

# The Malai Ika Daigaku (Syonan Medical College) in Malacca (1944 to 1945) During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and Malaya

J S Cheah, G Tay

## ABSTRACT

During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and Malaya (1941 - 1945), Singapore was renamed *Syonan* (or *Syonanto*) and Malaya was called *Malai* (or *Marai*; *Marei*). On 27 April 2603 (1943) the Japanese Military Administration established The *Marai Ika Daigaku* (Syonan Medical College) at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (*Hakuai Byoin*), *Syonan*. The Medical College shifted to the General Hospital, Malacca in February 2604 (1944) where it functioned till the end of the Japanese Occupation in September 2605 (1945).

## INTRODUCTION

During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and Malaya (1941 to 1945), Singapore was renamed *Syonan* (or *Syonanto*) while Malaya was called *Malai* (also spelt as *Marai* or *Marei*<sup>(1,2)</sup>). On April 27, 2603 (1943), the Japanese Military Administration established a Medical College in *Syonan*: it was called the *Marai Ika Daigaku* or *Syonan Medical College* and it was sited at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (*Hakuai Byoin*)<sup>(3)</sup>. The *Malai Ikadaigaku* (Medical College) shifted to the General Hospital, Malacca (Fig 1) in February 2604 (1944) where it functioned till the end of the Japanese Occupation (September 1945)<sup>(3)</sup>.

The existence of the *Ikadaigaku* (Medical College) at the Malacca General Hospital is known mainly to those who attended it; after the Japanese Occupation, the only written reference that could be found was written by Dr R B MacGreggor (Director, Medical Services, report of the Medical Department, Malayan Union, for the year 1946<sup>(4)</sup>).

The senior author (G Tay) attended The *Marai Ika Daigaku* (The Syonan Medical College) in *Syonan* and Malacca and his recollections are quoted verbatim where appropriate<sup>(5)</sup>.

Dr Chee Phui Hung was also at *Malai Ika Daigaku* at the Malacca General Hospital and he also gave detailed verbal description of its existence and functions<sup>(6)</sup>.

### The *Ika Daigaku* shifted from *Syonan* to Malacca

In February 2604 (1944)<sup>(4)</sup>, The Military Administration in *Syonan* shifted the *Ikadaigaku* from the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in Singapore (*Syonan*) to the General Hospital in Malacca (Fig 1).



Fig 1 - The *Marai Ikadaigaku* was in The General Hospital, Malacca from 2604 to 2605 (1944 - 1945).

"After ten months at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the authorities decided to transfer the *Marai Ikadaigaku* 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 doctors) as they called us." (G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>

"After a few months in Singapore, we were all transferred to General Hospital Malacca. Lorry transport was provided." (Dick Hu)<sup>(7)</sup>

Some of the students at the *Ikadaigaku* at TTSH (*Hakuai Byoin*), *Syonan*, did not shift to Malacca; instead they returned to their hometown in *Malai*: Abdul Wahab<sup>(6)</sup> returned to Penang while Omar bin Din<sup>(9)</sup> and Abu Bakar Ibrahim<sup>(9)</sup> returned to Alor Star (Kedah).

### The *Ika Daigaku* at the Malacca General Hospital

"Sometime in February 1944, the Singapore Medical College moved its headquarters to Malacca and the hospital which was formerly known as the State Hospital, now became the College Hospital."<sup>(4)</sup> The whole of "C" Block (Fig 2) was utilised for college activities, "B" Block being the hostel (Fig 3)<sup>(4)</sup>.

### Enrollment for the *Malai Ika Daigaku* in Malacca

The above was published in The *Syonan Shimibun* on April 19, 2605 (1945) (Fig 4)<sup>(10)</sup>.

### Life at the *Marai Ika Daigaku* in Malacca

"In Malacca we were housed in one block of the Malacca General Hospital; they continued to teach

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**Fig 2** - "C" Block, Malacca General Hospital was utilised for College activities of the *Malai Ikadaigaku*.



**Fig 3** - "B" Block, Malacca General Hospital was used as a hostel of the *Malai Ikadaigaku*.

us the Japanese language as well as Mathematics, Biology and Japanese culture (*Nippon Bunka*). The culture bit was taught by an Arts graduate of Tokyo Imperial University. He was an out-and-out communist who, before commencing his lessons, always gave us a summary of the latest news from All India Radio or the Voice of America. He was quite convinced that without Russia, The Allies would never win the war. Whatever his political convictions were, he was a true gentleman - both in his dealings with us and the other teachers, with whom he did not mix. After the surrender, he disappeared into the Malayan jungles and nothing more was heard of him." (G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>

"After three months or so, we were promoted to the second year, where they taught us Anatomy and Physiology in Japanese. Anatomy was taught by a surgeon, Keigo Shima, who became a Professor of Orthopaedics in Sapporo post-war and who passed away in early 1974. Keigo Shima was a true gentleman and an excellent surgeon. He would give his own spinal anaesthetics, ask somebody to monitor pulse and blood pressure, and perform appendectomies and haemorrhoidectomies. He had a neat pair of hands and it was a pleasure watching him operate. Keigo Shima also had a wry sense of humour. When he encountered one of the students with a nurse at the mortuary entrance in the late evening, he shone his torch to identify the student and said in Japanese: "Even in such a place." He walked off and the matter ended there." (G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>.

