

A HISTORY OF DISCOVERY EXPANDS INTO THE FUTURE

A conversation with
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Q: What kind of culture has Xiamen University developed over its 100-year history?

At Xiamen University, we embrace a culture of gratitude, openness, innovation, and harmony. In 1921, underpinned by a belief that education provides a solid national foundation, the philanthropist, Tan Kah Kee, founded Xiamen University. He put his heart and soul into developing the university and we are grateful for his efforts, and the support received from the government and all circles of life over the years.

Because Tan Kah Kee was a renowned Chinese expatriate, we have the tradition of integrating the essence of Eastern and Western cultures, and have had many students and faculty members with overseas experience since the early days. Today, with 400 international teachers and 3,000 international students, we are one

of the most active universities in international exchange, with activities ranging from research projects to conferences and summer schools.

With many firsts in China's higher education history, including the first department of aerospace, marine science, and journalism and communication, we strive to set standards. Following an innovation-driven development strategy, we have achieved internationally-recognized original results in chemistry and chemical engineering, biomedicine, marine science, energy, materials science, intelligent manufacturing, and artificial intelligence.

Located in the garden city of Xiamen, on the coast, we also boast a beautiful campus, with harmony between natural and built environments. We encourage diversity, and seek to provide a platform for people with different cultural backgrounds to grow.

Q: How do you promote science and technology innovation at the university?

Aiming at frontier science, and seeking to address national strategic needs and contribute to economic development, we have set development strategies to promote research innovation capacities. We are forging ahead with systemic reforms to ensure our research is guided by objectives and societal needs, is better organized and based on a model of team collaboration. We are also enhancing strategic planning for more forward-looking research and for achieving more breakthroughs in key, cutting-edge, or disruptive technologies.

Another effort is to construct big, integrated platforms, managed with new models, to improve cross-disciplinary integration, and our capacity for major research projects. We are taking part in international big science projects, and domestic projects focusing on research infrastructure construction, so that we can be integrated in national and global networks.

We also emphasize research translation and commercialization to benefit society. This includes building an innovation technology research institute to gather global resources, and several research translation bases to accelerate the application of results. Our efforts on disease control and drug development for HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, for instance, have led to useful technologies and products.

Q: What measures have you taken to enhance faculty teams?

A top-tier faculty team is essential for building a first-class university, and gathering talent has always been our tradition. In recent years, with faculty team-building as a focus of our work, we have emphasized both attracting and cultivating talent. We've hired an average of 110 faculty members from across the world each year, and emphasize personal development, providing space to grow professionally. Training programmes are offered to young teachers, with opportunities for exchange and collaborative research at world-leading universities. To enlarge the talent reservoir, we are also reforming our post-doctoral system, improving compensation and evaluation mechanisms for postdocs. With an emphasis on high-end young talent, we have initiated programmes to support salaries, research funding, lab space and facilities, and housing. We've now gathered a group of people with great potential and innovation capabilities.



Q: What do you promote in education?

We cultivate our students' leadership roles to help them become leading lights in their fields. While emphasizing their specialty knowledge, we endeavour to inculcate within them a strong sense of social responsibility. They also need to be quick learners to keep pace with the times. This means having an open attitude, a global vision, and good cross-cultural communication abilities.

With student education a core mission, we are now promoting educational reform and fostering student creativity and initiative by transforming teacher-centred learning to student-centred, with an emphasis on students' personalized needs. The reform uses new training models that integrate education with research, promote interdisciplinary work and encourage academia-industry collaboration. We also cultivate students' innovation and entrepreneurial spirits, encouraging their independent thinking. To ensure high-quality education, we have also established an assessment system to annually check our training objectives, models, processes and results.

Q: How does the university enhance its global connections?

The university's development is not independent of the global network. We are enhancing multi-channel, multi-level international collaboration. With the 'G50 Strategic Partnership Plan', we have established links with 50 world-renowned

universities, and are encouraging various school-level collaborations.

We have leveraged our geographical advantages as the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road by initiating the University Consortium of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which comprises 61 universities from 17 countries or regions. With the launch of the Tan Kah Kee research vessel, we are building a platform for training global marine science researchers.

A key step in our globalization strategy also includes the launch of our Malaysia campus in early 2016. As a milestone in Sino-Malaysia higher education collaboration, it has become a key platform for promoting cultural exchanges between China and Southeast Asia, and sets a new model for Chinese universities. As a way to promote educational collaboration and share resources, joint schools are also encouraged. An example is a school in creative arts co-established with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) in the United Kingdom, a national first of its kind. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe international collaboration is essential for becoming a world-class university.

Q: What are the latest moves for Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM)?

As the first Chinese university branch campus overseas, XMUM is committed to becoming an international university with first-class teaching and research, a diverse

culture, and global influence. With support from governments of both countries, it has made significant progress in academic development, student education and research.

With five schools and more planned, it has set up a multidisciplinary academic framework. Last September, it conferred degrees to its first batch of graduates. Among its 5,900-plus current students from 29 countries, some undergraduates have already published papers in international journals, or won innovation-themed contests. These achievements rely on an international, high-quality, diverse faculty team with nearly 300 dedicated teachers, as well as a fantastic management team. The new campus is already undertaking more than 20 research projects, leading to publications in high-quality journals and multiple academic awards. XMUM is also broadening its international ties and extending its social services, with construction of an expanding infrastructure, research and teaching facilities. ■



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