

A serious mind behind Chinese leader

Little was known about the wife of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang before she accompanied him to Africa, but her keen intellect and elegant disposition has made her a hit with the public. **Xue Yanwen** from China Features reports.

Before Cheng Hong accompanied her husband on an official visit to Africa last month, the wife of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang was little known among ordinary Chinese.

Prior to the trip, the public had only a few tidbits of information about her from coverage by the Xinhua News Agency. It was known that she is a professor of English at Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing and has translated several books on American literature, and that the couple has a daughter.

But when she smiled and waved to the welcoming crowds and donated books to a local university during the premier's four-nation tour, her presence created a frenzy in the media and online.

Netizens and experts hailed Cheng, together with Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping, as heroines of China's "wife diplomacy", a move to cultivate soft power and improve the country's international image.

'Iron girl'

Like her husband and many of China's senior officials, Cheng was sent to the countryside during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76). Perhaps such an experience explains why the 57-year-old enjoys

positioning herself as a low-profile university professor, even when she became China's "second lady".

Cheng was a *zhiqing*, a term used to describe educated youth. *Zhiqing* are a group of people who spent the prime of their lives toiling in the countryside during former chairman Mao Zedong's re-education program in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1974, the same year Li began his *zhiqing* life in Central China's Anhui province, the then 17-year-old Cheng arrived at a village in Jiaxian county in neighboring Henan province, where the nationwide campaign kicked off in 1968.

"Cheng Hong led a group of 'iron girls' to take on all the hardest work in our commune," says Wang Guangtao, 67, from Banchang village, where Cheng was sent.

"Iron girl" was the one of the best things a female *zhiqing* could be called at the time, when Mao's famous observation that "women hold up half the sky" prevailed. Women who were strong-willed and could work as hard as men were regarded as beautiful.

Reaping wheat, plowing, firing bricks, even picking up dung — every morning Cheng woke up early to work. She always earned the most work points, which only a few men could manage, according to Feng Xiaodong,



Li Keqiang and Cheng Hong arrive in Angola's capital Luanda on May 8.

LI TAO / XINHUA

a fellow *zhiqing* of Cheng's.

"I remember on a night of thunder and rain, we were fighting a flood, carrying sandbags on our shoulders to strengthen the river dike. We kept falling down on the muddy road but always got up again," wrote Cheng in an article published in *Guangming Daily* on Aug 1, 1994.

"Young people today might laugh at our passion back then. But it was our genuine feeling. Who can deny that genuineness is most precious?" wrote Cheng. "On that river bank I shed my sweat and tears. There I strove and pursued, not knowing what was ahead."

Devoted scholar

After four years as an "iron girl", Cheng returned to the city. She went to Peking University for English studies, where she met her husband.

Shortly after their marriage, Cheng took a teaching post at CUEB. She has taught in the foreign languages department for more than 30 years. She was responsible for a research project on "natural literature and eco-criticism".

The professor developed her interest in American and British literature on nature and ecology when she was a visiting scholar at Brown University in the United States, an experience she wrote about in her book *Tranquility Is Beyond Price*, published in 2009.

"The inner landscape of an individual is nourished by natural scenery," she wrote in the preface.

Cheng is the first person to have translated four masterpieces of Western nature writing to China, including *Wake-Robin*, *The Singing Wilderness*, *The Outermost*

House and Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place.

"Judging from the editors' viewpoint, professor Cheng is the kind of writer that editors would call 'the best,'" says Li Xuejun, veteran editor with SDX Joint Publishing, who has been cooperating with Cheng since 1999.

SDX Joint Publishing Co in Beijing released Cheng's four translations as part of a collection of American nature writing in August 2012. The collection has been a strong seller since its publication and has become even more popular after Cheng's public debut.

When she first met Cheng, "she looked like an ordinary scholar to me", Li Xuejun says. "What impressed me most then was her manuscript." *Returning to the Wilderness* is the first Chinese research work to serve as a systematic



Cheng Hong poses with Nigeria's first lady Patience Jonathan in capital city Abuja, on her visit last month.

LI XUJUN / XINHUA

introduction to American nature writing.

"I knew little about nature writing at that time. She's one of the few forward-looking researchers in this field," says Li Xuejun.

It took Cheng a decade to finish translating all four classics. But she maintained her low profile after publishing the collection and asked not to do book promotions, according to Li Xuejun.

