

CHINA'S FITTEST MAN

Tsinghua University professor Ma Yuehan was one of the nation's physical education pioneers, **Chen Xiangfeng** writes in Beijing.

He was once described by former Chinese leader Mao Zedong as the "nation's healthiest person". He created the slogan: "Be healthy and work for the motherland for 50 years", which is still popular among Chinese people today.

His name is Ma Yuehan, a pioneer of modern Chinese sports. He was a prime example of that popular slogan when he was a professor of physical education at Tsinghua University for 52 years, from 1919-66.

This year is the 130th anniversary of his birth, and his spirit and influence are still felt.

"I still remember the first day I became a student of Ma," said Wang Guanglun, a professor at Tsinghua University and an expert in hydraulic structure engineering.

"He did not give his first lesson on the playground but instead showed all of us into the big hall. He stood on the stage and raised his hands, asking us to do what he did and shout 'move on and move on'."

"His passion and love of sports inspired every student on campus. We spent lots of time playing different sports."

Wang was the captain of Tsinghua University's basketball team in the late 1950s and the healthy body he acquired through sports helped him in his professional life.

"Some people might question if it is worth spending time on sports rather than on your research.

"We should take a look at the whole picture. You spend time on sports, you become healthy and you do not have to go to the hospital time and time again when you are getting old.

"For me, doing sports made my work more efficient, and it was really worth following Ma's instructions to 'move on'."

Born in 1882, Ma went to St. John's University in Shanghai in 1904, where he held a key role in the school's sports delegation.

He was a member of the athletics, soccer, tennis, baseball and swimming teams.

He started his teaching career in 1914 as an instructor in English and chemistry, and began to focus on physical education in 1919.

He used his vacations in 1919 and 1925 to go to the United States' Springfield College to further his physical education studies.

During that time, he replaced an American to become the director of the sports department in Tsinghua and made a number of major reforms.

In a short time, Tsinghua set more than 20 national records.

Since then, Tsinghua has established itself as a sports powerhouse among China's universities and produced a number of world-class athletes.



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ma Yuehan (left) instructs students at Tsinghua University. He was a professor there for 52 years.

In memory of his contribution to sports education, Tsinghua awards the Ma Yuehan Cup at its annual sports meeting, which now boasts 42 events.

"It's a tradition to play sports at Tsinghua," said Hu Kai, one of the most outstanding student athletes from the university, who won the 100 meters at the 2005 Summer Universiade.

He was the first Chinese to win a sprint title at a major international event.

"Inspired by Ma's slogan: 'Be healthy and work for the motherland for 50 years', everyone is motivated to play sports once you are on campus. The Ma Yuehan Cup sports meeting is a great platform for students to compete and become friends," said Hu, who is now studying for a doctorate at Tsinghua.

Sportsmanship

Ma once said students could lose their competitiveness but could not afford to lose their sportsmanship.

On one hand, he asked students to master the technique and the courage to win.

On the other hand, his education was not just about how to win but more about how to discipline yourself and respect people through sports.

"Thanks to Ma's efforts, a passion for sports has been cultivated; sportsmanship is spreading, and a great sports tradition has been established," said former Tsinghua president Jiang Nanxiang.

Ma had some famous theories concerning sports and their relationship with society and an individual's personality.

He believed sports are an excellent place to develop a student's character and that sports have value not only in results on the field but also wield an ability to influence society.

Wu Wenhui, also a Ma student and a mid- and long-distance runner, remembers well Ma's instructions.

"Ma taught us sports but he also taught us proper behavior and ethics. He told us the importance of being a better man," said Wu, now a retired professor in the computer field at Tsinghua.

Thanks to Ma's influence, Wu not only achieved his major but also was later recognized as a great tutor by his students.

He was once selected as the university's best teacher by Tsinghua students.

"Ma is not with us anymore, but his spirit will last forever," Wu said.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

"(Ma Yuehan) did not give his first lesson on the playground but instead showed all of us into the big hall. He stood on the stage and raised his hands, asking us to do what he did and shout 'move on and move on'."

WANG GUANGLUN, FORMER STUDENT OF MA YUEHAN

Ma made mark in Olympics

Ma Yuehan was a pioneer in developing China's Olympic movement.

In 1936, Ma was honored as the head coach of the Chinese sports delegation to the 11th Olympic Games in Berlin. It was a significant moment for China's Olympic development as the country sent a 139-member delegation, consisting of 69 competitors in athletics, swimming, basketball, soccer, weightlifting, boxing and cycling, plus 34 observers and 11 performers of traditional martial arts.

In 1949, Ma was elected vice-chairman of the All China Athletic Federation and shouldered the burden of lifting China's performances on the world's stage.

"I hope one day Chinese athletes are able to win gold medals at the Olympics and, one day, China is able to host an Olympics," Ma said when he took

over the job.

Ma also passed his passion for sports and the Olympics to his son, Ma Qiwei.

Ma Jr was the head coach of the China women's volleyball team from 1951. Thanks to his contributions to volleyball and sports psychology, he was later made vice-president of the Chinese Olympic Committee and Chinese Volleyball Association.

Ma also inspired his son-in-law, Mou Zuoyun, to take part in sports. Mou played basketball at the 1936 and 1948 Olympic Games. He was appointed head coach of the Chinese national team in 1951 and later became a lifetime FIBA honorary member.

In 1980, the IOC asked China to provide a three-candidate list for IOC membership.

Ma Jr and Mou were on the list.

CHEN XIANGFENG



Beijing Olympics 100m sprinter Hu Kai played the role of flag guardian during the opening ceremony of the 2011 Tsinghua "Ma Yuehan Cup" Sports Meeting. Hu is one of the best athletes produced by the Tsinghua University's sports training system.

HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS OF MA YUEHAN (1882-1966)

Birthplace: Xiamen, Fujian province

• 1911

Went to study medicine at St. John's University.

• 1914-19

Worked at Tsinghua University as an English and chemistry teacher.

• 1919-66

Worked at Tsinghua University as a physical education teacher. In addition, he went to the US to further his education (in 1919 and 1925).

• 1929

He led underdog Tsinghua to victory in the North China Sports Federation's soccer tournament.

• 1936

Became head coach of China's Olympic delegation for the 11th Olympic Games in Berlin.

• 1949-52

Twice elected as the vice-chairman of the All China Athletic Federation (the governing body of all China sports, which is now called the State General Administration of Sports).

• 1956

Elected chairman of the All China Athletic Federation.