

The Marei Ika Daigaku (Syonan Medical College) during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942-1945)

J S Cheah, G Tay

ABSTRACT

During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942 - 1945), Singapore was renamed *Syonan* (or *Syonanto*). The Japanese Military Administration established The Medical College on 27 April 2603 (1943) and it was known as The *Marei Ika Daigaku* or Syonan Medical College. It was sited at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (Hakua Byoin). The Ika Daigaku relocated to the General Hospital, Malacca in February 2604 (1944) where it functioned till the end of the Japanese Occupation in September 1945. About 200 students from Singapore, Malaya, Sumatra and Java attended the Syonan Medical College; the students were taught mainly Japanese language and culture.

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore lasted from 15 February 1942 to 4 September 1945. During this period, there were chaos, hardship, fear and suffering; the Japanese conquerors renamed Singapore, *Syonan* (or *Syonanto*)⁽¹⁾. There is scanty record of the medical history during the Japanese Occupation⁽²⁾.

In 1943, the Japanese established The Medical College at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH). It was called The *Marei Ika Daigaku* or Syonan Medical College. This fact of history is so little known that an official publication in 1994 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of TTSH (The Legacy of Tan Tock Seng Hospital: 150 Years of Caring; text by Lee Siew Hua)⁽³⁾ did not mention The *Marei Ika Daigaku*! This is a significant omission as TTSH can rightly claim to be a Medical College from 1943 to 1944 during its long and distinguished history.

The senior author (George Tay) attended The *Marei Ika Daigaku* and in 1986, wrote a 5-page typewritten account of his experience; this was not published but was circulated to his friends. His recollections will be quoted verbatim where appropriate. The younger author searched for evidence of The *Ika Daigaku* in the *Syonan Times* (*Shimbun*), an English newspaper published during the Japanese Occupation; the *Syonan Times* or *Shimbun* (abbreviated to SS) commenced publication on 20 February 2602 (1942) and lasted till 4 September 2605 (1945).

Examination for final year medical students

The first reference to medical education in The *Syonan Shimbun* (SS) was on Tuesday, July 14, 2602 (1942): it was a notice for an examination for final year medical students in the King Edward VII College of Medicine, before the fall of Singapore (Fig 1).

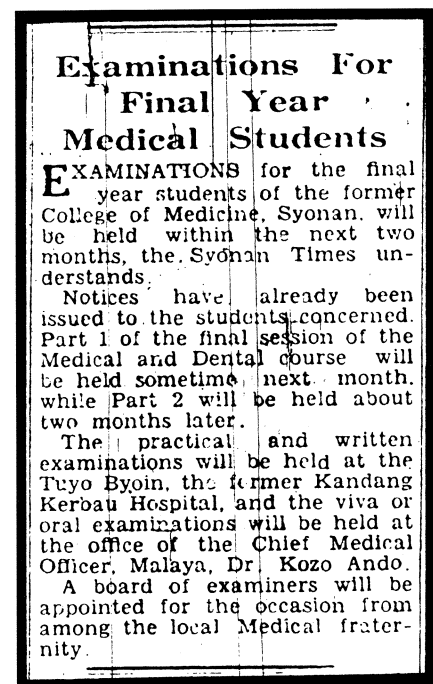


Fig 1 - A report on "Examination for final year medical students" (*Syonan Times*, 14 July 2602: 4)

Steps being taken to reopen college of medicine

On Tuesday 10 November 2602 (1942), The *Syonan Times* reported on the above (Fig 2)⁽⁵⁾. "Every effort is being made to reopen the College of Medicine in Syonan, and it is likely students will be admitted for courses in medicine and dentistry from April next ... Dr Tadashi Sato, MD (Tokyo), a member of the *Syonan Gunseikan-bu*, ... revealed that former students of the College of Medicine, would form the nucleus of the new college. The aim ... said Dr Sato, was to collect all the former medical students and allow them to continue their studies in medicine and dentistry. However, he stressed, all undergraduates would have to take a full course in *Nippon-go* as a preliminary step to their studies ...".

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Fig 2 - Steps being taken to reopen College of Medicine as reported in the Syonan Times on 10 November 1942.

