

THE PAUPER HOSPITAL IN EARLY SINGAPORE (PART V) (1860-1873) —Section 1

By Y.K. Lee

A general introduction to the study of the medical history of early Singapore has already been outlined.¹

The history of the Pauper Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital from 1819 to 1829,² 1830 to 1839,³ 1840 to 1849,^{4, 5} and 1850 to 1859^{6, 7} has already been documented.

The condition of the Chinese paupers in early 1860 was much the same as in previous years only their numbers had increased considerably. Nearly all the 200-odd Chinese prisoners in the House of Correction were poor emaciated men sent to jail for vagrancy, larcenies or other petty offences committed for the purpose of getting into prison where they were comparatively comfortable, having known from experience that their ill-health forbade their being put to hard labour. Many were diseased or leprous and were at once sent to the prison hospital. There were 209 under treatment in the temporary attap sheds at Balestier's Plain and it was anticipated that they would soon be moved into the new Tan Tock Seng's Hospital which was nearing completion in the vicinity.⁸

The Senior Surgeon was, however, not quite satisfied with the new buildings. He regretted that there were no verandahs on the outer sides of the wards to prevent rain beating in on the patients; that no plot of land was set apart for the patients to take exercise and to employ their time in growing their own vegetables; that the water supply was inadequate, and that the security measures were poor. "The great difficulty we meet with at present is to prevent the paupers from escaping, and this too with a fence around the compound. In the new buildings, no means whatever have been taken to prevent escape. The patients have only to open the windows and they are free so that we shall have all those who can walk prowling about our streets and thoroughfares completely frustrating the designs of the munificent benefactor who in providing an asylum for his unfortunate countrymen and others, who by infirmity and disease are unable to provide for themselves, no doubt intended to benefit the public at large by clearing our streets of these numerous vagrants who beset one in every direction with their foul and in many cases, leprous sores exposed, a nuisance to the whole community."⁸

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The Chief Engineer was asked for and submitted a report and estimate for a fence and tiled verandahs.⁹ He also assured the Governor that there need be no apprehension about the scarcity of water as there was an abundance in the yards of the two front buildings and in the immediate neighbourhood.¹⁰ He agreed with the Senior Surgeon that verandahs were most essential not only to keep the rain out but also "to greatly abate the early morning and evening glare and heat, which his Honour is most likely aware are now almost unbearable, particularly with the mass of dazzling white exposed to the slanting rays of the sun, and that they will prove an almost inestimable blessing to the hospital inmates. . . . When it is considered how much expense has already been incurred in providing these noble spacious wards, it surely is well worthwhile to make their practical accommodation for the sick and the poor correspond with the imposing exterior."¹¹

The Senior Surgeon kept asking for more:

"The glare from the white walls and sandy compound is insufferable. I would therefore respectfully suggest that turf be laid down throughout the compound and that the walls be re-washed either a yellow or stone colour. Iron bars should be added to the windows to prevent the patients escaping, and covered ways are needed from ward to ward and the outhouses, and if two urinaries were erected to each ward similar to those in the Convict Lines, it would be a great improvement, and I would also recommend that trees be planted all round the premises some 40 feet from the buildings. They would in time be a great protection and tend to keep the wards cool and comfortable."¹²

The second war with China started in 1856 and in 1858 China yielded, but the war was renewed in 1859. In 1860, Great Britain and the Western powers returned with reinforcements. Singapore was an important base in this campaign. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the Chinese paupers as war preparations required amongst other things, medical facilities including base hospitals, and as the new Tan Tock Seng's Hospital was nearing completion in early 1860, it was decided to requisition it for military purposes. Most of the Senior Surgeon's demands were immediately sanctioned. On top of that, more money, time and effort were expended in alterations and additions to make the hospital suitable for the European sick and wounded of the China Expedition.

The Governor wrote to the Resident Councillor and the Assistant Commissary-General in early July:

“ From letters received from Calcutta on Monday, it appears probable we shall be called upon to afford hospital accommodation to such wounded and invalid men from the China Force as may be supposed to derive benefit by the change of air, probably some 200 Europeans.”¹³

“ I have received a letter from the Military Secretary requesting that I will keep Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital available as it is possible that some of the sick of the China Expedition may be sent here. Will you therefore kindly speak to the Committee on the subject at once so that no difficulty may be thrown in the way hereafter when we are about to put any sick into the building. (Compare how the Committee were treated in 1857—see Part IV.)

