



上海社会科学院

SHANGHAI ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

SASS STUDIES

Winter 2021
Volume 24

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上海社会科学院出版社
SHANGHAI ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES PRESS

柳叶刀尖：西医手术技艺和观念 在近代中国的变迁

（英文版）

赵 婧 等著

上海社会科学院出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

柳叶刀尖：西医手术技艺和观念在近代中国的变迁：
英文 / 赵婧等著 .— 上海：上海社会科学院出版社，
2022

ISBN 978-7-5520-3862-0

I.①柳… II.①赵… III.①社会科学—文集—英文
②自然科学—文集—英文 IV.①Z427

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2022)第029589号

柳叶刀尖：西医手术技艺和观念在近代中国的变迁（英文版）

著 者：赵 婧 等

责任编辑：应韶荃

封面设计：右序设计

出版发行：上海社会科学院出版社

上海顺昌路622号 邮编200025

电话总机021-63315947 销售热线021-53063735

<http://www.sassp.cn> E-mail: sassp@sassp.cn

排 版：南京展望文化发展有限公司

刷：镇江文苑制版印刷有限责任公司

开 本：787毫米×1092毫米 1/16

印 张：14.5

字 数：315千

版 次：2022年7月第1版 2022年7月第1次印刷

ISBN 978-7-5520-3862-0 / Z · 078

定价：78.00元

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At the Point of a Lancet: The Transformation of the Western Surgical Techniques and Ideas in Modern China

Zhao Jing

Abstract: In the mid-19th century, Western Christian medical missionaries introduced Western medicine to China with the lancet and surgical techniques, and showed the Chinese people a new approach to curing diseases with surgeries. Western knowledge and techniques related to surgeries, such as anesthesia and asepsis, were introduced into China and continuously updated, and thus lay the foundation for the idea that Western medicine is superior in terms of surgeries. In the debates between Chinese and Western medicine in the first half of the 20th century, Western medical surgery became evidence to argue the superiority and advantages of Western medicine and surgery over Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and internal medicine. Western medical surgery transcended the material level and involved the development of various branches of medicine. They were used to criticize the “backwardness” of TCM. While advocates of TCM disputed the view of superiority of Western medical surgery, TCM also underwent

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This paper in Chinese was originally published in *Modern Chinese History Studies*, 2020 (5).

a process of self-reconfiguration. In the new space of medical care represented by modern hospitals, Western medical surgery, at first associated with horrible images of cutting off human bodies alive, was gradually accepted by Chinese patients, who experienced both horror and pain in surgeries and complicated interactions with doctors there. Western medical surgery not only cured Chinese people's bodies, but also shaped their idea about body and instilled a new medical ideal into them.

Keywords: Western Medical Surgery; Surgical History; Surgical Techniques; Body View; Medical Behavior

Introduction: Revisiting the Surgical Operation Site

As far as the history of Western medicine is concerned, the 19th century is undoubtedly a milestone in surgical revolution. The rapid development of modern surgery and surgical techniques was attributed to the development of modern anatomy, anesthesiology and asepsis. The book *On the Structure of the Human Body (De Humani Corporis Fabrica)*, which was published by Andreas Vesalius in 1543, cemented the foundation for modern anatomy. After the 18th century, surgeons carried forward the theory of Andreas Vesalius, and argued that they could leverage accurate and subtle anatomical observations to create an independent knowledge system of surgery. Therefore, anatomy became the "useful knowledge" urgently needed by surgeons. People gradually questioned the theory of using body fluid imbalance to explain the occurrence of diseases, which had been practiced for more than a thousand years. By the early 19th century, from the perspective of anatomy, surgery was considered as an ideal method to treat local body lesions.¹

Before the advent of medicine dominated by bacteriology and disinfection technology, humorism and holistic medicine were the mainstream theories of Western medicine. In terms of body surface trauma, there was a popular view that "suppuration can bring beneficial effects." According to the discussion of Claudius Galenus, a famous

¹Richard Barnett, *Crucial Interventions: An Illustrated Treatise on the Principles & Practice of Nineteenth-Century Surgery*, trans. Li Zhanping, World Publishing Guangdong Co., Ltd., 2019, p. 41, p. 44.