Institute for medical and dental students opening tomorrow

"Medical and dental undergraduates of the College of Medicine, Syonan, will have an opportunity of learning *Nippon-go* with the opening of the *Marei Bunka Kenkyu-Jo* (Malay Cultural Institute) tomorrow afternoon ... The Institute will be opened with the main intention of giving former undergraduates of the College of Medicine a knowledge of *Nippon-go* as a preliminary step to prepare them for admission to the College which is expected to be re-opened early next year ..." (Syonan Times, 22 November 1942; Fig 3)⁽⁶⁾.

Institute For Medical And Dental Students Opening To-morrow

Medical and dental undergraduates of the former College of Medicine, Syonan, will have an opportunity of learning *Nippon-go* with the opening of the *Marei Bunka Kenkyu-Jo* (Malay Cultural Institute) to-morrow afternoon.

The opening ceremony will be held at Alsagoff School in Jalan Sultan at 5 p.m. (Tokyo Time) and will be attended by prominent Nippon officials and members of the medical profession.

Dr. S. I. M. Ibrahim, a Syonan private practitioner, told a Syonan Times reporter yesterday that the Institute was not for the use of medical and dental students alone. It was open to all undergraduates desirous of learning *Nippon-go*, including students of the former Raffles College.

The Institute will also encourage the study of Nippon culture and Malay culture. Qualified teachers will be in charge of the students.

The Institute will be opened with the main intention of giving former undergraduates of the College of Medicine a knowledge of *Nippon-go* as a preliminary step to prepare them for admission to the College which is expected to be re-opened early next year.

It is understood that Alsagoff School will be used as the temporary headquarters of the Institute.

Fig 3 - Institute for Medical and Dental students opening Tomorrow (Syonan Times, 22 November 1942: 4)

Preparatory institute for medicos opened

The opening of the Preparatory Institute for Medicos was reported by the Syonan Times on 25 November 1942 (Fig 4)⁽⁷⁾. "A simple and yet impressive ceremony, having a considerable bearing on the future of medicine in Syonan, was performed Monday afternoon with the opening of the *Marei Bunka Kenkyu-Jo* (Malay Cultural Institute) in Jalan Sultan by Deputy Mayor K Toyoda. The Institute will serve as a channel through which undergraduates of the former College of Medicine in Syonan can acquire a first-hand knowledge of *Nippon-go*, *Nippon* culture and Malay culture ... A large number of undergraduates from the College of Medicine and the former Raffles College, who were also present, showed great enthusiasm at the prospect of being admitted to the Institute ... Replies on behalf of the students thanking the authorities for opening the Institute, were made by Mr S Parampalam and Miss R Ghows ... With the opening of the College of Medicine next year, all the lectures would be conducted in *Nippon-go* - although in a clinical way, Malay and English may be permitted ..." (7).

THE SYONAN TIMES.
WEDNESDAY, NOVEM

Opening Ceremony At Jalan Sultan

Malaya, Su Meet At C

Deputy Mayor Toyoda seated with Mr. H. Dazai, Chief of the Educational Department of the Syonan Tokubetsu-shi, Mr. Kobayashi of the Tokubetsu-shi, Mr. Naito of the Gunseikan-bu and Dr. G. Haridas of the Medical Department of the Tokubetsu-shi. Below, a section of the large gathering of medical and dental students of the former College of Medicine, Syonan, who attended the opening ceremony.

Preparatory Institute For Medicos Opened

A SIMPLE and yet impressive ceremony, having a considerable bearing on the future of medicine in Syonan, was performed Monday afternoon with the opening of the *Marei Bunka Kenkyu-Jo* (Malay Cultural Institute) in Jalan Sultan by Deputy Mayor K. Toyoda.

Fig 4 - Preparatory Institute for Medicos Opened (Syonan Times, 25 November 1942: 4)

Scholarships in medicine

"The Negri Sembilan Government intends to grant scholarships to students to the Syonan Medical College which opens in April. The scholarships will be for three courses - medicine, dentistry and pharmacy ... After graduation the candidates will be required to serve in the N.S. Government for at least four years"⁽⁸⁾.

