

FEATURE

Peng Liyuan won hearts inside and outside of China

Many have been fans for two decades or longer

By Raymond Zhou
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The week-long state visit by the Chinese president to the United States and then to the United Nations in New York was packed with highlights, which attracted a massive number of viewers with varying interests back in China. First lady Peng Liyuan's short speeches at the UN turned out to be a major shining point in the eyes of many ordinary Chinese who may not care much for the intricacies of international diplomacy.

Peng's delivery in English of two speeches on Monday, each about five minutes long, drew rave notices from Chinese denizens. Snippets of her speaking English have been captured by television cameras before, but it was the first time that a formal speech made by her in English — and at such a formal venue — has been broadcast and readily available online. It was predominantly seen as a gesture of being cosmopolitan and global in outlook and approach.

While slightly accented, Peng's English at the UN had an elegance that might be attributed partly to her music training. Musicians usually have a keen ear for linguistic subtleties.



Peng Liyuan admires manuscripts of Beethoven and Mozart in Lincoln Center in New York on September 28, 2015. [Photo/Xinhua]

Peng had enjoyed a superstar career as a folk singer starting from the early 1990s. But not many in China were aware that she received rigorous training at China's best music conservatory before her career was launched. She was China's first holder of a master's degree in Chinese folk music. It was a singing style

that originated from the grassroots and infused with some of the vocal techniques from Western operatic singing.

In 2005, Peng sang the title role in a Chinese opera that tells the story of Mulan, the woman who masquerades as male to fight foreign invaders. The venue was Lincoln Center in New York. The opera in concert form was aired in China. She reprised the role in 2008 for the Vienna State Opera. The role was originated by her in 2004 in Beijing.

Peng has performed in more than 50 countries and regions throughout her career. She has been keeping a low profile ever since she became China's first lady. Yet, every time she makes a public appearance, a wave of excitement sweeps through Chinese society, who cannot get

enough of her, analyzing the way she dresses or conducts herself in general.

It would be an understatement to say that the Chinese public adores her. Many have been fans of her for two decades or longer. They admire her for her art and also for her courage to reach out and help the unfortunate. She was one of the few celebrities who openly supported those

suffering from AIDS back in the days when the cause was still controversial.

For someone who has been in the spotlight much longer than her tenure as the nation's first lady, Peng's ability to make an English-language speech just adds another sparkle to her already glittering public persona.