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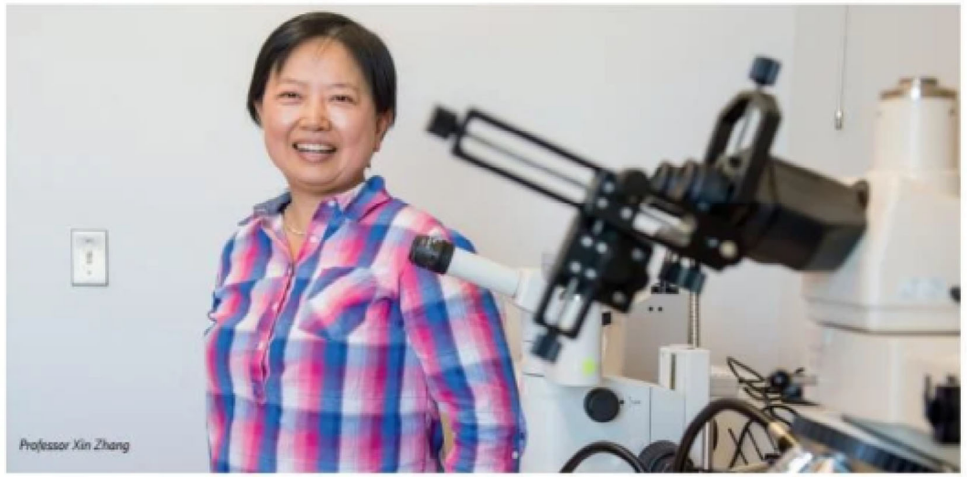

Professor Xin Zhang

PHOTOGRAPH BY CYDNEY SCOTT

Xin Zhang Is BU's Innovator of the Year

FIRST WOMAN CHOSEN, CITED FOR TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH IN METAMATERIALS

Professor Xin Zhang (ME, ECE, MSE, BME) has earned this year's Innovator of the Year award, an honor Boston University bestows annually on a faculty member who "translates his/her world-class research into inventions and innovations that benefit humankind." Zhang is the ninth faculty member and first woman to win the award, presented in December during BU Connect, an annual research and innovation showcase.

Zhang is well known for her pioneering work with metamaterials in areas as diverse as magnetic resonance imaging, downwell sensor technology for the oil industry and noise-cancellation acoustics. She is also the director of BU's Laboratory for Microsystems Technology (LMST), which focuses on interdisciplinary research in microelectromechanical and nanoelectromechanical systems.

"Zhang is a creative innovator. You describe a problem to her and she can solve it," says Michael Pratt (Questrom'13), managing director of BU's Technology Development office. "She's a go-to person for getting something done. It's a true quality of an engineer, right? She can use these fundamental technologies and solve important problems across various domains."

"Professor Zhang's ability to carry out pioneering and exceptionally creative work in a wide range of fields is a model and inspiration for other faculty members—particularly females," says Gloria Waters, vice president and associate provost for research and a Sargent College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences professor of speech, language, and hearing sciences. "Her ability to translate fundamental discoveries into practical applications is exceptional. I am certain that both her current and future work will have a major impact on society."

A native of China, Zhang earned a PhD at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and did postdoctoral research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before joining BU in 2002. She received a National Science Foundation Faculty CAREER Award in 2003 and was named ENG's inaugural Distinguished Faculty Fellow in 2009, an honor given to tenured engineering faculty. Despite the complex nature of her work in her Photonics Center LMST lab, she is clear about what drives her: solving problems with real-world applications.

"I am interested in: 'can you make an impact?'" she says. "The problem has got to be difficult enough that it has not been solved—and important enough." —**JOEL BROWN**

See page 10 for more on Zhang's recent work.