

One of STEM's 'Inspiring Women'

At age 7, Yi Ren was often separated from her parents during China's Cultural Revolution. She lived alone at home most of the week while her parents were away in the countryside. The only assistance she received was from friendly neighbors. As a result, at a very young age, she learned to rely on herself.

As she grew professionally, so did her work ethic. Now *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine has chosen her as one of its "100 Inspiring Women in STEM," as an example for younger women pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

"It is so incredibly surprising and humbling," said the biomedical sciences professor, nominated by Department Chair Richard Nowakowski. "It is an absolute honor to be given the opportunity to inspire the young women of today to pursue their goals in STEM fields."

Ren, an immunologist, was the daughter of a surgeon and a pediatrician. At their urging, she pursued a medical degree but graduated with a desire to conduct basic research. She came to the U.S. by way of London, where she obtained her Ph.D.

"Her childhood experience required tremendous strength of will and independence," said Nowakowski. "This same will and independence have strengthened her research and her teaching."

Ren's principal role model, she said, has been her mother.

"Ever since I was little, she would always encourage me to focus on my studies — despite the fact that the Cultural Revolution was still going on and most people had stopped going to school," she said. "She dedicated her life to her work as a physician and biologist even during the toughest and poorest times."

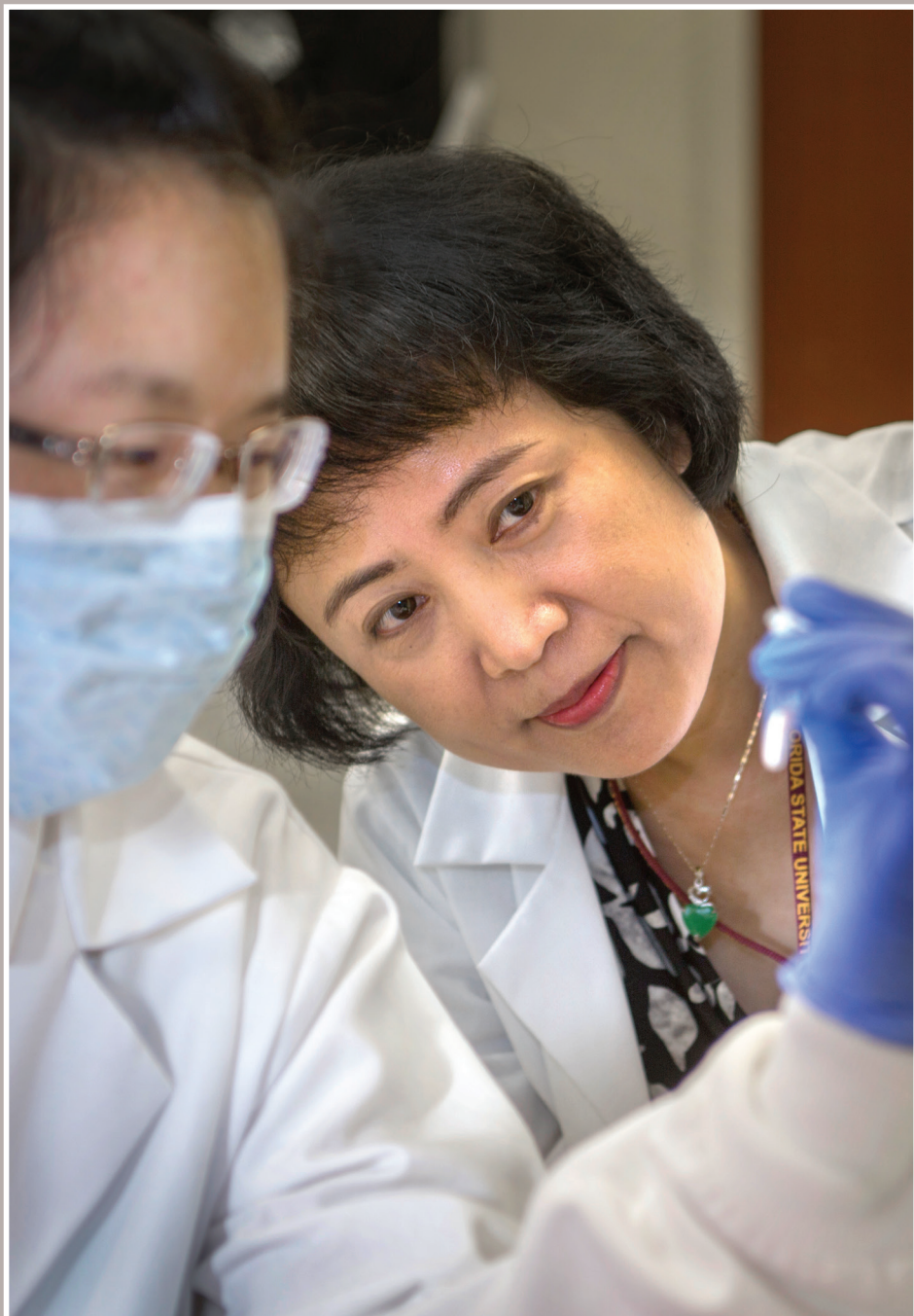
Ren's firm belief that women should not be discouraged by career obstacles comes from personal experience.

"I was first in line for the M.Phil. position with a female professor at my medical school in China," said Ren. "But she was unwilling to accept a female student. I told her I planned to take the exam again the next year and get into an even better program. Ultimately, I was accepted into one of China's most prestigious institutions of medicine in Beijing. In retrospect, her rejection wasn't an obstacle but

more of a blessing, as it made me realize the importance of determination."

Being chosen by *INSIGHT* from an international field of nominees has only increased her determination.

"To be selected reassures me that my work has made an impact on scientists but, more importantly, on female scientists," said Ren. "It motivates me to work even harder."



COLIN HACKLEY

Yi Ren