Medical college admission, special particulars stressed

The above was reported in the *Syonan Shimbun*, 9 April 1943⁽⁹⁾ (Fig 5). "An official news release draws special attention of applications for admission into the newly established *Syonan* Medical College ...

Medical College Admission, Special Particulars Stressed

AN OFFICIAL news release draws special attention of applicants for admission into the newly established Syonan Medical College to the following particulars:

The Institution is not open for students in general. No scholarship system is provided by Gunseikan-bu (Military Administration Department).

Applicants are restricted to the students of the former King Edward VII Medical College (first, second and third year grade students of the various courses, first year girl students excepted), and they are required to send in their applications immediately to the Chief of the Sanitary Department of the Gunseikan-bu, and to be present at this Department on Apr. 16, at 10 a.m. for a test in Nippon-Go character and physique.

Fig 5 - Medical College Admission, Special Particulars Stressed (Syonan Shimbun, 9 April 2603: 1)

Syonan Medical College Reopening On Apr. 27

THE SYONAN Medical College which has been established by the Gunseikanbu (Military Administration Department) will formally begin its session on Apr. 27 when opening ceremonies will be held.

The College has been established to provide facilities for those who desire to study medicine. Many applications have already been made to the authorities for admission to the College.

The entrance examination for admission to the college will be held on Apr. 16 at 10 a.m.

Fig 6 - Syonan Medical College Reopening on April 27 (Syonan Shimbun, 14 April 2603: 1)

The Syonan Shimbun

Medical Students To Be Paid Monthly Allowance Of \$50

YET ANOTHER step was taken for the welfare of the local inhabitants when the Military Administration decided on Monday to provide all the students at the Syonan Medical College with a monthly allowance of \$50 each to meet their expenses and to house them in a dormitory free of charge, says Domei.

As a means of extending relief to students of the former King Edward VII College of Medicine, the Nippon authorities on April 25 this year admitted a number of those who wished to continue their study to a second-year class at the College and took in an additional 100 in the first-year class.

It is understood that the customs and traditions of the local youths will be strictly respected but they will be taught, on the other hand, various Nippon ways at the dormitory in order to give them training in their daily life as well.

The authorities also plan to expand the scope of education eventually, and have taken steps to bring additional professors from Nippon shortly to take charge of physics, chemistry, biology, ethics, and other departments at the institution.

Fig 7 - Medical Students to be Paid Monthly Allowance of \$50 (Syonan Shimbun, 15 September 2603: 2)

Applicants are restricted to the students of the former King Edward VII College (first, second and third year grade students of the various courses), first year girl students accepted and they are required to ... to be present on April 16 at 10 am for a test in *Nippon-go* character and physique⁽⁹⁾.

Syonan Medical College reopening on April 22

This was reported in the Syonan Shimbun, 14 April 2603⁽¹⁰⁾ (Fig 6). "The Syonan Medical College which has been established by the *Gunseikanbu* (Military Administration Department) will formally begin its session of April 27 when opening ceremonies will be held ... "⁽¹⁰⁾.

Medical students to be paid monthly allowance of \$50

The *Syonan Shimbun* on 15 September 2603 reported the above. "Yet another step was taken for the welfare of the local inhabitants when the Military Administration decided on Monday ... to provide all the students at the Syonan Medical College with a monthly allowance of \$50 each to meet their expenses and to house them in a dormitory free of charge, says Domei ..." (Fig 7)⁽¹¹⁾.

Site of the Syonan Medical College

To the students who attended the above, it was known as *The Marei Ika Daigaku*^(12,13) although The Syonan Medical College was the name mentioned in all the reports in *The Syonan Shimbun*⁽⁹⁻¹¹⁾.

From its inception on 27 April 2603 (1943) to February 2604 (1944) the Syonan Medical College (SMC) was housed in Tan Tock Seng Hospital. It relocated to the General Hospital Malacca in February 2604⁽¹⁴⁾.

One of the pavilion wards in TTSH (Ward 1) was used as the classroom (Fig 8) while similar wards (2-5) were used as dormitories.