physician and surgeon in ancient Rome, blood is body fluid with nutrients, which will accumulate in the wound and become pus during the healing process. Therefore, sometimes suppuration can be regarded as a sign of wound recovery. Modern British surgeon Joseph Lister had some doubts about it. Inspired by Louis Pasteur's bacterial theory, he tried to sterilize all the surgical sites and operating rooms with various disinfectants, in order to prevent wound infection and suppuration. In 1867, he published this opinion in the famous medical magazine *The Lancet*, launching a new era of aseptic surgery.¹

Thanks to Joseph Lister's great contributions to the development of aseptic surgery, British surgery flourished during that time. Meanwhile, the United States made significant contributions to the development of Western medicine by applying anesthesia in surgery. In the mid-19th century, anesthetics such as ether, nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and trichlormethane (chloroform) were successively used by several surgeons in the United States, and spread throughout Europe quickly. In October, 1846, William Morton gave a public demonstration of ether anesthesia at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. This was regarded as the birth of modern anesthesiology. American doctors often used ether for general anesthesia, while British doctors preferred using chloroform.² Before the invention of anesthesia, the operation sites of major invasive surgery were usually full of shouting, blood and horror. Surgeons performed surgical operations on patients quickly when they were wide awake, in order to reduce pain, shock and blood loss, but the mortality remained high.³

For centuries, the medical circles dominated by physicians who specialized in internal medicine always looked down upon surgery. Hippocrates, the Father of Western Medicine, vowed that doctors should avoid performing surgical operations and ask other people to do it. Since then, surgery had been obviously regarded as an alternative profession, because it required manual work, rather than mental work. For a long time, surgery was called "barber's skill" and excluded from orthodox medicine.

¹Arturo Castiglioni, *A History of Medicine (Part II)*, trans. Cheng Zhifan, et al., Guangxi Normal University Press, 2003, pp. 642–643.

²Arturo Castiglioni, *A History of Medicine (Part II)*, p. 647, p. 764.

³Richard Barnett, *Crucial Interventions: An Illustrated Treatise on the Principles & Practice of Nineteenth-Century Surgery*, p. 16.

Compared with traditional physicians with profound knowledge about internal medicine, surgeons had very low social status and were called “butchers or sadists.” This is mainly because the surgical sites were always bloody, and their surgical instruments such as knives, soldering irons and saws were frightening.¹

In a sense, the modern history of surgery is a process of getting rid of bad stigma and constructing legitimate and scientific surgery. The Enlightenment Movement emphasized practice rather than book learning, and regarded surgery as a branch of science, thus greatly promoting the development of surgery and improving the status of surgery in Western medicine system. Surgeons regarded “surgical techniques” as the core, and claimed that they were engaged in “scientific surgery.” This was in line with the goal pursued by the gentry class in the Enlightenment era.² With the advancement of surgical revolution in the second half of the 19th century, surgical techniques gradually transformed into scientific practice. Accordingly, surgical practitioners have transformed from skilled craftsmen who acquired techniques from experience into professionals who received strict anatomical and pathological training. With a rising social status, they played a more and more active role in the medical treatment process.

By the first half of the 20th century, great changes had taken place in the clinical practice of Western medical surgery. Surgery was gradually subdivided, specialized and popularized; surgical risks and mortality were gradually reduced, and an increasing number of major invasive surgeries were carried out. The work scope of surgeons was no longer limited to the regular small-scale low-risk operations that had existed for several centuries (such as wound bandaging, tooth extraction, dealing with chancre and pain of sexually transmitted diseases, daily treatment of skin defects). Bloodletting (which was regarded as the typical work of surgeons) was not the most common surgical operation any more.³ Instead, the resection of appendage, tonsil, uterus, hernia and other organs has

¹The term “surgery” fully reflects this concept. The word “surgery” originated from the Latin word “Chirurgia,” which was the combination of Greek words “Cheiros (hand)” and “Ergon (work).” See Roy Portey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*, trans. Zhang Daqing, Shandong Pictorial Publishing House, 2007, p. 131, p. 139.

²Roy Portey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*, pp. 143–144; Richard Barnett, *Crucial Interventions: An Illustrated Treatise on the Principles & Practice of Nineteenth-Century Surgery*, p. 42.

³Roy Portey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*, p. 134.

become more and more common.