I am sure under the circumstances the Committee will not object to allowing the Chinese lepers to remain in their present quarters for some little time to come.”¹⁴

The Senior Surgeon was instructed to specify the number of medical subordinates and servants required to attend to the sick and wounded soldiers. He forthwith submitted a list and at the same time offered his services as the senior medical officer of the Hospital:¹⁵

“ . . . It is the same establishment as is allowed in India to a regiment of European Infantry as laid down in the Code of Regulations for the Bengal Medical Establishment. We should require the full establishment as the average sick in hospital in a full regiment seldom amounts to 100, whereas we should have at all times to meet the wants of 200 men. None of the Medical Subordinates can be spared from their duties here as we are already short of our complement by several hands, so that I would suggest that his Honour the Governor should apply to the First Inspector-General of Hospitals, Fort William, so that they may be sent down without delay.

Rank of Subordinate	Number Required
Apothecary	1
Assistant Apothecary	1
Apprentices (or a Second or Assistant Apothecary)	2
Head Compounder	1
Assistant Compounder	1
Head Dresser	1
Assistant Dresser	1
Shop Coolies	2
Steward	1
Apprentice	1
Native Writer	1
Steward’s servants to serve out wine, etc.	2
Bheasties (water carriers)	7
Sweepers	9
Ward Coolies	21

I shall be glad and have already tended my services to the Principal Medical Officer in China, Dr. Muir, to become the Chief Medical Officer of the Hospital, but two Assistant Surgeons will also be required. These doubtless will be sent down from China with the invalids.”

On 13th July 1860, the Governor reported to Bengal that the instructions conveyed in the despatch of 16th June had been carried out. Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital had been commandeered as a military hospital, “an arrangement to which the Committee of Management of the Institution have no objection”. He also requested that the staff asked for by the Senior Surgeon be supplied from Calcutta “as the local department is too small to admit of the services of any of its members being spared, and it is impossible to entertain persons of that description in the Straits. Coolies, sweepers and bheasties can, of course, be obtained when needed.”¹⁶

The wooden bed places in the hospital were removed and replaced by hospital cots specially ordered from Bengal. Green rattan blinds were fixed to the inner verandahs.¹⁷ The Chief Engineer was also instructed to prepare estimates for a suitable bathroom for the sick and for the erection of a Dead House in the vicinity of the hospital. He was also told to convert the Female Ward—“the female ward will be required as a Store Room and should be partitioned off so as to afford separate accommodation for Hospital Stores and Clothing belonging to the Invalids, a portion being reserved as a Reading Room.”¹⁸

The various additions and alterations recommended by the Chief Engineer to adapt the hospital for the reception of European invalids were sanctioned by the Governor except the masonry baths and partition walls in the female ward:¹⁹

“ The extra bathroom accommodation will certainly be needed, but there appears no good reason why the rooms should not be fitted with bathing tubs and slipper baths as prescribed by the Code, clause II, section IV, chapter 20 (instead of with baths of masonry), and with respect to the female ward, as the hospital stores, etc. are to be kept in substantial almeirahs, a wooden partition susceptible to removal when necessary would in his Honour’s opinion be preferable to a brick wall.”

The Chief Engineer was cautioned not to be carried away by his enthusiasm:¹⁹

“ It must be borne in mind that even in the event of European invalids being ever actually accommodated in the Hospital, the arrangement would be merely temporary, and the building must necessarily soon be appropriated to its original purpose.”

The war turned out to be a quick one and by October 1860 it was all over. Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital was not used as a military hospital at all, although it was held available for “the accommoda-

tion of European invalids until the return to Europe and India of the China Expeditionary Force, after which it is to be applied to the purpose for which it was originally intended."²⁰

The runaway patients from the hospital and diseased vagrants continued to fill the wards of the Convict Hospital. A new solution was tried where the Governor immediately remitted the sentences passed by the Magistrate to allow them to be taken straightaway to the Pauper Hospital:²¹

"The Governor under the provisions of Act XVIII of 1855 (Power to grant pardons and relieves and remissions of punishments in India) is pleased to remit the sentence passed by the Sitting Magistrates upon the thirteen prisoners (diseased vagrants), and to direct that they be removed to the Pauper Hospital on Balestier's Estate."

