

Dr Henry Phillips' graduation certificate from the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, 1906

Faith CS Ho, MD, FHKAM (Pathology)

Education and Research Committee, Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences Society

Unknown to many, of the 128 students who had enrolled at the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese there were at least 19 who came from a foreign country (ie, other than Hong Kong and China) to study medicine in Hong Kong.¹ Dr Henry Phillips (1867-1918), whose certificate is featured in this article, was one of these 19 students. He was born in Jaffna, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and finished his secondary schooling there. He entered the College in 1903 and was allowed to follow a shortened curriculum of only 3 years, with eligibility for the diploma of the College provided he passed all his professional examinations.² This was because

he had worked as a medical dresser in a hospital in the Federated Malay States for 12 years prior to coming to Hong Kong, as was clearly written on his graduation certificate, dated 1906 (Fig 1). Among the overseas students, 13 came from Asian countries that were, at that time, part of the British Empire, including Singapore, Malacca and Penang, forming parts of the Straits Settlements, Burma, Ceylon, and India. Only one student had come from the Philippines, which was not part of the empire, and four had come from the United States, all four of whom were of Chinese descent. It is not surprising to note that the students all came from countries

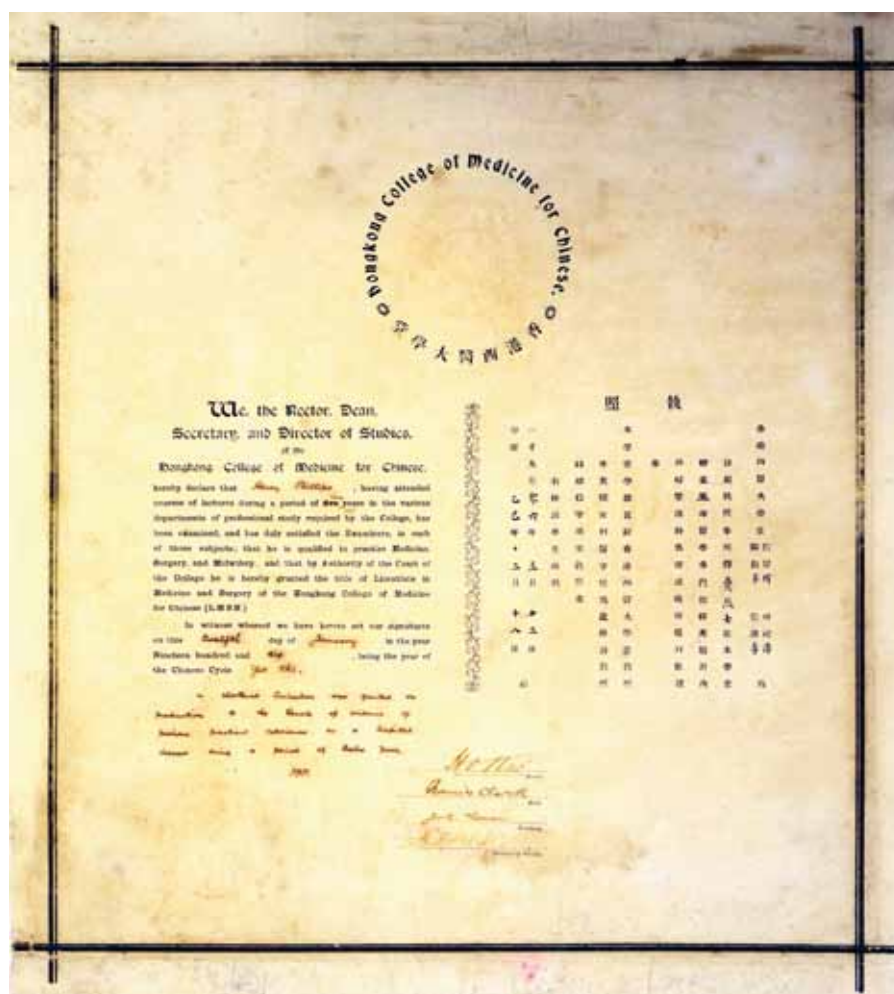


FIG 1. Original Certificate of Dr Henry Phillips on graduation from the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, 1906. Donated by his grandson, Dr Mano Arumanayagam to the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences Society in 2000



FIG 2. Dr Henry Phillips in his later years (Photo courtesy of Dr Mano Arumanayagam)

that were English speaking, since the course at the College was taught in English.

