

From checkmate to soulmate

World champion writes about romance success

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

"Lay Piece Without Regrets — Waits and Dreams of A Mermaid," an autobiography written by Zhu Chen to be published by the Nanfang Publishing House in May, 300 pages. Price: 22 yuan (US\$2.70).

Zhu Chen calls herself a mermaid in her first autobiography.

In many people's eyes, the 26-year-old is more a legend with beauty, wisdom, courage and success.

But few know of her failures and tears behind her bright eyes, sweet smile and story of success.

"When you put down a chess piece on the chessboard and withdraw your hand from it, you will never have the chance to regret. The same is true of your life," Zhu writes in her biography.

That's why Zhu named her autobiography "Lay Piece Without Regrets — Waits and Dreams of A Mermaid," in which Zhu writes stories about herself, her parents, her husband and her chess.

"The book includes all the necessary information on a contemporary young woman who desires success and love. It is also a valuable book for chess fans," writes Lan Dizhi, Zhu's professor at Tsinghua University, in the prelude to the book.

A brilliant chess player, Zhu has had few chances to demonstrate her gifts in other fields beyond the chessboard and the autobiography is a good way of getting this ball rolling.

"I was amazed at her ability to write," said Jing Min, the editor of the book.

"She does have many talents besides playing chess."

Born in 1976 in Wenzhou, a small town in East China's Zhejiang Province, Zhu fell in love with chess at the age of seven.

Dreaming of winning a championship, she was attracted to the pretty images of the chess pieces and began to learn playing at a local school for amateur chess, Zhu recalled.

Success came quickly when she won the under-12 age group during the World Junior Championships in Romania in 1988.

She thus became the first Chinese girl to win a championship in an international chess competition.

The championship made her famous and also took her away from her hometown. She was enrolled on to the national team and had to leave her parents and live independently at a training base in Beijing when she was 13.

Zhu could not help missing her parents and wrote letters to ask them to visit her. But she only got letters of encouragement in return.

She later understood that her parents missed her as much as she missed them. But they believed their daughter needed to become more strong and firm in character, in order to become a successful chess player.

To escape homesickness, Zhu tried to immerse herself in the world of chess. In Beijing, she first realized that chess was not just fairy tales of "king and queen," it was also about failures and victories, passions and responsibilities.

"I began to realize that chess could lead my life from that time," Zhu recalled.

What made her truly grow up was the highs and lows as a chess champion.

In the first half of the 1990s, Zhu suffered a string of defeats. Three years after the Romania victory, Zhu had her first major defeat during the 1991 National Championships.

She was ousted in the qualifiers, which surprised many who expected her to win.

She captured a national title in 1992, but failed to qualify for the annual event again in 1993 in Tianjin, which almost totally destroyed her confidence.

A year later she returned to the winning chess scene with a 1994 national title win. In the same year, she won the Asian and World Youth Championships in Malaysia, which earned her the women's grand master title.

It was also there that she met her future husband, Modihki Mohamed.

The young chess master from Qatar showed his affection for Zhu in their first meeting. There he learned his first Chinese sentence "I love you."

Love gradually developed between them through international telephone calls daily and regular visits to each other.

And love became the main impetus for Zhu to diligently study English, allowing her to communicate with Mohamed freely and reply to sports reporters in fluent English at international chess events.

Zhu has devoted a major part of her autobiography to depict their romantic love story.

But their love affair has not always been smooth-sailing. Neither of their families supported them at first.

Zhu's mother was not only worried that her daughter's bright future would be ruined if she was distracted by love but also wondered over cultural differences of having an Arab as her son-in-law.

But Zhu believed love can only be found and cannot be arranged.

The power of love can finally bridge the language, cultural, religious and even racial differences.

Zhu called that period of time as a time of "cold war."

She didn't want to break her mother's heart but neither could she give up her love.

In an effort to force Zhu to forget Mohamed and reconsider their relationship, Zhu's mother decided to send Zhu to college.

In 1995, Zhu entered Tsinghua University and became a college student in the department of Chinese, where she demonstrated her fine aptitude at academic learning.

Lan Dizhi, her first professor at Tsinghua, praised her as "an exceptional young woman without any arrogance."

But the change of environment didn't separate the young lovers.

They both shared a fondness for sentimentality as well as a love for the game, which drew them tightly together.

Their love also consoled Zhu after she heard that the qualifiers for the Women's World Championships (WWC) — the most renowned world competition for female players — was being suspended in 1995 due to organization problems.