In the 20th century, many Chinese people discussed Western medical surgery and its development history in their medical history books, such as the “History of Surgery” in the *History of Western Medicine* by Ding Fubao, and the *History of Surgery* by Liu Zhaolin.¹ The two books elaborated on the linear historical process of Western medical surgery and the great achievements of surgeons. In addition to appraising the “excellent medical instruments and sharp knives” in Western medical surgery, the books about the history of Western medical surgery compiled by Chinese authors intended to awaken and rejuvenate Chinese medicine. When the Western missionary medicine was just introduced into China in the mid-19th century, the Western surgical knowledge and techniques were one of the most significant symbols that distinguished Western medicine from TCM. Western medical missionaries introduced Western medicine into China by using surgical techniques. The research of Gulick and other scholars on medical missionaries (such as Peter Parker, Benjamin Hobson and John Dudgeon) showed how they used surgical knives to enable Western medicine to take root in China, and laid the foundation for the idea that Western medicine was superior in terms of surgeries.² With the wide application of Western medical surgery in the 20th century, the surgeries of some celebrities triggered the dispute between TCM and Western medicine, which gradually aroused wide public concern. Relevant studies mainly focused on Sun Yat-sen’s liver resection for cancer treatment, Liang Qichao’s resection of a healthy kidney, and other individual medical cases.³ In addition, the spread of relevant medical instruments and technologies (such as X-ray machine, microscope, stethoscope, injection technology, etc.)

¹Ding Fubao, *History of Western Medicine* [In Chinese], Shanghai Medical Publishing House, 1914; Liu Zhaolin, eds., *History of Surgery* [In Chinese], School of Medicine, Peking University, 1929.

²Edward V. Gulick, *Peter Parker and the Opening of China*, trans. Dong Shaoxin, Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008; Zhang Daqing, “Missionaries and the Introduction of Modern Western Surgery – Taking Benjamin Hobson’s *First Lines of the Practice of Surgery in the West* as an Example” [In Chinese], *Essays of International Symposium on “Western Learning and the Culture in Qing Dynasty,”* China Renmin University, 2006, pp. 951–961; Gao Xi, *A Biography of Dudgeon: A British Medical Missionary and the Medical Modernization of the Late Qing Dynasty* [In Chinese], Fudan University Press, 2009.

³Pi Guoli, *Nation, Chinese Medicine and Patients: Medicine and Body in Modern China* [In Chinese], Taipei: Wunan Book Publishing Co., Ltd., 2016; Yao Fei, “Disease, Politics and Medicine: A Study on the Last Days of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in the Perspective of Disease” [In Chinese], *Journal of Historical Science*, 2018, No. 2, pp. 84–96.

provided new insights and methods for diagnosis and treatment before performing surgery. From surgical equipment to surgical techniques and concept, they shaped Chinese people's view of body and medical behaviors. The academic circles also paid attention to this.¹

The existing studies outlined the general history about the spread of Western medical surgery in China, but seldom explored people's general perceptions of surgical instruments and techniques, the medical scholars' academic theory about Western medical surgery, the surgical experience of ordinary patients, and other topics about the history of cognition and views of Western medical surgery. Instead of focusing on the linear development of certain surgical operations or surgical branch, this paper first introduces surgical instruments, and explores how the Western surgical techniques featuring the body incision or excision with surgical instruments spread in China, as well as the consequent changes in medical concept and medical behavior from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century. Firstly, this paper investigates the vocabulary and images of Western surgical techniques in modern China, and discusses the changes of surgical types and characteristics which were represented by surgical instruments such as surgical knives. Secondly, it introduces the basic situation about the translation and introduction of surgical practice and knowledge about Western missionary medicine in the second half of the 19th century, and explains how the idea that Western medicine is superior in terms of surgeries was incorporated into the debates between TCM and Western medicine in the first half of the 20th century. In addition to sorting out the "internal history," this paper paid more attention to the "external history" of surgical cognition reflected by medical cases in medical books, newspapers and magazines. Western medical surgery, at first associated with horrible images of cutting off human bodies alive, was gradually accepted by Chinese patients, who experienced both horror