In December 1860, when the Chief Engineer wanted to hand over the new Tan Tock Seng's Hospital to the Senior Surgeon, he declined observing that the buildings could not be occupied as there were no iron bars in the windows and no fence around the hospital.²² He also asked that a special ward for lepers be erected.

This request was approved by the Governor with some modification. "The timber fence has been disallowed because it was considered too costly and would interfere with ventilation, and it would be some years before the bamboo hedge can be impervious to prevent evasion of patients with hospital clothing. Recommend one inch bars of hard wood in sills."²² "His Honour approves of the proposed arrangement for erecting to the left rear of the building of a semi-permanent ward for the accommodation of lepers and offensive cases. This latter ward can be erected with the materials that will be rendered available by the removal of the patients from the present temporary hospital."²³ Before the hospital was taken over by the Medical Department, the hospital cots were removed and replaced by the original sleeping platforms.²³

The staff situation of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital in 1860 excluding the Medical Officer who was not full-time, was one Apothecary, one Dresser, one Toty (scavenger) and eleven Convicts (6 as watchmen, 5 as Burial party).²⁴ The average number of patients was 212. It was also in 1860 that "Rules and Regulations to be observed by Executive Medical Officers serving in the Civil Department of the Straits Settlements" were compiled and brought into force.²⁵ (See Appendix A.)

In February 1861, the Resident Councillor suggested a rather novel means of augmenting the funds of the Hospital.²⁶ It was proposed that the Commissioner of Police should "invite (sic) all parties applying for passes for wayangs, mahjongs and processions of any kind, that they make a free-will offering to this charity which will be duly acknowledged on the face of the permits granted. It is supposed that a sum equal to \$50/- per month will be obtained in this

manner. We have no doubt that the Natives will duly appreciate the charitable motives of the suggestor of this idea, and with their usual liberality on all festive occasions, come forward nobly for the relief of their afflicted countrymen". The Straits Times volunteered to cooperate: "If the Committee will furnish us with a subscription list we will volunteer to circulate it before the Chinese New Year's Holidays are over, fully confident that we may realise a considerable sum."²⁶ Nothing came out of this scheme.

On 16th February 1861, a notice was published in the Straits Times calling a meeting of the Subscribers to Tan Tock Seng's Hospital. "We beg to draw special attention to an advertisement in another column calling a meeting of the Subscribers to this charity at Mr. Whampoa's residence on the Serangoon Road at 6 p.m. on Monday next. We sincerely hope that this third attempt to convene a meeting will be successful."²⁶ Thus wrote the Editor in the same issue in an article on the Hospital.

The proposed meeting was not convened until 28th February at the fourth attempt. The Straits Times reported that Mr. Seah Euchin resigned as Honorary Treasurer and Mr. Whampoa was elected in his place:²⁷

"The Friends and Subscribers to Tan Tock Seng's Hospital met accordingly to appointment at Mr. Whampoa's residence on Tuesday last. The accounts for the past year were presented and a balance of \$30/- in favour of the charity was found on hand. Mr. Seah Euchin, who for the last eight years has officiated as Honorary Treasurer to the charity, resigned and Mr. Whampoa was elected in his stead. The report of the operation of this charity, is, on the whole, very favourable and the gentlemen who have taken an interest in it deserve well of the public. The new hospital is now completed and everything arranged for the comfort of the unfortunate recipients of the public charity."

On 29th June 1861, the patients were removed from the sheds to the new hospital. This was very timely as the sheds had become very dilapidated. The Senior Surgeon had very mixed feelings about this whole operation:²⁸

"The present building is a magnificent hospital but I fear we shall have much difficulty in keeping the dormitories clean and wholesome from the filthy habits of the inmates, nearly all being infirm and emaciated Chinese with their constitutions broken down by opium smoking or some other narcotic. At my last visit, there were 230 patients in the hospital. The grounds have a cheerful appearance and are kept as clean as circumstances will allow. A ward is about to be built in the rear of the buildings for the treatment of leprous and other offensive cases. This when finished and the grounds enclosed will be all that can be desired."