That meant she had no chance to win the world title, since she could not participate in the qualifiers. In the years that followed, Zhu won a second world youth championship and a third national title in 1996, as well as a team win with her fellow countrymen at the Chess Olympics in 1998.

But the WWC issue still blighted her childhood dream.

"I felt I was at a dead end, with nothing before me. The only thing I could do was wait," she remembered.

In 2000, Zhu married Mohamed, five years after their first encounter. And she finally saw the revival of the qualifiers for the 2000 Championships.

However, both would prove disappointing. The bride and groom's families didn't approve of the marriage, and she lost in the first round of the qualifiers in Madrid.

The only comfort that year was helping China to a second team title at the Chess Olympics.

And as the time passed, the two were able to finally ease their parents' initial disapproval of their cultural and religious differences.

At the same time, she surprised all in the 2001 WWC in Moscow in December.

China wasn't expecting a win since its best player Xie Jun, who won the country's first world championship title in 1991, did not attend.

Zhu beat former champion M. Chiburdanidze taking on Russia's Alexandra Kosteniuk. She lost on the first move to win in the nail-biting four-game match.

Eighteen days after she started, the 25-year-old woman who was enchanted by the black and white pieces finally got her chance to play for.

Zhu didn't expect her autobiography with stories of winning the championship, but with the story of another sad, short separation from her husband.

Mohamed couldn't accompany her back to China but had to go back to Qatar to handle his own business.

"We had no marriage but just love," her husband said to Zhu before he left.

Zhu said they could meet either in Beijing or Qatar several times each year, but both of them must also put up with separation for the rest of the time.

She was at a loss to know why she loved him so deeply, but she believed their love was simple and pure.

"Their love story is the most charming part of the book," said Jing.

The book will be published in late May. But the publishing house doesn't expect it will be a very popular book because they know that chess is so far not a popular game among Chinese people.

"But I am sure readers can benefit from many things beyond chess," said Jing. "This is not a chess book but a book of a young woman who plays chess."

He said he has learned a lot from Zhu's parents and would also give a copy to his daughter to read.

In July, Zhu will graduate from Tsinghua University with a bachelor's degree in Chinese Language and Literature.

She plans to continue her studies to get a master's degree in International Relations.

Zhu said the publication of the autobiography helps summarize the first phase of her life and serves as a new, turning point of her future.

"Once I make a move on the chess board, I will never regret. So it is the same with my own life," Zhu said.



No regrets: The cover of Zhu Chen's newly published book entitled "Lay Piece Without Regrets — Waits and Dreams of A Mermaid."

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WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show
Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.
Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing
Time: 7:15 pm, nightly
Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

Acrobatics Troupe, include many national and world award-winning programmes.
Time: 7 pm, daily
Place: Wansheng Theatre, 95 Tianqiao Market
Tel: 6303-7449

STAGE

French love tragedy: An ancient Western fairy tale will be restaged on the Beijing stage.

Created in the 12th century, "Tristan & Yseult" occupies an important position in the history of French literature. It is known as one of the two greatest love tragedies in the West, along with "Romeo and Juliette" which was written much later.

Financed by renowned fashion designer Pierre Cardin, the story has been produced into a musical. The play also absorbs elements of Chinese acrobatics and Shaolin kungfu in its choreography.

Students' play: Beijing BISS International School students (grades 7 to 12) will present "Return to the Forbidden Planet!"

The show is a science fiction rock'n'roll musical comedy loosely based on Shakespeare's "The Tempest."

Students have been involved in every aspect of the production from concept to creation. All music is performed live amidst a cacophony of dance, song, video images and mock Shakespearean verse.

Historic opera: The Shaanxi Provincial Opera and Dance Theatre will stage its originally-created opera "Sima Qian" in the Chinese capital.

The opera tells the life story of ancient historian Sima Qian in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24). He suffered the painful fate of punishment by castration. But he didn't lose hope and instead strived to be one of the greatest historians in Chinese history.

The opera has won over 20 domestic awards and has been listed as one of the five most representative Chinese operatic works produced after the founding of New China in 1949.

Don Quixote from Cuba: Alicia Alonso, the star who dominated the world ballet scene from the 1930s to the 1960s, will lead her Ballet National de Cuba to perform in Beijing.

The Ballet National de Cuba is one of the most powerful ballet companies with many of the world's top dancers.

