

Keep on dreaming the dream

Successful women entrepreneurs tell of their struggle in their climb to the top

"The First Outstanding Women Entrepreneur Achievements Show," which was held last week at the Beijing International Convention Centre, offered a glimpse of what leading Chinese women business executives are contributing to the country's economic development. After interviews with several of them, China Daily reporters Lin Jinghua, Chen Jie, Wang Shanshan and Yu Nan wrote the following reports to share their personal experiences with the readers.



JIANG DONG/China Daily

YUYUEXIU's motto is: "Never stop studying, never stop pursuing."

With this ambitious belief, Yu, 50, has developed over the last 10 years from a radio broadcaster in a small village to the general manager of Wuxi Xinyi Industrial Co Ltd, with an asset of 10 million yuan (US\$1.2 million).

Born in a farmer's family in Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu Province, Yu suffered much from the "cultural revolution" (1966-76) like many others of her age. She had to stop going to school and working in the fields.

Unwilling to accept her fate, Yu continued to study by herself. After the "cultural revolution," she was admitted to a college to learn business administration.

However, upon graduation, she worked as an anchor woman in a radio station in Nanzhan Village in the outskirts of Wuxi.

In early 1990, the local government planned to develop the tertiary industry. Yu was asked to take over a small collective hardware company, which was near bankruptcy.

"The officials settled on me partly because they thought I was open-minded and had good public relations," Yu said. "Yet it was really a big challenge for me, since I had no experience in business. What's more, at that time, there were very few women managers in the city.

"However, my ambition finally overtook my worries.

"I asked myself, 'why not have a go?'"

When Yu took office, she realized she had to start from scratch, with the lack of both funds and talent.

After making careful market investigations, she found that the hardware factory was making simply didn't sell, while ceramics and furniture did.

"So I took a risk to arrange a loan from the bank and travelled around the nation to obtain the latest market information," she said.

Soon, Yu's company became the only commercial agent in

Wuxi for the Foshan Ceramics Group of South China's Guangdong Province and took the lead in opening furniture exhibitions.

A year later, the company began to see the benefits.

Yet Yu didn't stop there. She and her colleagues worked to develop the company into a more comprehensive trade group.

After 10 years, Wuxi Xinyi is now a multi-trade company engaged in ceramics, furniture, interior design and decoration, raw decoration materials and advertisements design and programming.

To be able to keep talented people, she established a training centre for her employees that provides courses ranging from professional ethics, basic knowledge of the law, public relations, marketing and sales.

"Trust is the motto in business," she said. "In my view, it is more important and efficient to trust the employees than control them.

"I like making friends, be it with my employees or clients. This brings me as well as the company success after success.

Some people say that men's guts and pioneering spirit might be stronger than women's, but Yu said her success has proved this is not always true.

When asked about any regrets that she might have, Yu admitted, "I owe my family much for the last 10 years.

"When I took over the company, my son had just entered middle-school and studied diligently day and night. We had little time to communicate with each other."

Three years ago, her son was admitted to a college in Urumqi, capital of Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which is very far from Wuxi.

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in Ningbo, a coastal city in East China's Zhejiang Province.

According to Xia, more than half of Ningbo-based clothing companies are currently owned or run by women.

The largest of these dress companies, Peiluocheng, which has an asset of more than 100 million yuan (US\$12 million), was established and is run by an elderly lady now in her 70s.

"In Ningbo the ability to make clothes was considered the most important quality of a wife, even more important than beauty," Xia said.

When these women had a chance to start their own enterprises after China started to reform and open to the outside world in the late 1970s, they naturally chose the dress business, Xia said.

But Xia didn't go into the business out of her own will. A former government official of the Xikou Town of Ningbo, she was appointed as general manager of the local collective-owned, Fincadon Dress Company in the early 1980s by the township government.

She bought the company in 1994 during the local economic restructuring.

"Every woman entrepreneur grew up in tears," said Xia.

Her family, including her husband, was strongly against her pursuing a business career when she accepted the appointment.