¹Li Hengjun, "Stethoscope and the Assimilation of Western Medicine in Modern China (1844–1910)" [In Chinese], *Journal of Dialectics of Nature*, No. 4, 2016; Li Yanchang, "Through Technology to Idea: The Spreading of Knowledge and Practice on Injection in Modern China" [In Chinese], *Modern Chinese History Studies*, No. 3, 2017; Ji Linghui, "The Adoption of Western Learning: Debates on the Knowledge of the Microscope in Late Qing and the Native Responses" [In Chinese], *Journal of Dialectics of Nature*, No. 3, 2018; Li Hengjun, "Insight into the Body: X-rays, Body Perception and the Debate on Sino-Western Medicine in Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republic of China" [In Chinese], Zhou Xian and Tao Dongfeng, eds. *Culture Studies*, Vol. 35, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2019, pp. 89–103.

and pain in surgeries and complicated interactions with doctors there. This showed the changes of Chinese people's attitude towards Western medical surgery. "Revisiting the surgical operation site" aims to represent the surgical history from the perspective of patients. While tracing the development process of surgeons and their exquisite operations, it intends to investigate the intertwined history of surgical cognition and concept among the society, medical circles and patients.

From "Daogui" to "Incision Therapy": Vocabulary and Images of Modern Surgical Techniques

There were many kinds of surgical instruments, some of which can be traced back to prehistoric times. Surgical knives became essential symbols of modern Western medical surgery at the initial stage of development. Lancet is the most famous surgical knife. The double-edged small lancet is used to cut veins and blood vessels for bloodletting. Therefore, lancet is often translated as "surgical knife for bloodletting" in early English-Chinese dictionary. Large lancets can be used to cut the abscess or perform bladder lithotomy. In the late 19th century, bloodletting was finally abandoned by scientific surgery, and lancet gradually disappeared in surgical operation. In contrast, the single-bladed scalpel, which was translated as "small cutter," can better represent the basic shape of modern surgical knives, and it is mainly used to cut the abdomen. Since ancient Rome, scalpel has constantly evolved for several centuries. With the gradual standardization of modern surgery, now scalpel generally refers to "surgical knife." At the end of the 19th century, steam disinfection was invented to disinfect the scalpel, in order to prevent surgical infection. In the 1920s, the invention of two-stage scalpel and disposable blade greatly improved the speed and safety of surgical operations.¹

¹John Kirkup, "The History and Evolution of Surgical Instruments: VI. The Surgical Blade: From Finger Nail to Ultrasound," *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England*, Vol. 77 (1995), pp. 380–388. To some extent, perhaps due to the authoritative position of *The Lancet* magazine (which was founded in 1823) in the medical field, lancet has been widely used as a synonym for surgery for many years. "Lancet" is used in the title of this paper, because it is the symbol of surgery, and there was a classic comment that "Peter Parker introduced Western medical surgery into China with the lancet." In fact, Peter Parker did not use lancet to perform ophthalmic surgery, but he may use lancet for bladder lithotomy and bloodletting.

A Handbook of Surgical Instruments for Operation Room Nurses systematically showed the surgical instruments that were used in the first half of the 20th century. The book was written by a British doctor, who wanted to provide operation room nurses with a handbook to quickly find the required surgical instruments. The book lists a complete set of instruments used for various surgical operations, including anesthesia and operations on limbs, face, eyes, ears, mouth, nose and larynx, chest, abdomen, kidney, rectum and anus, male and female genital organs and spine, as well as hundreds of surgical instruments such as knives, scissors, pliers, needles, saws, hooks and scrapes. This index booklet enabled us to understand the types and quantity of a complete set of surgical instruments required for a specific surgical operation. For example, for common appendicectomy, the required surgical instruments include scalpel, 2 pairs of dissecting forceps, 12 pairs of pressure forceps, 2 pairs of large pressure forceps, 2 pairs of scissors, retractors and needles.¹ The book didn't mention lancet, but considered scalpel as the first and most commonly used surgical instrument for incising or excising the body. This also revealed the changes of surgery types and features, that the surgical scope gradually expanded from the body surface to internal organs.

After "surgical knife" became a typical symbol of Western medical surgery, Chinese people tried to search for corresponding terms in TCM to describe the Western medical surgery in the late 19th century. Firstly, they used the word "Daogui," which is the name of a measuring device (medicine spoon) used for measuring drugs. It was commonly written in the medical prescriptions in the Han and Jin Dynasties. Although various studies showed different opinions on its measurement capacity, it is certain that the capacity of "Daogui" is very small.² Taoist priests used "Daogui" to measure the magic pellets made in furnace. "Daogui" became a Taoist term and referred to magic pellet. Therefore, the spread of the word

¹Gladys E Stephenson, eds. & trans., *A Handbook of Surgical Instruments for Operation Room Nurses*, Kwang Hsueh Publishing House, 1948, p. 52. The book was first published in 1926.