The number of patients increased very rapidly. By 30th September 1861 there were 238 patients. The

hospital wards were crowded and there was shortage of water and clothing.²⁹ By some administrative oversight there was no female nurse in the Female Ward:³⁰

“ Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital is very much crowded and the wards have a most untidy appearance as many of the patients take their meals on the sleeping benches. A short time back, drinking water was very scarce and loud complaints were made in consequence by the patients. It would be as well to sink two or three wells near the hospital. This might be done at a trifling cost as many of the inmates of the asylum might be made to work in removing the earth. . . .”

“ . . . The buildings are in good order, but with such people it is difficult to keep the wards clean, so filthy are the Chinese in their habits. We are much in need of clothing for the patients. I am aware that orders have been given to have it made up so that I hope it may soon be supplied. We have of late been much inconvenienced by the want of a female attendant at the Women’s Ward, their diseases being of that nature that such is indispensable. Dr. Cowpar has suggested that one of the convict women should be attached to the Ward as a nurse. If one could be got to undertake the duty it would be a great blessing to the poor bed-ridden creatures.”

To make matters worse, the Apothecary of the Hospital suffered a stroke a month after the opening of the new hospital and was paralysed. There was no qualified resident staff until October when a First Class Dresser was seconded for duty from Malacca.³¹

The number of diseased paupers in Singapore increased by leaps and bounds, and once again, on 25th January 1862, the Editor of the Straits Times in a leader criticised the Government, expressed disgust at the “trading upon human affliction” and warned of the danger of epidemics introduced and spread by the paupers:³²

“ The great numbers of maimed and diseased paupers that frequent our roads and streets at this time is really alarming and points, we think, either to some weakness in our regulations or to some neglect in their application. We cannot readily believe that the diseases and disfigurements which meet and offend our view at every corner of our public roads are those acquired or suffered in Singapore, and we have the painful conclusion forced upon us that our laws or the administration of them permit the immigration of such unfortunates upon our shores. The conclusion is a painful one in two ways. It is painful because it would lead us to believe that there is such a thing prevalent as the trading upon human affliction. We are told that in the surrounding parts, it is not uncommon for the friends of those who become physically incapable of self-support to pay their passage to this place, thus freeing themselves of the burden by imposing the support

of their helpless relatives upon European charity. Further, that the future attending many of these who have come here as beggars has been such as to make others look upon their diseases and disfigurements as so much trading capital. In the second place, the conclusion that we are made a refuge or haven for such unfortunates is still more painful when we reflect upon what calamity to the place may be or perhaps has been introduced by such an influx. The diseases which daily present themselves as a claim upon our charity are for the greatest part those which have always been accounted contagious, and we cannot but believe that in many cases, disease has been thus conveyed in this place to many originally sound in health. . . .

Such diseases as those which have chiefly come under our notice are not likely to extend to Europeans, but we submit that we should be equally jealous of the sanitary welfare of the lower classes of Chinese and Malays as we are of our own. And independent of the sin of allowing such unwholesome immigration, we are guilty of much gross and culpable neglect in permitting such wretches to crawl at large about the Town and country spreading their diseases as they go. How long the maladies that are everyday imported may continue of a nature to cause no alarm to Europeans, it is of course impossible to say, but it would be expecting too much to suppose that they will always continue so. We may be some day startled from our apathy by the sudden appearance among us of one of those general and fatal epidemics which have before now depopulated whole cities both in Europe and the East. Singapore has been singularly fortunate in this respect heretofore. On this account, let us be grateful but not turn callous and indifferent. Let us by all means in our power jealously preserve that immunity from disease which has been granted to us, and if it should anytime come, we may be at least saved the bitter reflection that it had been provoked by our own carelessness.”

The Editor continued his campaign to frighten the Authorities and public into action to stop the immigration of diseased paupers:³³

“ We should be sorry to alarm the public mind without cause or without an object in view, and unless we wish by so doing to awaken it from an apathy which is dangerous in itself and in its consequences. It was not long ago that we referred in no measured terms to the disgrace as well as to the danger of permitting to be at large, the diseased and disfigured paupers that now wander about our roads and streets. We alluded at the same time to the inadequacies of our regulations to check the influx of disease upon our shores. We said then that though hitherto the maladies and afflictions which were daily imported and met our gaze at every corner, were not of a character that extended themselves to Europeans, yet it was

impossible to say how soon some alarming epidemic might disclose itself that would sweep away the natives and Europeans alike. When we wrote this we certainly did not expect so soon to have our attention directed to something very similar to that we then foreshadowed.

