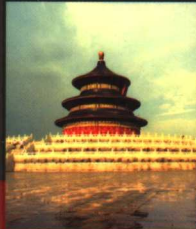


Compiled by He Qiuju

Enjoying Every Day in China

INTERVIEWS WITH WIVES OF
AMBASSADORS TO CHINA



CHINA
INTERCONTINENTAL
PRESS

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Preface

I have felt thrilled, and I always want to speak from my deep heart. In the past four years, because of work, I have traveled frequently among embassies in Beijing and interviewed several tens of wives of ambassadors. Advancing from being an acquaintance to becoming bosom friends with each other, I have developed profound feelings with these outstanding women. I've learned greatly from them. What moves me most is that in some particular aspects they know China even better than I do. I am moved by their deep love towards career and family; by their constant pursuits in life and optimistic sentiment; by their openness, kindness, and tolerance as they conduct themselves in society; by their dedicated support to their husbands for the countries' diplomatic cause.

This group of women and their stories as women diplomats have enlightened me. I have sorted out these articles, edited them, and finally arranged them together into this book. I hope to bring these rarely known stories to the public, so that others may enjoy reading them. And I, at the same time, will contribute my rudimentary effort for cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries.

This work is a dialogue between different countries, different terrains, different colors, and different languages, all breathing heart to heart. These stories meld together real feelings from family life, amazement towards sceneries of another country, and tastes of various local cultures. Additionally, these stories clarify feelings towards ancient Chinese civilization, that the heroines in this book have long yearned for. Through these descriptions, a

unique Chinese version of “Arabian Nights” unfolds in front of you. The dignified and profound historical cultural accounts, the quiet and peaceful urbanism, the simple and kind civilians and the tranquility in blending the life of the ordinary, unfold in the discussions I had with the ambassadors. Through these stories, my readers will feel a sense of the sincerity, friendship, understanding and harmony, which characterize these relationships.

The colorful, both ancient and modern China, brings enjoyment to these wives. They taste the charm of Chinese culture, feel its development and admire the elegant demeanor of Chinese women. They convey information of Chinese culture to the world by their views and their words.

“Amicability produces happiness, civilization brings harmony.” Human life needs friendship; development in the world needs friendship. I hope this little book will serve as a colorful cozy boat loaded with friendship and is sailing to the unearthly other shore.

Cheers to the progress of the world’s people!

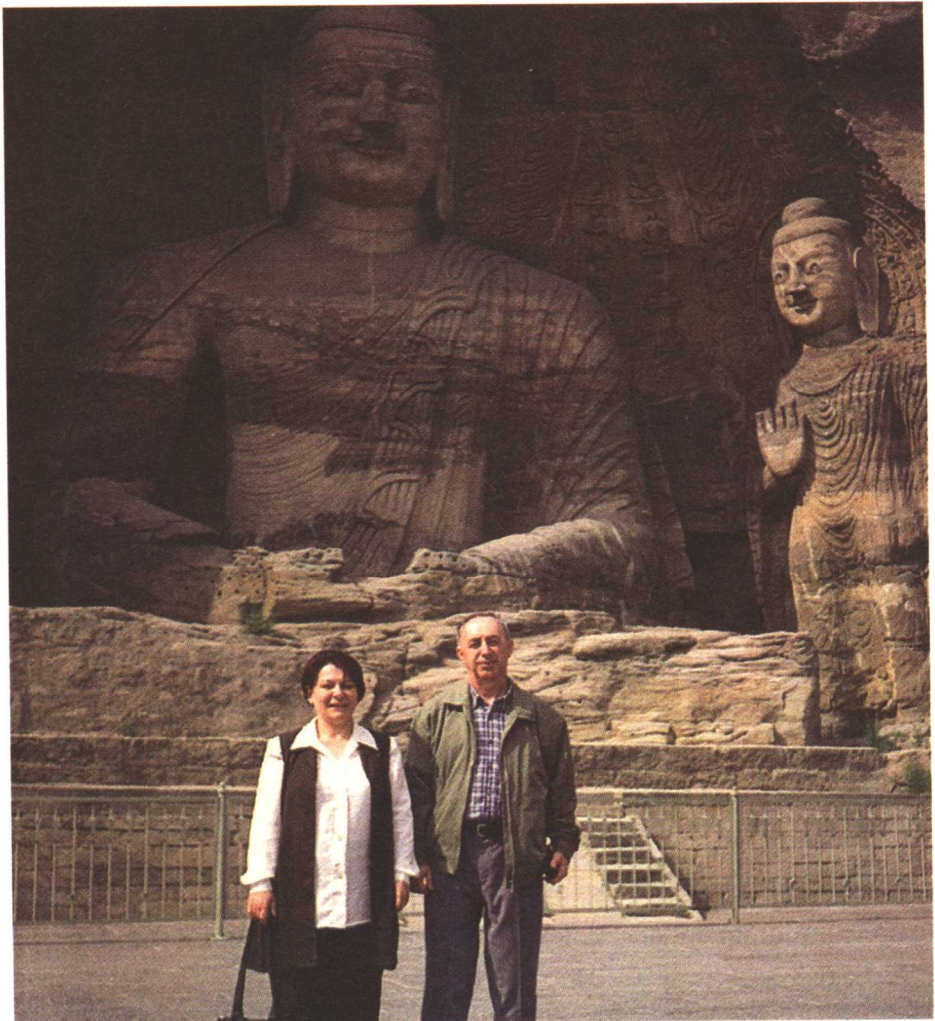
Cheers to eternal peace and universal friendship!

