

Sir Patrick Manson: good medicine for the people of Hong Kong

Born on 3 October 1844 in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Sir Patrick Manson (Fig) was the second child in a family with nine children. After an attempt at an ironmaster's apprenticeship failed due to illness, Manson focused his attention on medicine, graduating from Aberdeen University, with the degrees MB, CM, and MD in 1865 and 1866. Soon after qualification, he became a medical officer and worked in China for the Imperial Maritime Customs, firstly in Formosa for 5 years, then a further 13 years in Amoy, and finally for a private practice in Hong Kong from 1883 to 1889, before returning to London where he achieved much in the research of tropical medicine.

More than 80 years since Manson's death on 9 April 1922, many of the renowned parasitologist's contributions to the field of tropical medicine are still remembered and highly respected. Rightfully dubbed the 'father of tropical medicine', Manson played a central role in elaborating the pathogenesis of filariasis and advocating novel surgical treatment for disfiguring elephantiasis. Manson's critical observations of malarial infection would eventually lead the future Nobel laureate Sir Ronald Ross to his elucidation of the malarial life cycle. Whereas many are familiar with Manson's key role in the founding of the London School of Tropical Medicine, few are knowledgeable of his pivotal role in the establishment of the former Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, a predecessor of the University of Hong Kong Faculty of Medicine.

From 1841 when Great Britain occupied Hong Kong to 1883, when Manson arrived in Hong Kong, the population had increased from approximately 2000 to 180 000. The provision of medical services was not able to keep pace with the expansive growth of the population, and was therefore inadequate for the citizens of Hong Kong. The Tung Wah Hospital was viewed as a substandard facility that concentrated on traditional Chinese medicine and avoided modern western medicine, whereas the Government Civil Hospital was regarded as a foreign facility staffed by European practitioners. To alleviate the depressing situation, it was recognised that free public hospitals were needed to provide a comprehensive system of territory-wide health care. In fact, an attempt to advance western medicine in Hong Kong had been mooted in the early 1840s.

In 1842, William Lockhart was entrusted by the London Missionary Society to build a hospital, although it was Benjamin Hobson who managed to move the missionary hospital in Macao to Hong Kong (on Morrison Hill) in 1843, and Dr HJ Hirshberg who eventually set up a dispensary in Kowloon. Their work came to an abrupt halt with the transfer of Hobson to Guangzhou in 1848 and Hirshberg to Xiamen in 1853. Nevertheless, after a lapse of 28 years, the mission was again revived by Mr HW Davis, a partner



Fig. Sir Patrick Manson, GCMG, MD, FRS, FRCP, DSc, LL.D, a founder of the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, and Dean of College (1887-1889)

(Picture from the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene)

from the accounting firm of Linstead and Davis. Under the initiative of a committee chaired by Davis, the Nethersole Dispensary, a medical mission dispensary named after Mr Davis's mother, was opened by Dr William Young in 1881 in the Tai Ping Shan district at the western end of Hong Kong island where living conditions were appalling and carried a constant threat of epidemic. The immediate success of this new dispensary laid the foundation for the establishment of a new hospital whose intent was "mainly to serve Chinese".¹ Western medicine was thus beginning to find acceptance among local Chinese people.

The establishment of the new hospital, under the aegis of the London Missionary Society, was pursued with great zeal with the Society's contribution of HK\$14 000 and local philanthropist, Mr ER Belilios's donation of HK\$5000.² However, it was Manson's enthusiasm and commitment that made possible the new hospital's erection, especially in securing land for the premises. Manson was crucial in recruiting Sir Ho Kai, a fellow graduate of Aberdeen University, who was a driving force and a significant financial supporter for the building of the hospital. Manson also became the first Chairman of the Hospital Committee when it opened in February 1887. The Alice Memorial Hospital,

named to commemorate Ho's wife, was to serve as one of the major teaching hospitals for students of a newly formed medical school.