We have known beyond doubt for the last five days that cholera in one of its worst forms has broken out and is now raging with more or less fatality in the thickly populated districts in the northern part of our Town. . . .

Whether cholera at the present moment has been brought among us by unwholesome immigration or whether it is one of those spontaneous and unaccountable outbreaks which are common to all countries and all climates, it is bootless to speculate. . . . It is true that cholera has been here before and has passed away scarcely visiting our European population, but this is no guarantee for our immunity in the future. . . ."

The increase in the number of diseased paupers roaming in the streets was partly contributed to by the inmates of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital who absconded to beg in the Town. This practice was difficult to stop as the convict watchmen of the hospital were bribed and connived to allow the paupers to leave the institution.³⁴

" Dr. Cowpar, the Residency Assistant Surgeon has frequently brought to my notice the difficulty he experiences in keeping the patients within Tan Tock Seng's Hospital, and although doubtless some of the inmates who escape manage to do so by climbing over the walls, his belief is that in the majority of instances, the convict watchmen have connived and for the sake of a small bribe have opened the gates for the exit of the patients. . . . The cost annually to the Hospital for the loss of clothing, the runaway patients invariably departing with their clothes, is very considerable. . . ."

The problem of the convict watchmen was brought to the notice of the Superintendent of Convicts whose solution was to recommend a better class of convicts to serve as watchmen. This would cost the State more as 3rd Class Convicts supplied their services gratuitously whereas 2nd Class men had to be paid.³⁴ This plan was approved by the Governor.

The Senior Surgeon's quarterly reports for 1862 were depressing. He sounded very dejected when he complained of the overcrowding and filthiness of the hospital, the increasing numbers of paupers and their escaping to beg in the streets. He proposed that corporeal punishment should be administered to the escapees (very unbecoming for a medical man however desperate) and reported that new warders had been employed. The only cheerful note was about the Leper Ward which was occupied in early 1862.

"Tan Tock Seng's Hospital"

This is a miserable institution. It is impossible to enforce order or cleanliness amongst the patients. The attendants nearly all being old con-

victs who take no interest whatever in the place. There are 282 patients in the wards, chiefly Chinese with their constitutions destroyed by opium smoking and other pernicious habits. Many of these, the moment the Medical Officer leaves the hospital, escape and prowl about the public thoroughfares exposing their foul sores to excite compassion and extort money. The only way of putting a stop to this great nuisance would be to give each runaway half a dozen strokes with the rattan before sending them back to the Asylum they so ungratefully abuse."³⁵

". . . In much the same state as described in my last report. Steps however have been taken to prevent the paupers from escaping which I hope will be successful. A better class of keepers has been substituted for the former convicts. A large circular tank has been built. Into this good drinking water will be led from the wells in the neighbourhood. This is a desideratum as we have felt of late the want of good water. There are at present 237 paupers in this asylum. . . ."³⁶

The average number of patients increased to 349 during the third quarter³⁷ and 346 during the last quarter, "men most filthy in their habits so that it is next to impossible to keep the place clean or to enforce order amongst them. I would most respectfully suggest that a roomy attap shed be erected at the back of the hospital for the accommodation of all bed-ridden cases as the smell from so many diseased bodies is at times most offensive."³⁸

The Leper Ward report was as follows:

" This building has recently been erected and answers the purpose very well. Here, the arrangement for washing is admirable. A trough runs down the centre of the hospital through which water is led from a well outside the ward so that the poor creatures many of them being unable to walk, can crawl from their cots and bathe there. At present, there are 19 patients. All seem satisfied with their lot and appear more cheerful and contented than they were at the former building."³⁵

" There are at present in the Leper Ward 23 patients. This is very cleanly kept and the inmates appear contented and cheerful."³⁶

In December 1862, the land on which the Hospital stood and its surroundings were made over by the Government to Mr. Tan Kim Ching and Mr. Ho Ah Kay (Whampoa) to hold in trust for the Hospital. (See Appendix B.)

The drastic measure proposed by the Senior Surgeon to deal with the runaway paupers was not favoured by Government. However, from the beginning of 1863, a harsh policy was adopted. When arrested, they were sent to prison, not to the hospital as was the previous practice, but to do hard labour.