It may seem something of an anomaly that a person from Ceylon should seek to enter the College, which was so far from his home. We do not know what had attracted him to the Malay states to work as a hospital dresser, but he might have been interested in a medical career all along. Although a Ceylon Medical College had already been in existence since 1880 in Colombo, there was no medical school in the Federated Malay States where he was working. In fact, Phillips was the only person from Ceylon who came to study at the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese. When he graduated, the College still had the words 'for Chinese' attached to its name, as shown in his certificate, but a few months later, these words 'for Chinese' were dropped when the College was incorporated. This was considered more appropriate as there were a growing number of non-Chinese students entering the College. Thereafter, the College was known as just the 'Hong Kong College of Medicine' (HKCM).

After graduation, Dr Phillips returned to Malaya, and started his practice as a doctor among the rubber plantations in the small town of Kuala Kubu Baru in Selangor, about 70 km north of Kuala Lumpur. Quite a few graduates from the HKCM of this early period had also found employment in the

different parts of the Malay States. The Malay States did not have a medical school at the time; therefore, the graduates from the HKCM were highly sought after.

Dr Phillips' graduation certificate was kindly donated in 2000 to the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences Society by his grandson, Dr Mano Arumanayagam, who worked in Hong Kong as an Associate Professor in the Department of Chemical Pathology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. From the information given to the author during an interview with the donor, Dr Phillips had died at a relatively young age from cirrhosis of the liver, which was believed to have been due to over-consumption of alcohol.³ His widow, who was 20 years younger, then returned to Ceylon with their young son. Figure 2 shows a photograph of Dr Phillips during the period when he was practising in Selangor.

The Certificate has been preserved moderately well, but the circular crest of the HKCM, which was printed in red ink, has unfortunately been rendered barely visible over time. Fortunately, most of the words which were hand-written in ink are still legible, and Chinese characters written with brush and Chinese ink are well preserved. The design of the certificate is somewhat simpler compared with those of the earlier period, as it was signed by only four members of the staff of the HKCM instead of all the teachers and examiners. The signatories are Dr Ho Kai, who as Deputy Rector was signing on behalf of the Rector, Sir Henry May; Dr Francis Clark as Dean; Dr John C Thomson as Secretary of the HKCM, and Dr IE Mitchell as Director of Studies. Dr Mitchell was a medical missionary working at the Alice Memorial and its affiliated Hospitals at the time, and therefore supervised the practical work of the students in the hospitals. The position of 'secretary' would be equivalent to the Registrar nowadays, and the 'rector' would be equivalent to the Chairman of the Presiding Council, the supervisory body.

One interesting aspect of the certificate lies in the Chinese name used for the HKCM. In other historical documents and archival records, the name of the HKCM has been translated as 「香港西醫書院」, and this was also the Chinese name used in the earliest certificates including that of Kwan King Leung, which is now still well preserved. In the case of Dr Phillips' certificate, the words 「香港西醫大學堂」 are used, indicating an acknowledgement of the status of the HKCM as being equivalent to that of a university. Indeed, this became the actual state of affairs 6 years later in 1912, when the HKCM was subsumed into the new University of Hong Kong as its medical faculty. The words, 「大學堂」 were commonly applied to Hong Kong's sole university in its early days and persisted even after 1963 when the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong's second university, was established by ordinance.

The Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences is fortunate to have within its collections this original graduation certificate awarded by the HKCM, as there were only 51 graduates of the HKCM who were granted the qualification LMSH, ie, Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery of the Hong Kong College of Medicine (for Chinese). Few other examples of the original LMSH certificates are known to exist and are available for public display; they include that of Kwan King Leung (LMSH 1893) now in the possession of the Sun Yat-sen Museum in Hong Kong, and that of Ho Ko-tsun (LMSH 1901) now in the possession of the University of Hong Kong Archives. The status of the original certificate of the HKCM's most famous graduate, Sun Yat-sen, is not known, although a copy was said to have graced the entrance lobby of the Anatomy and Physiology Building of The University of Hong Kong in pre-World War II days.⁴ The whereabouts of even this copy cannot now be traced. Through the generosity of Dr Phillips' family, a replica of this graduation certificate of Dr Henry Phillips is now on display in the Alice Ho Miu Ling Charitable Foundation Gallery of the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences for all to study and enjoy.

References

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