"I will never marry such a wife as the one you have," Xia quoted the words from one of her husbands' friends. She preferred to keep her husband's name anonymous.

"In their minds, a woman should stay at home," Xia added.

To keep her own folks satisfied, Xia did all the housework and helped her husband in the fields after a day's work at the company.

When Xia was away from her 14-year-old daughter, Xia Chazhen, had to walk 4 kilometres everyday from school to do all the housework.

"My only child once had to wash fish in the freezing river water," Xia recalled, sobbing. "She was 12 years old then and her small hands couldn't even hold the big scissors to cut the fish."

As the social opinion changes with so many women's success stories in Ningbo alone, Xia's husband now fully supports her pursuits. Xia's daughter today has also become an entrepreneur. She started her own dress company in the late 1990s.

Xia believes a woman entrepreneur has a number of qualities that a man may lack.

"Women pay more attention to details such as the product quality, the special demands of their customers and the emotional needs of their employees," Xia said. "These are essential if you want to be successful in business.

"In an enterprise, the employees follow what their boss focuses on, and the details are actually of vital importance, especially to a company that is just starting."

Meanwhile talented people in a woman entrepreneur's company "because of the better intentions there." Xia said. "The loss of fundamental principles is often the reason leading to private enterprises' collapse."



courtesy of Xu Dizhe

XU DIZHE, the biggest entrepreneur in Cixi City of East China's Zhejiang Province.

Xu's enterprise, Ciji Group, which was founded in 1992, is now worth around 2 billion yuan (US\$24.1 million), consists of a factory, three factories producing motorcycle accessories, and a company.

Her company has also invested in an education base. The idea pre-school facilities will provide high school education.

As the chairman of the board, Xu said such a big business ought to be satisfied. But Xu still feels a little regret for dropping out of school too early.

The fourth generation of the family, Xu had to wear her hair down from her sisters. "I felt it was unfair and I decided to make my own choice," she recalled.

A simple reason, but Xu left school at the age of 14 and began to do needlework at home.

"I wished someone could have stopped me when I made that stupid decision," Xu said. "But in the old ideas of our small town, whether girls studied or not didn't matter much."

Fortunately Xu's needlework at home was successful. She earned 2,000 yuan (US\$241) for herself after two years and began to run a small business of selling clothes.

As the tiny amount of money "snowballed," Xu extended her business into plastic materials, car lamps and motorcycle accessory production step by step.

She opened her own motorcycle factory in 1995 after careful investigation of the market. Only after three years, she annexed Ningbo motorcycle factory — the largest State motorcycle factory in Zhejiang Province with 12 million yuan (US\$1.45 million), which marked a peak in her career.

"I was just lucky to catch each chance that came my way," Xu said.

Xu admitted that as a business woman, she burdens and

pressure are heavier than a man would bear because women have to spend more energy on family. And if a woman fails in business, people put all the reasons down to gender.

"If a woman who wants to succeed always reminds herself she is a woman, she will never achieve her goals," Xu said. "I don't mean that she has to forget her gender but she ought to regard herself at least equal to a man in most aspects."

She said that men appear to be more successful in business only because there are more men in this field.

In 2000, Xu turned her investment to the educational base, a complex which will complete by the end of 2003.

She believes that education will be a booming and promising industry in the future and China's development needs more local talent.

"Maybe this is also compensation for my lack of education," she said.



JIANG DONG/China Daily

ZHOU XIAOGUANG has had to fight to be able to stand on her own feet and for her success in business.

"Women must be independent and self-confident," said Zhou, president of Zhejiang Xinguang Jewellery Co.

"A woman's status is not decided by money," Zhou said. "In other words, it is not true that a woman will be happy after she becomes rich. She has to keep on improving herself.

"I don't think women are inferior to men when it comes to business. Sometimes they are more responsible and more devoted." Born into a farming family in Dongyang County, a mountainous area in Southeast China's Zhejiang Province in 1962, Zhou has a natural gift for dealing with jewellery and ornaments.

