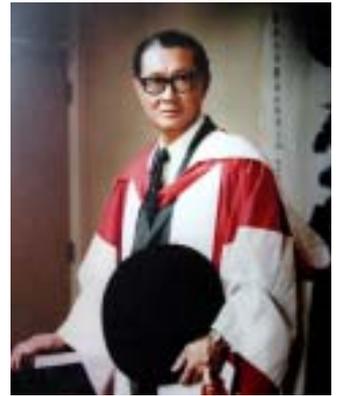


OBITUARY

Professor Tan Sri Guan Bee Ong, PSM, OBE, MD, DSc, FAMS (Hon) (1921 – 10 January 2004)



Professor Guan Bee Ong, who passed away on 10th January 2004 at the age of 82 years old, was a doyen of surgeons in Hong Kong and a world-class surgeon *extraordinaire*. He was the first ethnic Chinese to hold the position of Professor and Head of Department of Surgery at the University of Hong Kong.

Born in Sarawak, Malaysia in 1921, Professor Ong joined the University of Hong Kong where he completed his medical studies in 1947 and early surgical training. Later, he proceeded to the United Kingdom and obtained the Fellowships of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons of England and Edinburgh. Returning to Hong Kong in 1953, he joined the government medical services and worked as a consultant surgeon, first at Kong Wah Hospital and later as surgeon-in-charge of Kowloon Hospital. In 1964, he assumed the Chair of Surgery at the University and Head of the Department of Surgery at Queen Mary Hospital, Hong Kong.

From 1964 until his retirement in 1982, Professor Ong presided over the vast responsibility of 800 beds in 4 hospitals. He brought order and structure to the units under his charge. Immensely energetic and passionate about his work, he operated, taught and wrote extensively and travelled widely. During his brilliant career at the University, his surgical Department at the Queen Mary Hospital became renowned as a centre of excellence for innovative surgery of the oesophagus, liver, biliary tract diseases, and cancer of the head and neck. He pioneered several new techniques such as transphenoidal approach to the pituitary gland, transoral approach to the upper cervical spine, transhiatal dissection of the oesophagus and oesophagogastric anastomoses in the neck, Roux-en-Y choledochojejunostomy, and retroperitoneal approach to the common bile duct and urinary bladder reconstruction using isolated stomach.

Professor Ong, or GB as he was popularly called, earned a huge international reputation as an outstanding surgeon, master technician, inspirational teacher and a charismatic leader. His weekly staff round at the hospital, with its large variety of complex surgical cases and an army of staff, never failed to impress a visiting surgeon. He was always a gracious host to visiting surgeons whom he introduced to the best of Hong Kong Chinese cuisine. He was kind to his patients but hard on his junior staff in getting work done, but all those who knew GB well enough, speak of him with awe and respect. He was a most sought-after speaker at major international surgical conferences and a visiting professor to leading medical schools where he demonstrated his unique surgical techniques. When he left the public service, he had published over 250 scientific papers, more than 10 books and monographs and performed over 10,000 major operations.

Professor Ong was a regular visitor to Singapore where he had many patients and several close friends. He was a visiting professor at the University and a visiting expert. He was always a willing teacher and a master surgeon ready to demonstrate his special techniques, which was characterised by extremely swift and bold surgery. In 1975, he mooted the idea of forming a surgical club in Southeast Asia to foster closer relationship between surgeons. The Academy of Medicine, Singapore, through the initiative of the Chairman of the Chapter of Surgeons, played a major role in facilitating the preliminary meeting and later the launch of the Association of Surgeons of South East Asia in 1976 in Singapore. It was a pleasure for me as the protem Secretary to work with GB as President to start the organisation which is now well established as the Asian Surgical Association.

During his distinguished career, GB had received several notable awards, including the title of Tan Sri from the King of Malaysia, OBE from Queen Elizabeth II, First John Bruce Gold Medal, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Medal, the Abraham Colles Medal, Majid Ismail Gold Medal and many honorary fellowships of colleges and professional societies abroad. In 1980, he was conferred the honorary DSc by the University of Hong Kong.

Many a surgeon, having retired from hectic academic life, would have been quite content to lead a more relaxed life, but that was not the style of Professor Ong. He continued an active private surgical practice in Hong Kong for many years till he was diagnosed with liver cancer in 1999. He underwent treatment, including liver resection, but later developed metastases. He bore his illness with great courage and finally succumbed in January 2004. Professor Ong is survived by his wife, Paula, and his 2 children, Lisa and Michael, both doctors.

Raj M Nambiar, *FAMS*