The Compiler
April 2006

China - an Amazing Country

EUGENIA GHAZARYAN

Wife of the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to China



Eugenia Ghazaryan and her husband.

Two years have passed since we moved to China, and it seems we have had enough time to turn only one page of the country's beautiful and long history. I knew little about the story of China – one of the world's earliest civilizations, with a recorded history of 5,000 years – before moving to the country. But only now do I understand how little people learn from books, and how much they can, and should, learn by visiting the amazing country.

My first impression of China is the Chinese people with concentration of historical knowledge, spiritual power and wisdom. They are trying to present all colors of their country to you as much as to learn from you about the history, traditions and customs of your country. Honesty, courage and patriotism are the best qualities of the Chinese people. The more I learn about China and the Chinese people, the more similarities I find between both countries and histories. Historically considered the “cradle of civilization,” the Armenian upland is one of the oldest sites of the human race. *The Book of Genesis*, in the *Bible*, states that Noah's Ark landed on the summit of Mt. Ararat, in the very center of what would later be known as Armenia. Also historically, Greater Armenia was on the silk and spice trade routes that connected the East and the West. Many historians believe that this is where Armenia and China began their long-term friendship. In Armenia, as in China, the dynasties governed agrarian people for many centuries. Throughout years of foreign domination and natural disasters, the enduring Armenians developed into a hardy and tolerant people, much like the Chinese. As a result, a good base was created for mutual understanding between the two nations.

From historical pages to the current level, our bilateral ties passed

decades of establishment and development. I would like to thank the Chinese government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for making every effort to advance relations with Armenia. To better represent the cultures and historical heritages of the people of both countries, we are organizing an annual cultural performance. The Armenian State Folk and Dance Ensemble performed last year in several of China's communities – including the home of the Peking Man and the capital of five dynasties, Beijing. It is interesting that Yerevan, capital of Armenia, is the same age and on the same latitude.

During my stay in China, I have had opportunities to travel the country and enjoy the magnificent and fascinating beauty of unfeigned colors of China's nature. China is situated between the Siberian steppes in the north and the tropical jungles in the south, a desert in the west and coastline in the east. The country could be characterized as the "four-season country" that wins over tourists' hearts.

China is like a book. A new page is being written and read each day. The book waits to be read over and over again.

Women Will Hold up More of the Sky

DILSHAD RAHMAN

Wife of the Ambassador of Bangladesh to China



Dilshad Rahman and her husband.

Bangladesh national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam once said that “whatever in the world is created by human being – half of them is by men and half by women.” There is also a famous saying by Chinese leader Mao Zedong that “women hold up half the sky.” But I am sure the day is coming soon when women of the world will hold up more of the sky.

In my eyes, “women” are the most unique, interesting, amazing, sensitive, and the most beautiful creation of God in this world. It is quite fascinating to find that in the animal kingdom, male animals are more gorgeous than female, whereas in the kingdom dominated by human beings, women are the prettier ones. Whenever unfolding the historic panorama, we can see that women have played very important roles using their charm and beauty, knowledge and talent. Famous poets and writers of the world have tried to describe these brilliant “women” in all kinds of original ways. But even the most eloquent ones failed to give an utmost description.

Women have influenced the world in the past, and are doing so in the present, and they will continue to rise in the future in a more meaningful way. There is no doubt that women can also be powerful – either to construct or to destroy.

Through my experiences in Bangladesh and China, I found that women of these two nations share much in common.

During the last two years of my stay in China, we have traveled to many beautiful cities in the country. So we have had much more chances of meeting and getting close to Chinese women. In my eyes, they are beautiful, charming, friendly, active, talented and hard-working. Because

of my husband's job, I have a chance to make acquaintance of many Chinese people of various social statuses. I cherished any opportunity to talk to them, and I found them optimistic and full of energy. No wonder China today is growing so fast in the world.

A hundred years ago, the well-known scholar and reformist Liang Qichao had pointed out that "liberation of Chinese women is liberation of the Chinese society." This is also true for every other society, as there is growing awareness about the potentials of women as a positive force for change in society. We are witnessing amazing social progress as a whole in every corner of the world, especially in China. Women's empowerment and advancement have brought about advancement as a whole in China. China has all along attached great importance to the role of women. It has ensured that women enjoy equal rights with men in politics, in economy, in culture, in society and in family life. China has introduced and improved the framework of laws and regulations to promote women's development and protect their legal rights and interests. Today, women in China are participating more and more in different sectors.