Manson's ultimate goal was to establish western medical education in Hong Kong. Within 3 years of his arrival in September 1886, he successfully founded the Hong Kong Medical Society and emerged as President, with the specific aims of introducing the concept of periodic medical publication and addressing the need for medical attention for poor Europeans and Eurasians. Even so, perhaps Manson's greatest contribution to the people of Hong Kong was the establishment of the territory's first medical school, which would be based on the principles and scientific rigours of modern western medicine. Despite his busy private medical practice, Manson addressed the issue of the territory's weak medical infrastructure in order to improve medical care. With the utmost efficiency, he collaborated with Sir James Cantlie, founded the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, and was elected its first Dean on 30 August 1887. The Senate of the new College comprised Cantlie as Secretary, Dr J Chalmers of the Union Church as Chairman, and Dr Frederick Stewart as Rector, as well as Manson. Manson also successfully procured patronage for the medical school from Li Hung Chang, then viceroy of Guangzhou and on whom Manson personally attended. Li's enthusiasm and praise for Manson and his colleagues' endeavours were evidenced in a letter of acceptance of the position of patron.³

TO THE AUTHORITIES OF THE HONGKONG [sic] COLLEGE OF MEDICINE FOR CHINESE

GENTLEMEN,—I am in receipt of your letter informing me that I have had the honour of being elected Patron of your College. I also thank you for your desire to perpetuate my name on your College walls.

I wish every success to your benevolent design. I learn that there are between 20 and 30 students in the College studying medicine, and consider it most proper that they should also pay attention to the sister subject of chemistry and understand how to compound and how to analyse, thus ensuring greater accuracy in the diagnosis of disease and the preparation of remedies.

I remark that your countrymen devote themselves to practical research and base their scientific principles on the results of investigations, thus differing from those who rest content with theories.

The happy results which ever attend the treatment of disease on scientific principles are evidence of the advantage to be derived from the constant study of anatomy and chemistry and the consequent illumination of the dark path of knowledge.

There is no doubt that when your admirable project is achieved it will be appreciated and imitated, and that it will, through your students, be a blessing to China.

Trusting that you will prosecute your scheme with unflinching energy, and wishing you my compliments, I subscribe myself on the accompanying card,
(Sgd.) LI HUNG CHANG.³

And so, it is from this modest start as a medical school for Chinese that the present-day University of Hong Kong Faculty of Medicine came into being. The Faculty of Medicine now boasts 17 departments, including Anaesthesiology, Anatomy, Biochemistry, Clinical Oncology, Community Medicine, Diagnostic Radiology, Medicine, Microbiology, Nursing Studies, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Orthopaedic Surgery, Paediatrics, Pathology, Pharmacology, Physiology, Psychiatry, and Surgery.

In his address to the Hong Kong community, at the inauguration ceremony for the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese on 1 October 1887, Manson suggested that the College would be an opportunity for Hong Kong "to become a centre and distributor, not for merchandise only, but also for science".³ Manson added, "The old Greek cities used to boast of their great men, and claim them with jealous care. Let us hope that in the new and greater China of the future, when the learned dispute of their great men, not a few may be claimed for Hongkong [sic] and for the school to-day [sic] inaugurated".³ One of such great men was Dr Sun Yat Sen, who was awarded the College's first diploma in July 1892 with high distinction, although his greatness alluded not to the science of medicine but to his role as the founder of the Republic of China. In his reply to a toast to the first licentiates during the dinner given by Dean Cantlie, Sun advocated the College to thrive "not only for ourselves but for everyone in Hong Kong".⁴

Manson's contributions to advancing medicine and health care in Hong Kong were not limited to founding the medical school. He was a leading practitioner in the colony. He served on the Sanitary Board, proposing measures to control infectious diseases, reduce overcrowding, clear the slums, and protect food and the water supply. He assumed a proactive role in the community, advocating the establishment of a dairy farm for the regular supply of fresh milk for children and ill people (albeit only for the European community), as well as actively criticising unsound medical practice such as the wasteful use of quinine for fevers inaccurately diagnosed as malarial in origin. Indeed, he encompassed the roles of physician, scientist, and administrator. In recognition of his work in Hong Kong and China, in 1886, Aberdeen University conferred on him the honorary degree of LLD, being the first academic body to show official recognition of his distinguished attainments in science. In 1972, the Sir Patrick Manson Gold Medal was established by the University of Hong Kong to pay tribute to his contributions to medicine and the University. Since its inception, the medal has been awarded to individuals submitting an MD thesis with outstanding merit and serves as a stimulus for the pursuit of excellence in research.

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Further reading

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