"The rapidly changing era calls for willpower and a calm

mind," Li Keqiang wrote in a letter in reply to the Sanlian Bookstore, the first bookstore to be open 24 hours in Beijing, on April 22, the day before World Book and Copyright Day.

"In my eyes, Cheng Hong has such willpower and a calm mind," Li Xuejun says. "That's why she's able to persist and continually offer the readers her new discoveries in the area."

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Oral health museum shines light on medical history

By LIYU and PENG CHAO

A free oral health education museum is due to open next to the West China Hospital of Stomatology in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, in October.

"The museum is the first of its kind in China," said Fu Tianxing, an official responsible for the museum.

The museum will be housed in an old, traditional-styled building built in 1936 and will have an exhibition area of 1,000 square meters.

The West China Hospital of Stomatology and the Chengdu city government jointly established the museum to teach

people about oral health and to protect Chengdu's culture, according to Fu.

People of Chengdu and Sichuan province are very proud of the West China School/Hospital of Stomatology, which is affiliated with the West China Medical Center of Sichuan University.

The hospital is a clinical treatment center for oral diseases and maxillofacial surgery in western China. It is considered the birthplace of modern dentistry in China and has long been ranked as one of the top hospitals in the field.

The West China School of Stomatology has top educators and leading scholars in

dental science, many of whom become backbones of the nation's stomatology schools.

The *International Journal of Oral Science*, published by the school in 2008, was China's first English journal on dental science. The journal was included in the databases for Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE) and Pub Med (MEDLINE).

Bone Research, another international journal published by the school in 2013, was China's first English journal in the bone field and was co-published with the Nature Publishing Group since its first issue of 2014.

The West China Medical

Center is also affiliated with other hospitals, which are the best in the country.

The West China Hospital was ranked second among China's large general hospitals in the China's Best Hospitals list, which is annually released by Fudan University, for four consecutive years. The Peking Union Medical College Hospital in Beijing was ranked first.

Official statistics show that the hospital is the second largest hospital in the world, with a total service area of more than 400,000 sq m and 4,800 beds.

The hospital publishes nine different academic periodicals, all of which are included

in the resource periodicals for national scientific publications and three are included into the MEDLINE database.

The West China Women's and Children's Hospital owns China's only national office for maternal and children's health surveillance and the national center for birth defects monitoring. The network consists of 783 member hospitals in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, covering a whole population of 140 million.

Century old

The history of the affiliated hospitals of the West China Medical Center reflects the modern medical developments of Chengdu and western China.

The hospitals were originally established by a group of volunteers from Canada and other western countries more than a century ago.

Dr Omar L Kilborn and his wife arrived in Shanghai on Nov 3, 1891, and came to Chengdu on May 21, 1892. Kilborn opened the first Western clinic in western China in Sishengci Street in Chengdu on Nov 3, 1892.

Dr Retta Gifford Kilborn, Kilborn's second wife, was the first female doctor to work in western China.

In 1896 she opened the first women's hospital in Sichuan, near Sishengci Street, which developed into what is known today as the West China Women's and Children's Hospital.

Dr Ashley Woodward Lindsay graduated from the Royal College of Dental Surgeons in Toronto in 1906 and left Canada for Chengdu in the autumn of 1907 with his newly married wife. With help from



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Dr Omar L Kilborn and Dr Retta Gifford Kilborn, pioneers in modern medical service and education in Chengdu.

Kilborn the Lindsay couple opened a dental clinic in Sishengci Street, marking the start of China's modern dentistry in Chengdu.

In 1910 volunteers from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada jointly founded the West China Union University, which today is known as the West China Medical Center of Sichuan University.

In 1914 Kilborn founded the Medical School of West China Union University - today's West China School of Medicine and West China Hospital. In 1917 Lindsay established the Dentistry Department of West China Union University, which is now known as the West China

School/Hospital of Stomatology.

The West China Medical Center of Sichuan University has become a national medical center that combines higher medical education, medical research and a treatment center for difficult and severe illnesses.

"Although it has been a long time and all those earliest foreign volunteers have passed away, we will never forget their unselfish contribution to China's modern medical service and education," said an official from the West China Medical Center.

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PENG CHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

The Chengdu Oral Health Education Museum in a traditional-styled building will open in October.