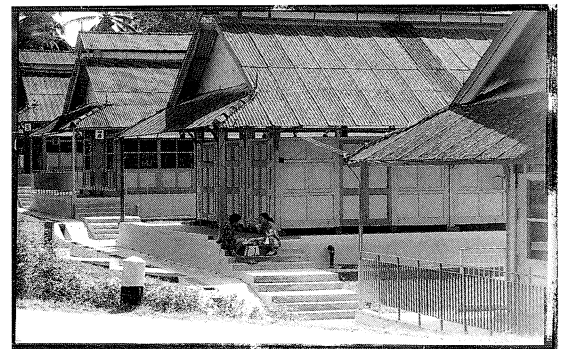


Fig 8 - The pavilion wards in Tan Tock Seng Hospital; Ward 1 served as a classroom while wards 2 to 5 were dormitories for the Syonan Medical College. (Photograph courtesy of Mr David SP Lee).

The Japanese teachers of the SMC lived in the house shown in Fig 9; after the Japanese Occupation, it was the residence of Professor Gordon Arthur Ransome and was subsequently the office of the medical superintendent, TTSH, before it was demolished⁽¹⁵⁾. During the Japanese Occupation, TTSH was renamed the *Hakuai Byoin* and was the main civilian hospital^(1,2); Dr Benjamin Chew lived in a terrace house opposite the house shown in Fig 9^(15,16).

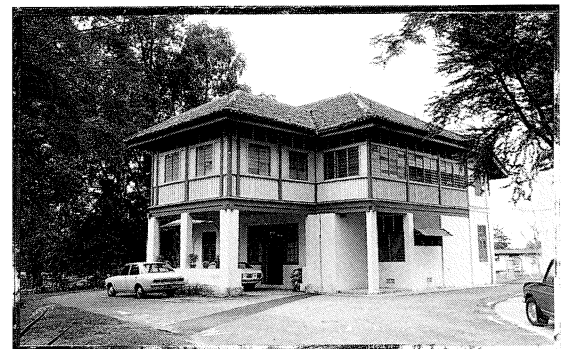


Fig 9 - The bungalow in TTSH where the Japanese teachers of the Syonan Medical College lived; it has been demolished. (Photograph courtesy of Mr David SP Lee).

Life at the *Syonan Medical College (Marei Ika Daigaku)*

"All former students of the King Edward VII College of Medicine were accepted, and a total of about 200 students became *Ika Daigakusei* (medical students), 100 from Malaya and Singapore and 100 from Indonesia, nearly all Sumatrans" (GT)⁽¹²⁾. The number of students recalled George Tay⁽¹²⁾ was in agreement with the estimation of Chee Phui Hung⁽¹⁷⁾, Wong Cho Fatt⁽¹⁸⁾ and Abdul Wahab⁽¹⁹⁾ although the number was smaller than the estimation of Dick Hu⁽¹³⁾.

"On opening day, we were assembled in the open ground which now houses the Outpatients' Department of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital. We were told that we were privileged to have been chosen as the first batch of students; we were to work hard and justify their faith in us; the health of the peoples of Malaya and Indonesia was our responsibility" (GT)⁽¹²⁾.

"Initially there were only two teachers - a primary school teacher called Ozaki and a physical instructor called Kameyama. It was made clear to us that we had to be proficient in the Japanese language because it was to be the medium of instruction. They also believed in *mens sana in corpore sano*; Kameyama would see to it" (GT)⁽¹²⁾.

"Ozaki taught us Japanese from scratch, using no English or Malay. It was obvious to us that he was a primary school teacher, who came from farming stock. He was always talking of rice-fields and farm animals and hardly ever mentioned the big cities. At the end of six months, we could converse fairly fluently in Japanese and write *Katakana*, *Hiragana* and even a few *Kanji* characters" (GT)⁽¹²⁾.

