

BOOK REVIEW**“FROM THE ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE: CENTENARY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION 1905-2005. THENCE-NOW-HENCE”**

Editor: Lim Kuang Hui

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During the year 2005-2006, the National University of Singapore celebrates the centennial of tertiary education in Singapore. Strictly speaking, this year marks the centenary of the founding of the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School. This school was renamed the King Edward VII Medical School in 1913, and the King Edward VII College of Medicine in 1921. In 1949, the medical college combined with the Raffles College of arts and sciences (established in 1929) to form the University of Malaya, which is the predecessor of both the Universiti Malaya and the National University of Singapore (NUS).

It is entirely fitting that the Medical Faculties of these universities have chosen to commemorate their joint centenary with the publication, spearheaded by the Alumni Association, of a large volume “from the Alumni perspective”. In addition, the NUS Medical Faculty has published an official “coffee table” book, *To Sail Uncharted Seas*, which complements the volume under review. While both books provide valuable and fresh accounts and insights, the Alumni volume is more wide-ranging, as it not only presents glimpses of notable medical alumni but also extends its coverage to dental and pharmacy graduates, who once formed part of the Medical College but now belong to separate faculties.

Of course, the main themes are fairly well-known, and much of the material has been extracted and compiled from university, faculty, and especially alumni publications. The distinctive contribution of this book is to draw together different threads, and to weave them into a rich tapestry of nostalgic recollections, serious reflection, and proactive resolution for the benefit of current alumni and the next generation. Readers will find pleasant surprises awaiting them in its pages.

The book is replete with examples of alumni who have made vital and varied contributions to their profession and healthcare services, as well as to wider social, economic and political development in Malaysia, Singapore and elsewhere. They certainly lived up to the Alumni Association's motto (proposed by my late father Dr Benjamin Chew and Dr Leo da Silva), “Not to be ministered unto, but to minister”. This tradition began with the first batch of medical graduates, which included the social reformer Dr Chen Su Lan (who later became the first President of the Alumni Association), and it has continued – through two World Wars and the emergence of two new nation-states – to the present, with the recent despatch of public-spirited medical missions from Malaysia and Singapore to their tsunami-stricken neighbours, including Indonesia and Sri Lanka (which are described in the book).

Given the constraints of time and space, the editor Dr Lim Kuang Hui and his committee have produced a judicious selection of accounts and anecdotes in a one-stop reference volume. Their labour of love places all alumni and other readers in their debt. To be sure, there are some minor defects in this book, such as the long and vague title, the occasional repetition and overlap, and the absence of an index. Hopefully, the absence of the index will “hence” be remedied by a dedicated medical reference librarian.

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