In 2010, the Sir Run Run Shaw Hospital (SRRSH) approached Dr Gordon and Mrs Rosie Low to see if they were able to assist our department in improving our repertoire in Reconstructive Surgery, particularly reconstructive surgery of the breast after mastectomy. Our scope in Aesthetic Plastic surgery was also limited and we had hoped that the capacity of this aspect of plastic surgery could increase.

Early in 2011, Dr Low arranged the visit of Dr Richard Bloom and Dr Howard Webster to our hospital. Both are experienced plastic surgeons from Melbourne, and have their own Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery partnership. During the week that they were here, they operated on 3 patients who required major breast reconstruction. 2 of these patients had DIEP (Deep Inferior Epigastric Perforator) flaps. The third patient required fat injection. They also gave lectures on reconstructive and aesthetic surgery. These lectures provided the bases of understanding the principles of this specialty of surgery.

The next step was for me to observe how plastic surgery is done in Australia. My visit was facilitated by Dr and Mrs Low, and I spent 5 weeks in Melbourne in October 2012 with Drs Bloom and Webster, watching many operations performed by themselves and their colleagues, in breast augmentation and reduction procedures, and cosmetic surgery operations of the face and other parts of the body. The experience gave me much confidence to start this type of surgery in Hangzhou.

It is always a daunting task to start a new field or endeavour, because there is often a gap between what you have seen and how you can put that experience into practice. We needed an additional boost to our confidence before we could embark on such ventures. To this end, Dr and Mrs Low sent Drs Dean Trotter, Derek Neoh and Eldon Mah to our hospital in August, 2012. They gave lectures and demonstrated the finer points in plastic surgery and emphasized the importance of good micro-anastomosis techniques.

In March, this year, we created history in our hospital by doing the first non-pedicle composite graft of a breast reconstruction, that is, the free TRAM (Transverse Rectus Abdominus Myocutaneous) flap. Since then, our department has performed a number of operations using the lessons we have learned in micro-vascular anastomosis. We have also refined our techniques in fat injections.

We are deeply grateful to Dr and Mrs Low, coordinators of Project China, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, and the surgical colleagues they have sent to our Hospital to help us to develop this branch of surgery. It is our aim to utilize this knowledge to the benefit of the patients of Zhejiang Province and beyond.