



## China-Chengdu City Marathon and Friend Reunion

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On October 27, 2024, in Chengdu City, Sichuan China, I ran in the Chengdu International Marathon. Referring to the common shorthand for China's geography—"Which part of the right-facing chicken is it?"—Chengdu lies at the base of the tail feathers or near the rump.

Chengdu is fairly far away. First, from Fukuoka, it's roughly two hours till Shanghai, then via Shanghai transfer its three hours till Sichuan, totaling a five hour journey.

Chengdu is a massive metropolis, with a population exceeding 16 million—making it even larger than Tokyo. Historically, it was the capital of Shu Han, one of the Three Kingdoms recorded in the Records of the Three Kingdoms. Today, it is an industrial and logistics hub with rich historical heritage and is a flourishing and lively city overflowing with contemporary buildings and cutting-edge high-tech industry.

Sichuan's basin's center area has extensive farmland and is known as the homeland of the pandas that come to Japan.

In addition, Sichuan is the home of Miyakonojo City's first Chinese Coordinator for International Relations, Biao Li, who worked in Miyakonojo 22 years ago.



My participation in this marathon began with an invitation from Biao in April, asking, 'Won't you participate?' For me, I haven't ran this marathon in 5 years but it would mark my 3<sup>rd</sup> total participation.

In the end, together with a fellow marathon runner and MIA member, Taemi Iwamatsu, we accepted Biao's offer and decided to run in the half-marathon.

The Chengdu International Marathon is a new event that started in 2017, and has a large turnout with 35,000 participants (full-25,000, half-10,000). It developed into a marathon that competes with the likes of London, New York, Paris, etc. city-type marathons and is a wide-reaching international event comprising of participants from over 50 countries. In city-type marathons, the world's top runners and the amateurs run the same course. While it was a fun event for the general population, for the 21 African runners from Kenya and Ethiopia, it represented a prime opportunity to compete for substantial cash prizes and bring recognition to their countries.

Due to the rapid increase in marathon participation in China in recent years, entry is now determined by lottery; fortunately, the two of us were selected. After impatiently waiting for our departure day, we embarked on our voyage in high spirits.

Biao prepared two separate rooms in their house for us to lodge in during our five-day homestay.

Together with their spouse, Biao continues to run in the marathons that I first invited them to during their time working for the MIA. Across their vast country, they enjoy challenging domestic marathons here and there as husband and wife. They are a sport-loving couple, having even participated in the Mt. Fuji marathon (Yamanashi-ken) seven years ago.

This time, the Lis came with their companions, the Gs (also a husband and wife pair), from Qingdao to participate in the marathon. The Lis and Mr. G ran the full, while Mrs. G, Taemi, and I ran the half.

Along with the torso tag on my chest to measure my time, I also made my own tag to boost my performance and wore it on my back. It displayed the phrase 'Goal: Race Completion at 84 Years Old' in Chinese as I ran. In marathons in China, when senior citizens are running, people who pass them often shout words of encouragement like '加油、加油!' (Come on!). These cheers, along with roadside support, provide great motivation. Hoping for plenty of such encouragement, I displayed my age on my back. At 84 years old, I was the marathon's oldest participant—a runner whose ability to finish was uncertain in

many people's minds. I thought, 'To persevere and run to the end, I need their cheers!

The result was just as I predicted, but one thing happened outside my expectations. Before the race began, countless runners looked at the tag I had created and asked to take pictures with me using their smartphones, starting conversations as well. Without getting a chance to warm up, it was already time to start. Even more unexpectedly, people pointed their smartphones at me even during the race, taking photos and videos as I ran.

Of course, I received lots of support from my fellow runners and roadside spectators, which turned into power enabling me to finish within the time limit and receive my profoundly heavy race-completion medal. I am always taken aback by the completion medals from this marathon. This year's edition featured a double-structured and double-doored unusual design. The idea is so exquisitely intricate that you would think that it has inherited the eccentric battle strategy wisdom of the Shu Han's military strategist 'Zhuge Liang. Out of the whole world's marathon medals, this one is probably the most striking.

Compared to me, Mrs. G and Taemi reached the finish line fairly quickly and waited for me to complete the race. We received word that the three who ran the full also finished with good times! I was glad to be a part of the group that completed the race! After waiting a bit, Mrs. G informed me that a video of my run had been posted on Instagram. The following day, the video was also sent to my smartphone, and for the first time, I saw my own running form. It was terribly awkward, old man-esque running, but considering my age, it can't be helped. When I think about how the video might be spread throughout China, I feel a little embarrassed (I intended to run a little more stylishly...lol). That being said, the video received lots of likes and nearly a 100 comments. Apparently, the video was uploaded to Instagram by a famous Chinese running influencer and later shared separately by another runner.

When I returned home and took a look at the comments, this is what I found:

Woh! Grandpa, persevere, persevere! So cool! My idol! (lol)

A model we should learn from! Insane mentality! 100 years isn't a problem for a forged body!

Persevering is already impossible for him, participating alone is a victory! It's a blessing he's even able to run!

Running is bad for your knees, After he runs for like 30 years and becomes 114 he'll understand that lol.

It's rumored that running is bad on your knees but from looking at this old-man's healthy figure that doesn't seem to be true.

So on and so on, I received (praiseful?) comments. On the other hand, I also received words of worry and encouraging me to be prudent; like the comments below.

Grandpa, what are you going to when your knees go bad?

Maybe the old man will his lose his life?

Grandpa, in the event something happens you might cause others trouble.

Also these sorts of comments:

How did you even get selected by the lottery at that age?

When I apply I don't get in.

Maybe I'll run putting the lottery-winning old guy on my back-

He's got retirement money right? Prob getting around a

200,000 yen pension?

During the race, many runners called out to me, not realizing I was Japanese but understood once I responded with my maladroit Chinese. Towards someone this old who came all the way from Japan, people expressed a mix of astonishment and admiration. I was shocked to see so many comments and such interest from people who hadn't

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