The Dance King: A surprising hit, the play had been staged 75 times in Istanbul, attracting people from Europe and America. The play tells the origin of people in Anatolia with dancing, a universal "language" understood by most people worldwide.

From book to stage: The best-selling cartoon series "Se Nulang (Acerbic Ladies)" created by Taiwan caricaturist Zhu Deyong will be moved to Beijing's drama stage.

The play focuses on various humorous stories around four young women sharing the same apartment. One is a workaholic, one is eager to get married but always fails, one is a naive girl, and the other likes being the fancy woman of different men.

'Madame Butterfly': Vocalists from the China Central Opera House will stage Puccini's "Madame Butterfly."

The heroine will be acted by Ma Mei who performed with the Three Tenors during their 2001 concert in the Forbidden City. The opera will be conducted by Gao Weichun.

Acrobatic show: The Tianqiao area of Beijing was the city's major outdoor performance area for acrobatic shows before the founding of New China in 1949.

Acrobatic shows are still staged every evening in a theatre located in the Tianqiao area.

The shows, put on by the Beijing

Peking Opera night: Ghaffar Pourazar, a British-Iranian who is now an expert in playing the Monkey King in Peking Opera, is to present an extraordinary evening at the Zhengyici Theatre in downtown Beijing on April 26.

Episodes featured are "White Snake," "Farewell My concubine" and an English version of "The Monkey King" — back from a successful tour of the United States.

CONCERTS
Pop concert: To send China's football team off to the 2002 World Cup in style, a concert will be held to wish the players the best of luck. The line-up will include popular singers from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea: Na Ying, Sun Nan, Han Hong, Zero Point Band, Yu Qian, Sun Yue, Elva Hsiao (Xiao Yaxuan), Chen Wai Lam (Chen Huijin), Jay Chou (Zhou Jielun), Wu Bai and Angela Jin Kim.

Hollywood music: Melodies from "Independence Day," "Jurassic Park," "Gone with the Wind," and many other Oscar Award winning films can be heard during a concert next week given by the symphony orchestra under the China Opera and Dance Theatre.

The music will be accompanied by scenes from the films shown on a super large screen.

EXHIBITIONS
Masterworks: Liang Yan is presenting a solo exhibition of ink and wash at the west hall of Wanfung Art Gallery. Liang displays his skill in figure painting, featuring ordinary farmers. His portraits, no matter young or old, men or women, are characteristic and impressive.

Another display of oil paintings — "Modern Art Space" — is being held at the east exhibition hall.

Sino-Japanese calligraphy: A joint calligraphy exhibition featuring works by Chinese and Japanese calligraphers will be unveiled at China Millennium Altar.

The show is part of a programme of events celebrating the 30th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The 20 Chinese participants include Qi Gong, Ouyang Zhongshi and Liu Bingshen.

Ukrainian art: An exhibition showcasing the art of the Ukraine will start at Yanhuang Art Museum on April 25.

Once a part of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine has always had its own unique culture and art heritage, even though it is not well known outside the country, which gained its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Italian designs: A total of 100 original, imaginative industrial works can be viewed at the China Millennium Monument.

The exhibits are the most representative works in Italy since 1945 and include electronic products, furniture, transportation utilities and toys. The exhibition has a down-to-earth charm with creative designs inspired by daily life.

Huang Zhou revered: The Yanhuang Art Museum is holding a commemorative exhibition in tribute to Huang Zhou (1925-97), a famous modern artist in China who was also the founder of the museum.

In commemoration of Huang, the exhibition is shown in the front hall at the entrance of the museum, where scores of Huang's original paintings are displayed in rotation. Huang is known for his vivid portrayal of donkeys.

Kung Fu Show: The Tianqiao area of Beijing was the city's major outdoor performance area for acrobatic shows before the founding of New China in 1949.

Acrobatic shows are still staged every evening in a theatre located in the Tianqiao area.