In 1978 she began to sell needles and other small necessities for embroidery. She had been travelling across the country for eight years in order to find trade.

In 1986, Zhou and her husband Yu Yunxin bought a stand at the Market for Small Commodities in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, and began their ornament business.

With an investment of 6 million yuan (US\$725,000), Zhou set up her jewellery factory in 1995. Six years later, Xinguang became one of the most successful private-owned enterprises in the country with a fixed asset of 160 million yuan (US\$19.3 million). Its products have reached

over 70 countries and regions. Being a woman investor, Zhou could not forget how she had fought in the early years for the factory.

"It's only because I'm a woman," Zhou recalled, saying that this was the biggest problem she had ever encountered. Conflict sometimes occurred in front of her factory when local gangsters provoked trouble.

"They thought that because I'm a woman and a person from out of town, I should pay them a visit and obey what they told me to do," she said.

Thanks to the local authorities, Zhou got rid of the disturbance.

"I should also thank my family, particularly my husband," she said. Her husband is now the general manager of the company. "We share the same interests and have the same goal," she said. "We treat each other with patience, trust and respect, particularly at work."

Although she did not have much education in her early years, Zhou has realized that only when you keep learning do you develop further.

She has attended various courses on management. She appreciates talented professionals. "Whoever is capable will be promoted, no matter whether they are a woman or a man," Zhou said.

There are about 20 women managers in her factory, and women workers total 1,300, or two-thirds of the total work force. Zhou encourages her employees to study further after work. She also has a team of supervisors who give her both advice on management and production.

"I'm trying to change the family-style enterprise into one with modern management," Zhou said, adding that her husband is now studying an MBA course at Liaofeng College in Ningbo.

relatives or neighbours, who had heard of her skills and who asked her to make them clothes.

"At that time, I did not consider it a business and felt it embarrassing to ask for payment, so I just accepted some food or other daily necessities that they gave me out of gratitude," Deng recalled.

As a woman with many traditional merits, she worked hard and never complained.

In 1982, after her husband was demobilized and returned home, Deng tried to sell children's clothes. It turned out to be a success. Then Deng made more types of clothing which sold well at small country fairs.

But Deng still remembers the first time she travelled more than 200 kilometres to department stores in Beijing and Tianjin with sample clothes that she had made.

"Who would buy shabby home-made clothes from the countryside?" She was told by the managers and salespersons, who didn't even look at her clothes.

"I was so frustrated and exhausted. Sitting at the gate of the last store, I told my husband that I wouldn't face the embarrassment again," she said.

However, Zhai encouraged her. Deng finally entered the store and begged the manager, "Please just have a look before you say no."

When he finally said "yes," she was so excited that she missed her steps and fell down the stairs with four big bags of her sample clothes. She hurried to tell her husband the good news.

"I should thank my husband for his help and good service after I walked out on the family and turned into a business woman from being a full-time housewife," she said.

In 1992, she founded her company and produced hand-made traditional Chinese clothes.

Types of clothes were not as fashionable as today in the country.

The market rejected her products.

"But I did not want to give up and I believed the market would eventually take them," she said.

As she expected, traditional Chinese clothes with fine workmanship, high-quality fabric and exquisite designs finally arrived in the thriving modern cities and came into fashion at the turn of the century.

In 1998, Deng registered her brand "Zhonggu" and began to specialize in traditional Chinese clothes.

Today, as the general manager of the company, Deng still loves to tailor clothes.

"I would like to measure the customer myself, though the busy business has pulled me a little far away from tailoring," she said.

Now she is passing her skills to her eldest daughter while training her son and younger daughter to open up the new market.

"They've chosen their own professions and all do a good job," she said.

JIANG DONG/China Daily



Courtesy of Deng Jiurong

DENG JIURONG, born into a family of tailors in a village in Tangshan, North China's Hebei Province, was still a housewife when small businesses began to mushroom in the early 1980s.