Chinese women are eager to know the other parts of the world. For many times, the "Sari," our national dress for women, attracted much attention and admiration from them. During the last two years, I had so many pictures taken with them, the number of which even excelled that of all my other photos taken in the past.

"Yi Ge, Yi Ge" is the first Chinese word I have learnt in China. I heard these words when they vied with each other as to who would stand next to me for a photograph. Then they would say "Yi Ge, Yi Ge," i.e. "one by one" for a better solution. Sometimes, they were critical with the facial expressions on the pictures. They would take more pictures for a proper

smile. I appreciate their curiosity to experience new cultures and styles. I told them the story of “Sari,” which represents river (we have more than 250 rivers in Bangladesh). The main part, the colorful borders and the end parts of Sari represent the river, the river banks and delta, respectively.

Women in Bangladesh have also made major contributions to the society. Historically, Bangladesh is a country that has experienced much hardship – natural disasters like cyclones and floods hit the country almost every year. In spite of all these disadvantages, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress as one of the developing countries in the world. I can say very proudly that with women’s contribution in the economic, political and social sectors, our development has been accelerated.

I would like to share with you the experience of women in my country, who are today, an active force in the economic development of the country. In Bangladesh we have invested heavily in women’s education and economic empowerment. Gender gap in education and health sectors has been narrowed. Tuition for girls up to the level of bachelor’s degree in governmental institutions has been made free. Women are increasingly being integrated into economic mainstream in Bangladesh. Innovative and home-grown ideas in informal education and self-employment through micro-credit schemes have immensely facilitated their empowerment. Bangladesh is well known for its experience in empowering rural women through “micro-credit” and education. The success of the “Grameen Bank,” nearly 90 percent of whose clientele is constituted of women, is being replicated in many other developing countries. Thanks to the Grameen Bank, it is now quite common to see cell phone as a good source of income for these village women. At the same time these women are exposed to information technology.

Today, women in Bangladesh constitute relatively a larger group of the work force than a decade ago. In some sectors they even surpass men, for instance, women make up nearly 90 percent of the labor force in the main export trade – garment manufacturing sector. There are totally more than two million female workers in the industry.

The empowerment of women is gradually being shifted from socio-economic to political arena. Today women are holding top political offices. The government of Bangladesh has been headed by female prime ministers for 15 years. Women are now in the administrative and diplomatic services and they are venturing into non-traditional professions such as the armed forces and police. Bangladeshi women have also participated in UN peacekeeping operations. These are, I believe, a true reflection of the changes that have come about in Bangladesh through the conscious policy and efforts to mainstream women in the national development. There have also been some changes for the better in our social indicators – the birth rate has fallen with consequent fall in the children and maternal mortality rates, and we have almost reached gender parity in literacy.

I think women can make a real difference to the society. Women, in their natural roles as caring and sharing characters are known to play a more responsible role, once they are economically empowered. Our experience from “micro-credit” has shown that women are better managers of money. They invest their savings well, they make good use of their earnings, and overall, they make a much greater difference in the lives of their families, which leaves a very positive impact on their children, their families and the society as a whole. There is a proverb that says “when you educate a girl you educate the whole family, but when you educate a boy you educate one child only.”

Women in Bangladesh began to have more marital freedom. Take my family as an example. I was married in 1972, a traditional arranged marriage. Before the arranged meeting by our parents, I had not seen my husband and had no idea about the meeting. My parents told me only after when my would-be husband had said “yes” to the marriage.

But things were quite different when my daughter got married. Hers is a “love marriage.” She settled down in the USA after graduation and was married to a foreigner completely out of her own choice. It was her who introduced our son-in-law to us. We all thought the boy was suitable, so my husband and I arranged a wedding ceremony for them in Singapore, as we were posted in Singapore at that time. The ceremony was a happy mixture of Bangladeshi tradition and a modern wedding.

Today in case of arranged marriages, parents allow their children to meet each other so that they know each other better before marriage. Parents are now open-minded and understanding and welcome a degree of free choice. Thus there has been a sea change in these two decades or more.

Women have made great strides, but there is still a long way to go. More efforts are needed to carry on the struggle to break the age-old shackles of tradition and social obstacles; to reshape the mind-set of societies to accept women as equal; to establish women’s rightful position in society, and to recognize women’s potential and true contributions for the society and mankind as a whole. Economic empowerment and education would be the key instruments towards achieving that goal. As a woman, I hope that the campaign will continue to gain greater momentum.

I have a strong feeling that a forceful wave of women power is building up all over the world. I hope that it will make the world a better place to live in with harmony, irrespective of different race, color and religion of the people.