The shows, put on by the Beijing

CROSSWORD (No 6573)

ACROSS
1 Moo - gai pan
4 "Bonanza" brother
8 She, in Paris
12 Ancient
13 Casino locale
14 Midday
15 Sign before Virgo
16 Mighty trees
17 Ladder part
18 Baby food
20 Cowboy flick
21 Crawling insect
22 Take a snooze
23 Bleated
26 More noble
30 Have a cold
31 Dutch airline
32 El Dorado loot
33 Feared
36 Overpopulated
38 Shark part
39 Evergreen
40 Secretary of State Powell
43 Reggae's island
47 Drama

DOWN
1 Outdoor game
2 No-cholesterol spread
3 Scent
4 Close by
5 Handed out
6 "Diana" singer
7 Aug. and Feb.
8 Filled with delight
9 Boor
10 Sole
11 Bridge bldr.
19 Sultry West
20 Klutz
22 - de plume
23 Spoiled
24 Vanish into thin -
25 Dark brew

55 Feel grateful
26 Attorney's deg.
27 Lightning byproduct
28 Uh's cousins
29 Fish eggs
30 Novelist
31 Kesey
34 Off course
35 Clamor
36 Small hollow
37 Historic period
39 Well-known police officers
41 A woodwind
42 Androcles' friend
43 Agree
44 "Othello" plotter
45 Ship's personnel
46 Highest point
48 Resinous deposit

Solution to No 6572

FIEF BIN BAIT
ROAR OFT OGLE
ATTEND HEALED
NASTY DRESS
USSR AIDA
HIP EAGLE MOM
UM JOT CO
EPA EAVES LTD
MESH RUNE
ANIMA REGAL
PIGOUT MERINO
SPOT AMP DOTS
ESSE RUG SNIT

TODAY'S RADIO

- FM 97.4 MHz (all stereo)**
08:30 Music World
11:00 Pop 2001
13:00 World Classic Concert
15:00 Music Saloon
20:30 Beautiful Life
22:30 New Music Magazine
- FM 90.0 MHz (all stereo)**
08:00 Auto CD
09:30 Chinese songs by popular singers
11:50 Music
12:00 Happy 30 Minutes
17:00 Radio songs

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

Mark Twain wrote, "Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't." I saw this deal in a magazine, and I think the author, let's call him Joe, resorted to some fiction under the guise of fact. See what you think.

North-South raced into three no-trump. West led his fourth-highest heart, the trick being won with dummy's queen. Declarer cashed the diamond king, then played a diamond to his ace. When the queen didn't drop, South continued with a third round of the suit. In with his queen, East shifted to the spade queen, netting the defenders four tricks in that suit for one down.

It seems simple enough when you look at all 52 cards, but how did East know to lead the spade queen, rather than return the heart 10? If South had begun with the spade ace and king-

TODAY'S TELEVISION

- CCTV-1 Chann 2**
19:00 News; Weather
19:38 Focus Interview
- CCTV-2 Chann 8**
21:25 Economy 10 Minutes
- CCTV-3 Chann 15**
18:03 Studio Express
22:40 News
- CCTV-4 Chann 32**
13:30 Around China
17:50 Taiwan Space
- CCTV-6 Chann 18**
19:45 Chinese Movie
21:43 US movie
- CCTV-8 Chann 29**
19:00 Animal World
- 19:35 Studio Express
- CCTV-9**
14:00 Financial Report
15:30 Around China
17:00 Headline News
- BTV-1 Channel 6**
20:49 Record
21:45 Focus Today
- BTV-2 Channel 21**
17:04 World Watch
22:46 Concert Hall
- BTV-3 Channel 27**
18:55 Discovery Channel
19:50 Science and Technology
20:05 Gourmets Across the Country
23:35 Legal Times

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third of hearts, East's defense wouldn't have won any points.

What did West play? Joe discarded on the diamond. If South has the club ace, West has the spade shift, but if West has the club ace and South the spade queen, West would make a heart return.

Joe wanted to make the point that if South had discarded on the second round of the suit, the contract would have been secured. Even if West had the diamond, he would have no killing spade king is safe take at least 10 four diamonds and the real world, I think South would survive his misplay. We are trained on partner's suit, especially in no-trump.

North
♠ 8 4 3
♥ Q 5
♦ K 10 7 2
♣ K Q 10 4

West
♠ A 10 6 2
♥ K J 9 7 3
♦ 4
♣ 7 6 5

East
♠ Q J 9 5
♥ 10 6 4
♦ Q 8 6
♣ 9 8 3

South
♠ K 7
♥ A 8 2
♦ A J 5 3
♣ A J 2

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: East-West

South 1 NT West 3 NT North East All pass

Opening lead: ♥ 7

Shen Time: 19:30 (Every Night)
Venue: Xinrong Theatre
16 Baizhifang Road, Xuanwu District, Beijing
Inquiry: 83540774 83540775

KUNG FU SHOW
HIDDEN DRAGON CIRCUS TRUEN
Production: Beijing Detian Shunyi Culture Development Co., Ltd.