"We also had our share of nasties. Outstanding in my memory was Matsunaga who looked so simian that we called him 23, the number for monkey in the 36 number lottery. One day he found out about 23 and some poor Indonesian students were given the beating of their lives." (G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>

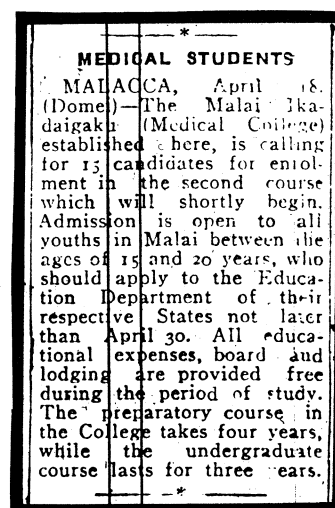
"There was also an ophthalmic surgeon, who was fairly handsome and believed he was God's answer to the many pretty nurses we had. If ever he caught

anyone of us talking to a pretty nurse, he would call us up to his room and give us a long lecture on our responsibilities as future leaders of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In short, we had to lay off the nurses until we graduated!

The pharmacist who taught us about drugs at least had his priorities right. He dwelt at length on the pharmacology of quinine and emetine which were quite topical, as malaria and amoebiasis were fairly rampant. We were also taken to a village near Tanjong Kling where yaws was endemic; we saw how efficacious neo-arsphenamine was in its treatment.

We also had a young Japanese matron, very good looking but somewhat chubby. She was full of the *joie de vivre*, and her greatest joy was to teach us how to make rice-cakes. We enjoyed her company but not the rice-cakes!

The 'grow more food' campaign was already in full swing then, and we had to clear a plot of rubber



**Fig 4** - Call for enrollment at the *Malai Ikadaigaku* in the *Syonan Shimbun*, April 19, 2605 (1945).

trees next to the hospital and grow tapioca which was our staple food then. When we had finished this job - it took us about eight Sundays - we were taken to the site of the present airport in Malacca and our task was to clear the dense forest (as it was then), so that it could be used as a landing strip for their small aircraft.”(G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>

“We spent some time going round Malacca on our off days. We visited the Portuguese settlement in Bandar Hilir, where the descendants of the Portuguese invaders lived. They spoke a quaint type of Portuguese which I was told dated back to the 15th century. We knew St John’s Hill fairly well - it was here that the Portuguese fought the Dutch. We went to Bukit China, the residence of the Chinese ladies brought over by the eunuch Admiral Cheng Ho for the Sultan of Malacca in the 15th century. We knew every inch of Heeren Street as it was then known, and wondered at the length of the houses where the rich Babas lived. We went to Tanjong Kling on Mandi Safar Day; some of us even did the long journey on bullock carts.” (G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>

“Sometime in July 1945, our culture teacher was looking worried and withdrawing more to himself. He asked me to dinner, when he told me that the time was near, and Japan would have to surrender. Perhaps, he said, we would never meet again; he bade me *sayonara* and told me to forget what he had told me.

I returned to Singapore some two weeks before the surrender, and I did not know what happened in Malacca at the time of surrender.”(G Tay)<sup>(5)</sup>

“After a few months in Singapore, we were all transferred to the General Hospital, Malacca. Lorry transport was provided. There, we stayed in better dormitories converted from the wards. Every morning at 8, those of us who were still asleep would be awakened by the roll of a big drum sounded by the jaga. It was the call for the morning roll call! We would hurriedly put on our uniforms and rushed to the roll call ground a short distance away. Many of us wore wooden sandals and the noise made by them on the cement floor and stairs was deafening. At roll call, we had to sing the Japanese Anthem (*Kimigayo*) and did some free hand exercises after that. It was called “*rajio taiso*” (radio exercise) because the timing was provided by the radio.

Some Indonesian students from Sumatra joined us in Malacca. Most of them could not speak English and we all could not speak Japanese well; so we were not very friendly with them. We only befriended those who could speak some English.

We had a few teachers in Malacca who taught us school subjects like Mathematics, History and Geography, all in Japanese; so we could hardly follow the lessons.

We were given three meals a day. The bread was rubbery in consistency, so we used to joke that we could bounce it on the floor. For lunch and dinner, we had plenty of rice with a little bit of vegetable but hardly any meat or fish. Many of us supplemented our undernourished meals with food bought from outside. We were given a small sum of money every week plus a packet of Koa cigarettes (20’s) which we could sell for money, much more than our pocket money.

When the surrender was published, we were given a last farewell talk by the Principal. I wish I could understand exactly what he said.”(Dick Hu)<sup>(7)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The *Malai Ikadaigaku* (Syonan Medical College) was established at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (*Hakuai Byoin*), Syonan, on 27 April 2603 (1943) by the Japanese Military Administration. It was shifted to the General Hospital, Malacca in February 2604 where it functioned till the end of the Japanese Occupation in September 1945.

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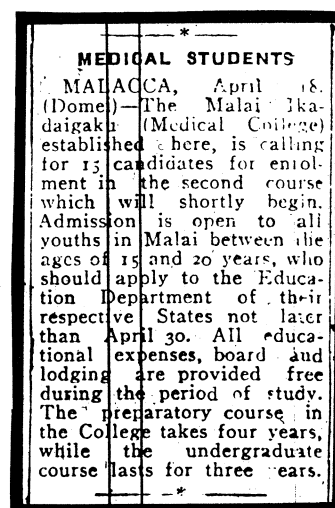
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