". . . I have no doubt the system described will effectively deter them from absconding. . . . Within the last two months however, a severe dis-

cipline has been introduced and all who possibly can are put to task and work in breaking stones and kept at it and strict silence enjoined by the sight of the cane. This will have the best effect and teach these men to rest contented with the Home provided for them by the Public, and strange to say, one and all have considerably improved in health since this system was introduced."³⁹

The Superintendent of Convicts was also very pleased:

"When this batch is released from Jail, I believe there will be the commencement of an effective stop to street vagrancy by that class of Chinese. They one and all are now begging to be allowed to go to the Hospital at Serangoon declaring most positively that they will remain there quietly to be treated."⁴⁰

At the same time, the Governor suggested to the Committee of Management that they should set about framing a Code of Rules for the employment of those patients in hospital who were able to work, and also for the dieting of patients as in the Government hospitals.⁴⁰ The Senior Surgeon was in favour of the Governor's suggestion. He proposed that a workshed should be erected in the hospital "for most of the men are able to do some kind of work and should be made to do so. Basket making and rattan work of various kinds might be introduced and the proceeds would add considerably to the low state of the funds of the asylum."³⁹

These measures were of no avail. The patients continued to escape to the Town to beg. Proper administration of the hospital was extremely difficult due to lack of nursing attendants and the condition of the patients themselves. The Senior Surgeon reported in November 1863:

"Tan Tock Seng's Hospital contains at present 300 paupers. As usual, the men abscond in large numbers and generally find their way to the House of Correction either for vagrancy or for committing some petty larceny. The buildings are in good repair and the grounds kept clean and tidy, but not so the dormitories. These are filthy and at times most offensive. This arises from the men taking their meals in them and throwing the water they wash their dishes and cups with on the floor so that it is constantly damp. I am at a loss how to remedy this as many of the poor creatures are bed-ridden. Those that are able should be made to eat in the verandah or open air. In future, I will see how far this can be carried out."⁴¹

"... The prevailing diseases have been ulcers, chiefly of a gangrenous and phagedemic nature, most of them connected with disease of the bone, dropsies, diarrhoeas, rheumatisms and atrophy. Many of the cases are brought into hospital in a wretched condition from disease, starvation and filth and terminate fatally almost immediately after admission..."⁴²

The nuisance of the runaway paupers and lepers was the subject of the editorial of the Straits Times of 3rd November 1863. The Editor suggested that the Leper Hospital should be removed to one of the islands in the harbour:⁴³

"We regret to find that the vigilance of our police which has for a considerable time now kept our roads free from the presence of maimed and diseased paupers, is again giving way. . . . It is certainly not right the Leper Hospital should be allowed to remain so very near the Town. In addition to the dangers and to the disgust which result from its situation, we must attribute in a great measure, this ever recurring presence on our roads of these diseased men to the circumstances of its locality. The inducements for the lepers to attempt escape are considerable. Their sores if skillfully exposed prove a fruitful source of profit to themselves and their friends, and it is nothing unusual, we have been told, for three or four men to escape from this hospital in one morning, and no sooner are they outside its gates, they are ipso facto in the midst of a busy throng. . . ."

In 1864, a new source of funds for Tan Tock Seng's Hospital was introduced. This was the issue of Certificates of Protection by the Government to Chinese who were British subjects, who wished to return to China temporarily. The fees went to the Hospital and the receipts were issued by the Honorary Treasurer of the Hospital. One specimen is below:⁴⁴

Singapore, 30th January, 1864.

Received from Wee Boon Keng, the sum of Five (5) Spanish Dollars for Tan Tock Seng's Hospital for a Certificate granted to him by the Honourable Captain Burn for China.

