Endless passion for excellence: the life and work of Professor Shi-Wen Wang

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Figure 1. Prof. Shi-Wen Wang
(1933–2012)

The 30th of January 2012 was a sad day for thousands of Chinese cardiologists and geriatricians: they lost a respected and admired colleague, an outstanding leader and innovative pioneer. Professor Shi-Wen Wang (1933~2012, Figure 1), founder and director of the Institute of Geriatric Cardiology at Chinese PLA General Hospital, Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Geriatric Cardiology*, passed away on that day.

Professor Wang was born in Shandong, China on January 25, 1933. Her father was a postmaster in a small county town, who had managed to provide college educations for all his 4 sons and his only daughter, an extraordinary and almost heroic achievement at that time in China. Educated in several missionary and public schools in Nanjing, Professor Wang in 1950 entered the medical school of Nanjing University, then one of the best universities in China, and obtained her M.D. degree in 1955.

While a college student, Professor Wang joined the Chinese PLA and was among the first medical officers at the Chinese PLA General Hospital, which rapidly became one of the most prestigious hospitals in China shortly after its establishment in 1952. She began her clinical career under the training of many distinguished physicians in China, including Professor Wan Huang, who introduced electrocardiography into China in early 1940's, and Professor Kewei Huang, a Harvard Medical School graduate. With energy, hard-work and remarkable talent, she became an outstanding physician, a genius in diagnostics, a master of healing art and a trusted friend to hundreds of thousands patients, including national and military leaders, distinguished scientists and artists, but mostly ordinary soldiers, workers and farmers.

Although completely devoted to caring for her patients, Professor Wang also had a passion for medical research. She was one of the first physicians in China to investigate the peri-operative management of cardiac risk in patients undergoing non-cardiac surgery, particularly in elderly patients with cardiovascular disease. In 1984, at the age of 51, she traveled to the United States as a visiting scholar, doing studies on the pathology of coronary artery disease, first at the Harvard Medical School and then at the University of California, San Diego. During this time, she observed an octogenarian, who was admitted for a trivial Colles fracture, although appearing in excellent health at admission, the patient developed multiple organ failure and died within a few days. This tragic case had a profound impact on her academic career. Upon returning to China in 1985, she focused her research in “multiple organ failure in the elderly” (MOFE), a clinical syndrome she devised to conceptualize the multiple organ failure in elderly, non-surgical patients. For almost

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20 years, she undertook extensive epidemiological, clinical and basic studies on this newly recognized syndrome. Based on these studies, she proposed the “lung initiation theory of MOFE”, providing insights into the prevention and management of this fatal condition. During the 50 years since 1960s, she has published more than 1000 clinical research articles, reviews, perspectives, editorials and book chapters. She founded and served as Editor-in-Chief of 2 journals: *The Chinese Journal of Multi-organ Disease in the Elderly* and the *Journal of Geriatric Cardiology*, an English-language journal.

Professor Wang was also a widely respected educator. She had trained hundreds of cardiologists and geriatricians in China, and supervised scientific studies for nearly a hundred MD or PhD candidates. Undeniably, Professor Wang was a pioneer in modern geriatrics in China. In the early 1980's, she published several books on principles and practice of geriatrics. She was one of the founders of Institute of Geriatrics at the Chinese PLA General Hospital. In consideration of the rapid growth of both elderly population and cardiovascular disease in China, she published *Geriatric Cardiology* in 1994, a book considered to be “classical” among Chinese cardiologists and geriatricians. In 1996, she founded the Institute of Geriatric Cardiology, a medical institute of more than 100 beds and dozens of laboratories.

Over sixty years of her clinical, academic and educational career, Professor Wang had been honored on numerous occasions by the Chinese government, society and medical organizations for her outstanding contributions. She was a visiting professor at several prestigious universities, including Tsinghua University and Nankai University. She was elected a Member of Chinese Academy of Engineering in 1996. She served as Vice President of Science and Technology Committee of Chinese PLA. She is member of dozens of China's national scientific advisory boards and committees. She has been reported frequently by leading Chinese mass media, including CCTV, the People's Daily, and numerous other TV programs, newspapers and magazines.

Professor Wang is a versatile woman with wide interests. In college, she had been the captain of the women's basketball team and had a lifelong love for singing, dancing, swimming, painting, cooking and travel. A marriage of fifty-five years to her husband, Dr. Daxun Ye, had been an envy of her colleagues and friends. After the diagnosis of oral cancer in 2004, she had undergone more than 20 surgeries, but always faced the disease and intolerable pains and sufferings with calm and dignity. Professor Wang, a woman physician, scientist, and teacher, with her endless passion for excellence, is and will forever be loved by her patients, family, colleagues and friends.