring contribution of city's university with new campus route, **Li Yingxue** reports.

One hundred years ago, when overseas Chinese philanthropist Tan Kah Kee founded Xiamen University in Fujian province, he hoped that when foreign ships berthed and departed from the city's port, the sailors could see a spectacular university, symbolizing the city's search for knowledge and excellence. He wanted the university to have a global appeal and to leave an impression.

His vision of publicizing the city and the university was realized in spectacular fashion on April 10. For the first time, organizers who established the Xiamen Marathon plotted a separate course through the university's campus as part of a special 13.8-kilometer race to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the university that was being held on the same day as the Marathon, which was founded 19 years ago.

The special race — along with the marathon, which was conferred with the World Athletics Elite Platinum Label in February, China's second after the Shanghai Marathon — was broadcast live across the nation.

Thirty minutes after the starting gun for the 2021 Xiamen Marathon fired, about 3,000 runners sheared off from the main group and began heading in the direction of a different finish line at the Siming campus of Xiamen University.

Most of the runners were teachers, students and alumni of the university.

Founded in 1921, with the motto "Pursue Excellence, Strive for Perfection", Xiamen University has cultivated more than 400,000 undergraduates and postgraduates.

"We want to provide a platform for our students, staff and alumni to join our 100-year celebration and start the next stage of our journey."

Liu Jianmin, deputy Party secretary at the Xiamen University's Physical Education Department

In 2016, the Xiamen University Malaysia campus was founded, the first overseas branch campus established by a renowned Chinese university.

Xiamen University has set 2021 as the university's centennial year and April 3 to 9 was designated as a week of celebration.

The university held 11 categories of activities both online and offline, including the celebration ceremony, the Kah Kee Forum, the World University Presidents' Forum and the International Forum on Humanities and Social Sciences.

Qiao Xiaoyang, a researcher from the School of Public Health, was the first runner to break the finish tape.

Growing up in Xiamen, Qiao started work at Xiamen University in 2017 when he graduated from college. The 24-year-old is an enthusiastic runner, who has finished several full marathons and a couple of half marathons. He has run the Xiamen Marathon twice before.



Runners celebrate after the race marking the 100th anniversary of Xiamen University. About 3,000 runners, mostly teachers, students and graduates, took part in the event in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I chose to participate in the Xiamen University race this year instead of the Xiamen Marathon, because I think this race is special. I can always take part in the Xiamen Marathon in the years to come," he says.

According to Liu Jianmin, deputy Party secretary at the Physical Education Department of the university, around 1,700 students and 400 staff members joined the race and the youngest runner was 18-year-old student Lin Keyao.

"We want to provide a platform for our students, staff and alumni to join our 100-year celebration and

start the next stage of our journey," Liu says.

The race separates runners into youth and middle-aged categories and each age group is then divided by gender. The top 15 runners of each group were invited to attend the award ceremony.

Liu Zuyang, 55, who runs a sports equipment company, finished 16th in his group, one position away from the podium.

He studied international finance from 1985 to 1989 at Xiamen University. The route through the campus brought memories flooding back, especially when passing by the

Qunxian buildings — which were built in the 1920s — where he used to have courses.

"When I look back, the university has been a huge influence on me, whether directly or indirectly," Liu Zuyang says. "As well as the knowledge I gleaned there, it is perhaps more about how it shaped my personality, values and worldview."

"The college wanted us to keep an open mind, which encouraged me to be an entrepreneur in 1992 when, back then, it was the choice of the few," he says.

According to Liu Zuyang, the university always organizes different

activities for alumni, including tennis and running events. He was also a torchbearer during the 100-day countdown event leading up to the centenary celebrations.

"Xiamen University is an important element of the city," he says.

Volunteers answered the call, with 477 people helping to organize the special race. Zhang Hong, a post-graduate student at the university's School of Journalism and Communication, helped to organize the award ceremony. The 25-year-old believes the university and its alumni have a special bond, and that was evident in the turnout for the race and the centenary celebrations.

She explains that, in her view, the university is inclusive and cares for all who pass through its portals on their educational journey. "Our university loves its students in every way," she notes. "One tiny example is that it provides free rice to its students in the canteen. We feel we are well taken care of."

The race was originally scheduled for Jan 3, together with the 2021 Xiamen Marathon, but it was postponed until April 10, following a circular issued in December by a State Council task force for combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Zhang was planning to run the race in January. She joined the volunteer team for the centenary celebration in the same month, which left her no time to train for the rearranged race.

"It's special to take part in the race as a volunteer even though I didn't get to run myself," she says. "The route inside the campus was well planned. It enters through the south gate, which directly faces the sea, and passes the statue of Tan Kah Kee and several classic buildings."

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