²According to the inscriptive measuring vessels of Eastern Han Dynasty excavated by archaeologists, the actual measurement value of "Daogui" is equivalent to 0.5 ml in modern measurement system. See Xiong Changyun, "Research on the Newfound Inscriptive Measuring Vessels and the Measurement System of Medicines of the Han Dynasty" [In Chinese], *Chinese Journal of Medical History*, No. 6, 2018, pp. 323–327.

“Daogui” was closely related to Taoist culture.¹

In the late 19th century, Daogui was used to refer to drugs on a large scale. In 1883, an article entitled “Extraordinary Efficacy of Daogui” in *Shun Pao* newspaper was actually an advertisement for “Belidevs Analgesic Potion,” which claimed that it can cure acute diseases such as heatstroke.² During that time, “Daogui” was used in similar advertisements of self-made Huoxiang Zhengqi Pills (or Ageratum-pills for restoring heatstroke) made by Jieyuantang, a clinic at Fourth Road, Shanghai, and pharmacies specializing in Western medicine.³ Nobody knew when the original meaning of Daogui was forgotten and gradually evolved into a metaphor of doctors: “Nowadays people use ‘Daogui’ too frequently to notice that it is wrong to call doctors ‘Daogui masters’. It is also wrong to call medical work as Daogui undertakings.” The author sarcastically said, in TCM, “Daogui” is used to measure medicine, just like spoon is used for measurement in Western medicine. If doctors of TCM practitioners are Daogui masters, wouldn’t doctors of Western medicine be spoon masters?⁴ Moreover, “Daogui” was sometimes misused to refer to the Western medical surgery featuring knife incising or excising. A woman who lived in Hongkou, Shanghai suffered from a malignant tumor in her breast. After being admitted by St. Luke’s Hospital, she was given a general anesthetic before the surgical operation. A month later, she fully recovered, and was amazed by the “magic Daogui surgical operation” performed by a Western medicine practitioner.⁵ For another example, the doctors of Western medicine in Shanghai Chinese Hospital also demonstrated “magic Daogui surgical techniques” when cutting off a breast tumor weighing up to 24 jin (a Chinese traditional unit of weight); and the woman said that “she didn’t feel any pain in the surgical operation.”⁶ In a sense, the drug measuring device “Daogui” was used to refer to a surgical knife. This was mainly

¹Guo Mingzhi, “Daogui and the Nicknames of Characters in *Journey to the West*” [In Chinese], *Seeking Truth*, No. 2, 1997, pp. 64–65.

²“Extraordinary Efficacy of Daogui” [In Chinese], *Shun Pao*, August 24, 1883, Section 11.

³“Daogui Brings Great Benefits” [In Chinese], *Shun Pao*, July 21, 1888, Vol. 3; “Daogui in Western Countries,” *Shun Pao*, July 16, 1897, Section 3.

⁴“Daogui’s Interpretation” [In Chinese], *Medical Journal*, No. 3, Shanghai, March 1910, p. 9.

⁵“Magic Daogui Surgical Operation” [In Chinese], *Zi Lin Hu Bao*, May 6, 1896, Section 3.

⁶“Magic Daogui Surgical Techniques” [In Chinese], *Xinwen Bao*, August 31, 1893, Section 9.

attributed to people's perception and imagination of the characteristics of surgical techniques in Western medicine.

