

The Rich Legacy of Tan Tock Seng Hospital Includes that of Being a Medical College in 1943 to 1944

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Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), Singapore, started its history as a pauper hospital. The foundation stone of the first TTSH was laid on 25 July 1844. The hospital built at Pearl's Hill was not used until 1849. The hospital was for many years known as Tan Tock Sing's Hospital, named after its founder* (Mr Tan Tock Seng, 1798 to 1850, was a native of Malacca who lived nearly all his life in Singapore, first as a vegetable seller, later as a shop-keeper and merchant. He was the first Chinese to become a Justice of Peace in Singapore. Wealth came to him and he nobly used the gifts which life had bless him with).² It was the first hospital in Singapore to be built with non-Government funds. In the official records, the name "Tock Sing" was changed to "Tock Seng" in the 1850s.³

The early history of TTSH from 1844 to 1873 has been described in great detail by Lee Yong Kiat.¹ When TTSH was 150 years old in 1994 a book was published to commemorate its 150th anniversary.² A personal recollection of TTSH from 1942 to 1997 was given by Chew Chin Hin in his inaugural Tan Tock Seng Hospital Oration.⁴

The history and story of TTSH is not complete without inclusion of the fact that a medical college (The *Marei Ika Daigaku* or Syonan Medical College) was established in TTSH from April 2603 (1943) to February 2604 (1944).⁵

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore lasted from 15 February 2602 (1942) to 4 September 2605 (1945). During this period the Japanese conquerors renamed Singapore Syonan (*Syo* is "bright" or "brilliant" or "brilliance" and *Nan* means "South"; hence Syonan means "Brilliant South"); it is also often referred to as *Syonan-to* (i.e. Syonan Island).⁶

In 1943, the Japanese Military Administration established The Medical College at TTSH; during the Japanese Occupation, TTSH was renamed *Hakua Byoin*. The Medical College was called The *Marei Ika Daigaku* or Syonan Medical College (SMC). To the students who attended the SMC it was known as the *Marei* (also spelt

as *Marai* or *Malai*) *Ika Daigaku* (or *Ikadaigaku*) but in The Syonan Shinbun it was referred to as The Syonan Medical College.⁶

The SMC was officially opened on 27 April 2603 (1943) and it functioned at TTSH until February 2604 (1944) when it shifted to the General Hospital, Malacca.⁷

Among those who attended the SMC in TTSH were Drs George Tay and Chee Phui Hung (Singapore), Dr Dick Hu Wei Hsien (Johor), Dr Abdul Wahab (Penang) and Mr Wong Cho Fatt (Penang). Dr George Tay's recollection of life in The *Marei Ika Daigaku* in TTSH has been described in detail elsewhere.⁶

All former students of the King Edward VII College of Medicine were accepted into the SMC and a total of about 200 students became *Ika Daigakusei* (medical students); 100 from Malaya and Singapore and 100 from Indonesia.⁶ The students lived in dormitories that were the pavilion wards of the pre-war TTSH. One of the pavilion wards was also used as a lecture theatre. The teachers were Japanese and they also lived in a bungalow in TTSH.⁶

The students were taught in Japanese (without English or Malay) by Japanese teachers; they were taught mainly *Nippon-go* (Japanese language) and *Nippon Seishin* (Japanese Spirit).

After about 10 months at TTSH (April 1943 to February 1944), the *Marei Ika Daigaku* or Syonan Medical College shifted to the General Hospital, Malacca sometime in February 2604 (1944); the exact date of the shift is not known.^{6,7} The students were told the shift was necessary as there might be more raids by the Americans and they did not want any harm to befall the *Isha no Tamago* (embryo doctor).⁶

With the shift of the *Marei Ika Daigaku* from TTSH to the Malacca General Hospital in February 2604 (1944), another chapter closed in the history of TTSH. No one can doubt that TTSH in its distinguished and long history of 159 years did function as the only Medical College in Singapore (Syonan) from 1943 to 1944.

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