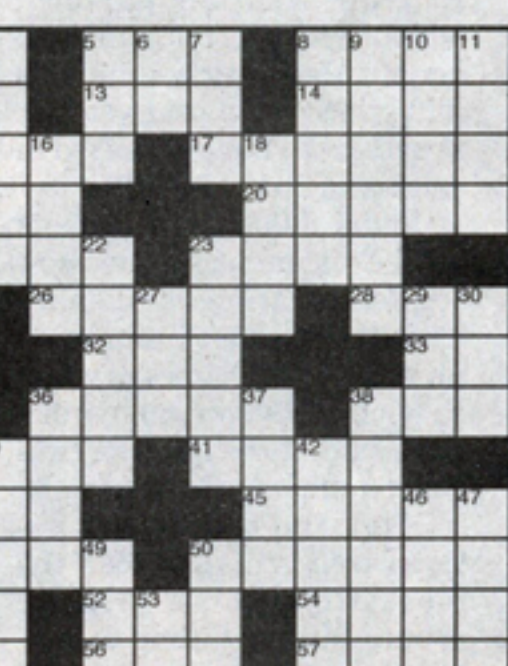
As the wife of the eldest son of a rural family, Deng, 53, had to bear the heavy burden of keeping a big family all by herself, after her husband's parents died and while her husband, Zhai Xiu, was serving in the army.

Besides making all the clothes for the family folks including her three children, her brothers-and sisters-in-law, Deng also made dresses for other

CROSSWORD (No 6549)

- ACROSS**
- 1 O'Hara estate
 - 5 "Charlotte's —"
 - 8 Lean against
 - 12 Stove part
 - 13 Unhealthy
 - 14 Ticket price
 - 15 Shirt feature
 - 17 Muslim headress
 - 19 Hog's dinner
 - 20 Loses heat
 - 21 Harper of "Tender Mercies"
 - 23 In addition
 - 24 Blvd.
 - 26 Heart outlet
 - 28 Head
 - 31 Fifty-one, for Flavius
 - 32 Packers' org.
 - 33 Neighbour of ID
 - 34 Chemist's work place
 - 36 "Golden touch" king
 - 38 Cincinnati player
 - 39 Ambler or Blore
 - 41 — pop
 - 43 Harangue
 - 45 Send else

- DOWN**
- 1 Stoppers
 - 2 State positively
 - 3 Say from memory
 - 4 Foot's neighbour
 - 5 Ingenuity
 - 6 Loop train
 - 7 Diner sandwich
 - 8 Bushy hairdos
 - 9 Chimp's kin
 - 10 Caspian Sea tributary
 - 11 Some bills
 - 16 Actress
 - 18 Lancashire Bruins sch.
 - 48 Least polluted
 - 50 Common bug
 - 51 Outback birds
 - 52 Charlotte of "Bananas"
 - 54 McEntire of country music
 - 55 Rendezvous
 - 56 Novelist Levin
 - 57 Holland export



Solution to No 6548

HAT WHOA DREW
 ILE RANI EIRE
 PEACEFUL EDIE
 EATS EMEND
 CRANKS BYE
 AUNT LARDER
 MIT CEASE DUD
 NEARBY INFO
 FEB CARAFE
 LADLE HERO
 ASEATIDINESS
 SIAM OLES PAT
 HARE MODE AMY

- 22 Part of SST
- 23 Ayn's shrugger
- 24 Everybody
- 25 Roman road
- 27 Country addr.
- 29 Run up a tab
- 30 Not good
- 35 Lebanese port
- 36 Wire thicknesses
- 37 Feeling miffed
- 38 Rode the rapids
- 40 Actress Wither-spoon
- 42 Steel plow inventor
- 43 Made haste
- 44 Cougar
- 46 Napoleon's island
- 47 Paper measure
- 49 Numerical prefix
- 50 — sport (co-operate)
- 53 Element 18 sym.