As an image of surgical techniques, the Chinese character of "knife" is also used in some Chinese words that are related to surgical operation. A sailor in Ningbo City injured his right leg after an accidental fall on a ship. He was amputated by doctors of Western medicine, and installed a prosthetic leg. From then on, he believed in Western medical surgery. When he found a tumor under his right ear, he went to Shanghai Chinese Hospital and asked the doctor to perform surgical operation again.¹ At the end of the 19th century, some words with traditional Chinese characteristics (such as "incision therapy," "operative surgery" and "dissection") were used to describe the Western surgical techniques. "Incision" and "dissection" emphasized the characteristics of Western medical surgery in the treatment of diseases by using knife incising or excising techniques. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the word "surgery," which was borrowed from Japanese, has gradually been used to refer to "surgical operation," and the words "performing an operation" and "incision therapy" have also been used for a long time. Meanwhile, all kinds of large and small hospitals were generally equipped with different types of operating rooms. In 1920, the monthly journal *Pok Tsai* listed the symptoms and number of surgical operations performed in the operating rooms of Canton Hospital (which is also known as Ophthalmic Hospital in Canton or Canton Pok Tsai Hospital).² In the same year, Tongji German Medical School displayed photos about the operating rooms of Tongji German Hospital and Paulun Hospital in the journal of the school. The operating table with white sheets and neatly displayed medical items in the photo symbolized the modern surgical environment of aseptic operation.³

Meanwhile, the surgical scope expanded from the body surface to internal organs, and an increasing number of abdominal and chest surgical operations were performed. In addition to body surface diseases

¹"Western Surgical Operation" [In Chinese], *Xinwen Bao*, April 19, 1893, Section 3.

²Kong Xianzhang, "Announcement of Operative Surgery Room" [In Chinese], *Pok Tsai*, No. 23, December 1920, pp. 13-16.

³"The Operating Room of Tongji German Hospital" [In Chinese], *Tongji German Medicine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1920, no page number; "The Operating Room of Paulun Hospital" [In Chinese], *Tongji German Medicine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1920, no page number.

such as hemorrhoids, foreskin, buboes, carbuncle, etc., surgeons also performed surgical operations on cecum (appendix), tonsil, prostate gland and various internal tumors (in the liver, gallbladder, stomach, intestine, lung, breast, uterus, etc.). Taking the "Surgical Work Report" in 1936 of Shanghai Municipal Hunan Hospital as an example, major surgical operations included vermiform appendix resection, which ranked top in terms of number, followed by hernia repairing, intestinal resection, breast amputation, spleen amputation, etc. Apart from abscess incision, the most common minor surgical operations included hemorrhoid surgery and hemorrhoidectomy.¹ In addition, the media released advertisements and reports about various surgical operations. Doctor Zhang Shaoxiu "set up an operation room and purchased medical instruments and drugs, and made full preparations ... He specialized in the study of major surgical diseases, such as hemorrhoids, anal prolapse, anal fistula, venereal disease, skin diseases, and consumption, and can cure patients within a specified period."² Shanghai Zhongde Hospital "was equipped with the most advanced surgical operation rooms, and specialized in major and minor operative surgeries, especially the appendicitis surgery and gynecologic surgery."³ Many celebrities received surgical operations. For example, Sun Yat-sen received liver resection for cancer treatment, Wang Jingwei had resection of carbuncle on the back and surgery to remove bullets, Ge Gongzhen had cecectomy, Ding Fubao had resection of prostate gland. These surgeries were widely reported by various media.⁴

The ultimate goal of surgical knife manufacturers and surgeons is to create the sharpest knives and reduce pain as much as possible. Some

¹Chen Zhaochang, "Surgical Work Report" [In Chinese], *Health Monthly*, Vol. 7, No. 6, Shanghai, June 1937, pp. 17-18.

²"Doctor Zhang Shaoxiu Expanded the Clinic" [In Chinese], *Shun Pao*, November 12, 1923, p. 4, Section 15.

³"Characteristics of Zhongde Hospital's Equipment" [In Chinese], *Shun Pao*, June 27, 1934, p. 3, Section 12.

⁴"Sun Yat-sen Was Admitted by Peking Union Medical College Hospital for Incision Therapy" [In Chinese], *Eastern Times*, February 5, 1925, p. 1, Section 3; "Wang Jingwei Had Resection of Carbuncle on the Back" [In Chinese], *Eastern Times*, April 16, 1933, p. 2, Section 5; "Ge Gongzhen's Cecectomy Was Absolutely Wrong" [In Chinese], *Li Bao*, November 7, 1935, Section 3; "A Bullet Was Taken out from Wang Jingwei's Back This Morning" [In Chinese], *Li Bao*, November 29, 1935, Section 1; Chen Mo, "Ding Fubao Had Resection of Prostate Gland" [In Chinese], *Diamond*, November 16, 1936, Section 3.