"Whilst we did not learn anything pertaining to medicine, we learnt to sing the *Uni Yu Ka Ba* and the *Kimigayo*, and how to bow deeply in the direction of the Imperial Palace before we did our physical exercises ... There were lessons in *Nippon Seishin* (or the Japanese Spirit) given by a cantankerous colonel from the Army. We were taught the code of *Bushido*, the virtues of self-sacrifice and bravery, and most important of all, that it was an honour to lay down one's life for the Emperor..."⁽¹²⁾.

"We lived in dormitories that used to be the free wards of the pre-war Tan Tock Seng Hospital. It was very spartan but at least there was a bed to rest our weary limbs after the physical exercises and the carrying of concrete blocks. We had to spend an hour or so everyday after dinner in study - *Nippon-go* and *Nippon Seishin*.

Those of us who joined the *Marei Ika Daigaku*, as it was called, knew the score - we were not going to learn much medicine but it was better than being conscripted and sent to Thailand to work on the Death Railway"⁽¹²⁾.

"... We were taught the Japanese alphabets (*ah*, *ee*, *oo*, *eh*, *oh* etc) by a lone teacher who apparently, could not speak any English. Next, he taught us words, explaining each word in Japanese only. Those of us who had picked up some knowledge of Japanese either through self-tuition or attending

classes could understand him to a certain extent but I think most of the students could not understand him. We were free to go out when there were no lessons but every night around 10pm, there was a roll call ..." (Dick Hu)⁽¹³⁾.

"At the *Ika Daigaku* ... we were taught how to *kow-tow* to the teachers, sing their national anthem in the morning, and of course learn their language. We liked learning Japanese *Katakana*, *Hiragana* and *Kanji* but what we hated was the laborious job of levelling the sloping piece of land in front of the wards. After a week or two, the students were told that if they liked they could go outside to study the *Ika Daigaku* - the Singaporeans were already allowed to live at their own homes but we outsiders, (non-Singaporeans) had to rent a house somewhere at our own expense ... On looking back, I think my time at the *Ika Daigaku* was worth it as I did learn some Japanese from our teachers there ..." (Omar bin Din)⁽²⁰⁾.

The *Marei Ika Daigaku (Syonan Medical College)* moved to the General Hospital, Malacca in 2604 (1944)

The *Marei Ika Daigaku* (Syonan Medical College) was located at TTSH from 27 April 2605 (1943) to February 2604. In February 2604 (the exact date is not known), it shifted to the General Hospital, Malacca⁽¹⁴⁾. The *Ika Daigaku* in Malacca will be described in detail in a separate paper.

"After (ten) months at TTSH, the authorities decided to transfer the *Marei Ika Daigaku* lock, stock and barrel to Malacca: they said there might be more raids by the Americans and they did not want any harm to befall the *Isha no Tamago* (embryo doctor) as they called us"⁽¹²⁾.

"After a few months in Singapore, we were all transferred to the General Hospital, Malacca ..." (13).

CONCLUSION

During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942 to 1945), Singapore was renamed *Syonan* or *Syonanto*. The Japanese established the Medical College in April 1943 and it was called The *Marei Ika Daigaku* or Syonan Medical College. It was located at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. In February 1944, the *Marei Ika Daigaku* relocated to the General Hospital, Malacca; it functioned at the Malacca General Hospital till the end of the Japanese Occupation in September 1945.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Dr Chee Phui Hung, who first told me of the existence of the *Marei Ika Daigaku* (Syonan Medical College). He knew because he attended the *Ika Daigaku* at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and at the Malacca General Hospital. I am also grateful to the other students of the *Ika Daigaku*: Drs Dick Hu Wei Hsien, Omar bin Din, George Tay and Abdul Wahab and Mr Wong Cho Fatt. Mr David SP Lee supplied the photographs shown in Figs 8 & 9.

Notes on terminology and spelling

All the students who attended the Medical College in *Syonan* referred to it as the *Marei Ika Daigaku* (or *Ika Daigaku*) but the *Syonan Times* (*Shimbun*) referred to it as The *Syonan Medical College* and once as The *Malai Ika Daigaku*. *Marei* (Malay) or *Malai* is the spelling used in the *Syonan Shimbun* while G Tay spelled it as *Marai*. *Ika Daigaku* (Medical University) may also be written as one word (*Ikadaigaku*).

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