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

The story of Cesare Pavese, an Italian novelist, poet and translator, is sad. He wrote in his diary on March 23, 1938, "No one ever lacks a good reason for suicide." And 12 years later, shortly after being awarded the Strega Prize for literature, he did take his own life.

Many players commit less-serious suicide at the bridge table, killing contracts that should have been kept alive. Here, you reach love diamonds. West leads the club two Defending strongly, East wins with the queen, cashes the club ace, then shifts to a low heart. How would you continue so that partner won't want to hrottle you after the deal?

The auction was effective. North's raise to three diamonds invited game, showing support with about 11 high-card points. South tried three hearts to indicate a stopper there; he was hoping North could convert to three no-trump with something in clubs. However, with nothing in that suit, North went for the minor-suit game.

This is the key question: Suppose the heart finesse wins — what then? The answer, of course, is that you draw trumps and take a spade finesse. If it wins, you are home; but if it loses, you are down. Yet if the spade finesse is winning, you do not need the heart

finesse, which is a potentially suicidal risk.

Win trick three with the heart ace, draw trumps ending in hand, and play a spade to dummy's jack. When it wins, return to hand with a trump, repeat the spade finesse, discard the heart queen on the spade ace, and claim.

North

♠ A Q J 2
 ♥ 8 7 3
 ♦ A 7 3 2
 ♣ 10 5

West

♠ K 9 7 5
 ♥ K 10 4
 ♦ 8 4
 ♣ K 7 6 2

East

♠ 10 8 3
 ♥ J 9 6 5 2
 ♦ —
 ♣ A Q 9 8 4

South

♠ 6 4
 ♥ A Q
 ♦ K Q J 10 9 6 5
 ♣ J 3

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: East-West

South **West** **North** **East**

1 ♦ Pass 1 ♠ Pass
 2 ♣ Pass 3 ♦ Pass
 3 ♥ Pass 5 ♣ All pass

Opening lead: ♣ 2

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show
 Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specialises 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 Dongshanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing
 Time: 7:15 pm, nightly
 Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

STAGE
Peking Opera: The veteran artists of the National Peking Opera Troupe, including Yuan Shihai, Yu Kuizhi, Li Shengsu, Li Changchun, Xi Zhonglu and Yang Chi, will perform some classic repertoires at Chang'an Grand Theatre.
 The programmes and dates are: March 30 "Changbanpo"; March 31 "Lianhuanbao" (starring 87-year-old Yuan Shihai) will be a feast for Peking Opera fans; April 1 "Shi Jieting (Loss of the Strategic Pass Jieting)," "Kongcheng Ji (Ghost Town)," "Zhan Ma Su (Execution of General Ma Su)," and "Zhan (Fighting) Ma Chao."
 Time: 7:30 pm, March 30-April 1
 Place: Chang'an Grand Theatre
 Tel: 6510-1309

Easter requiem: Mozart's famous "Requiem" will be played during a concert to celebrate Easter. The concert will be given by the International Holiday Chorus under

the baton of the UK's Nick Smith.
 Time: 7:30 pm, March 30
 Place: Forbidden City Concert Hall
 Tel: 6559-8308, 6559-8285

CONCERT
Something old: Formed by four young Chinese musicians, the Hong Kong Performing Quartet will give a concert, featuring Haydn's "String Quartet in C minor," and Mendelssohn's "String Quartet in D major." The instruments of the players are all precious antiques, such as a Giovanni Grancino violin produced in 1699 and a Paolo Antonio Testore cello made in 1719.
 Time: 7:30 pm, March 26
 Place: Forbidden City Concert Hall
 Tel: 6559-8308, 6559-8285

EXHIBITION
Passion for nature: The Wanlung Art Gallery is displaying a show of flower and bird paintings at its western hall. Artists including Zou Chuan'an, Feng Linzhang, Mi Chunmao, Song Yuhui, Zhou Zhongyao and Liu Jibiao will show their works featuring animals. They express their passion for nature and life through their brushes.
 Time: 9 am-5 pm until April 17
 Place: 136, Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District
 Tel: 6523-3320