

Researcher named L'Oreal Laureate

BECAUSE SHE'S WORTH IT: Jacqueline Whang-Peng was recognized for her lifetime achievement in cancer research and her contributions to Taiwan in medicine

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Director of the National Health Research Institutes' Division of Cancer Research Jacqueline Whang-Peng (彭汪嘉康) was yesterday named as the first laureate of the L'Oreal Taiwan Outstanding Woman Scientist Award in Taipei for her lifetime achievement in cancer research and her contribution to Taiwan in the field of medicine.

Whang-Peng will represent Taiwan in March when she attends the L'oreal-UNESCO For Women in Science Award ceremony in Paris, France.

The L'oreal-UNESCO Award is widely considered the "Women's Nobel Prize" in the science field and was established in 1998 to laud the achievements of women scientists, "who are under-represented for their achievements," said the founder of the award, 1971 Nobel Prize Laureate Christina De Duve upon its establishment.

This year, the L'Oreal Taiwan Outstanding Woman Scientist Award, its Taiwanese-spinoff, was founded collaboratively by the Wu Chien-shiung Education Foundation and L'Oreal Taiwan, "since Taiwan is not a UN member, but the country contains many outstanding female scientists worthy of recognition," L'Oreal Taiwan's CEO Alvin Hew (丘泰謙) said.

The Wu Chien-shiung Education Foundation was founded by four Nobel Prize Laureates, Yang Chen-ning (楊振寧), Lee Tsung-dao (李政道), Ting Chao-chung (丁肇中) and Lee Yuan-tseh (李遠哲), in memory of one of Taiwan's greatest female physicists, Wu Chien-Shiung (吳健雄), in 1995.

Upon graduating from National Taiwan University (NTU) Medical School in 1956, Whang-Peng became the first female surgical intern in Taiwan, an achievement that contributed to her receiving a National Outstanding Female Youth Award in 1968, said Academia Sinica Academician Wu Cheng-wen (吳成文) at the award ceremony. Wu nominated Whang-Peng for the award and is a long-time research partner and friend.

Whang-Peng later completed her residency in the US, Wu said.

"One cannot always plan one's life," Whang-Peng told the audience.



After finishing her residency, Whang-Peng was originally offered a job at the Tufts University Affiliated Hospital, she said.

"I asked my then future supervisor to postpone my start date by one week because I was getting married," she said. "They told me that since it would be difficult for me to tend to the busy schedule required, I need not return to the hospital."



Academia Sinica's Jacqueline Whang-Peng speaks during a press conference in Taipei yesterday after she was awarded the first annual "L'Oreal Taiwan Outstanding Woman Scientist Award."

As such, Whang-Peng went into the field of medical research, and, between 1960 and 1993, was a research fellow at the US National Health Research Institute, she said.

Being a pioneer in cancer genetics, cytogenetics and therapeutics, she has so far authored more than 365 publications; her research in tumor cell chromosomal alternations earned her the Arthur Fleming Award in 1972, making her the first female and foreign recipient in the history of the award, she said.

"What drove me to go on in my research was constantly reminding myself how I could help cancer patients," Whang-Peng said.

When she returned to Taiwan in 1993, the quality of local cancer care lagged behind US standards by about 15 years, Wu said.

Whang-Peng led a team of researchers to promote basic molecular genetic research and basic mechanism of carcinogenesis, and worked closely with US cancer expert, Paul Carbone, in training young clinical oncology researchers, physicians and nurses -- the trainees later became local experts in the field, Wu said.

In addition, Whang-Peng actively promoted cancer prevention in the country, and introduced the "five-a-day [fruits and vegetables]" concept to Taiwanese, Wu said.

"Science requires brains and dexterous hands and is therefore a good field for girls to enter," Whang-Peng said.

"I earnestly invite more women to join the field; though I did not become an affluent surgeon, I was rewarded with a lot more in my research -- with continuous hard work, support from others and a bit of luck, I trust that there will be more successful women scientists in this country," she said.