(sd) Whampoa. "

The 1863/1864 Annual Report of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital recounted the woes of the Committee of Management⁴⁵—the increasing numbers of sick paupers, the acute shortage of accommodation, the lack of funds and the Hospital's debt to the Treasurer. The possibility of closing down the institution and the release of the paupers to roam about the Town were hinted at. The appeal for funds was supported by the Editor of the Straits Times who published the Report on 7th May 1864; and commented:⁴⁵

"... The Committee make an earnest appeal to the public for additional support to that valuable institution. . . . which seems likely to be deprived of its usefulness from lack of those contributions which it was thought would be so readily granted. The hospital is now to be considered not only in the light of a useful charity but as a positive necessity, the withdrawal of which would inflict a most serious evil upon the place. Indeed, the appeal which the Committee now so earnestly make might have been urged in a far different spirit and have almost taken the shape of a threat. According to the returns contained in the report

of the Medical Officer, the hospital contains a daily average of 290 inmates. Of these, a large number are merely harmless, penniless beggars or superannuated men and women, but others are sufferers from one of the most fearful diseases with which man is afflicted. Within this hospital walls are now contained the victims of the worst forms of leprosy in all stages of decay and who if turned loose would not only shock our sight at every street corner but rapidly spread the contagion of this malady. . . ."

Parts of the Honorary Secretary's Report read:⁴⁵

" . . . The hospital originally founded by Tan Tock Sing for the diseased of all countries, has during the past 20 years been so much resorted to that notwithstanding several additions made from time to time to the building, the large number of sick, diseased and dying creatures present in this Town and Island has compelled the Committee to reject many applications for relief. There is a demand for increased accommodation but the Committee regret that the regular monthly subscriptions has so far fallen off that the kind Treasurer has advanced large sums of money from his own purse rather than allow diseased and dying Chinese and others to perish in the streets. This debt to the Treasurer must not only be paid off, but without enlarged support the number of inmates must be much restricted and as a necessary consequence, many lepers and poor men and women in the last stages of disease must be turned into the public streets, there to obtain any means to alleviate their miseries and glide into a loathsome pauper's grave.

Already it is a matter of complaint that some of these unfortunate creatures infest our thoroughfares and solicit alms. Unless subscriptions reach the Committee and speedily too, we shall soon see the sad spectacle of hundreds of objects crowding about the Square and leading streets, whose appearance will terribly shock the feelings, a result to be avoided by prompt and regular pecuniary assistance to the hospital funds.

The documents appended hereto cause much embarrassment to the Committee for while the demands enumerated by the Surgeon of the Hospital are urgent, the Committee cannot carry them into effect in the face of the accumulating debt exhibited by the Treasurer's account. The Committee is still further hampered by the serious conviction prevailing in their minds that their present means are wholly inadequate to discharge the monthly expenses of the charity.

An appeal is now confidently made to the community, European and Asiatic, for enlarged support. . . ."

The appeal fell on deaf ears. The Hospital was in for hard times. Unfortunate accidents occurred due to lack of attendants. Patients had to draw water

from the wells in the grounds of the hospital and occasionally some were found drowned in them.⁴⁶ "The servants too (such as Toties, Sweepers, etc.) connected with the Establishment are a very inferior useless lot and cannot be entrusted to carry out instructions of any kind. The smallness of the pay and the dirtiness of the work are the obstacles in the way of obtaining better servants."⁴⁷

When the Senior Surgeon was queried again about the large consumption of opium at the Hospital,⁴⁸ he stated that the Assistant Surgeon had proposed that as an experiment opium smoking "be discontinued altogether for a time and a few healthful and nutritional articles of diet, such as bread, milk, etc. substituted and opium given internally when thought proper."⁴⁹ But the Hospital could not "be burdened with such expensive articles to support paupers", and the Assistant Surgeon was ordered to allow opium-smoking only when absolutely necessary.⁴⁹

The Hospital was rapidly falling into disrepair. The Assistant Surgeon reported on " . . . the present very unsafe condition of the ceiling of the wards of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital. Large portions of it frequently falling down and causing in some instance serious injury to the patients in the shape of severe wounds on the head and face, etc. With a view to prevent such occurrence in future and perhaps the loss of life (a thing not at all improbable under such circumstances) and as it has hitherto been found impossible to prevent plaster from tumbling down every now and then, I would beg leave to suggest that it (the plaster) be removed all together and the laths covered with lime wash only. . . ."⁵⁰ The Senior Surgeon was of the opinion that "planking would be better than having mere laths. . . . but this again is so expensive".⁵⁰

The Committee of Management had to resort to drastic measures. Patients were to be made to work and a new scale of diet, which cost less, was introduced. "It was proposed to insist on those who are able that they shall be made to do some kind of work, and a different scale of diet introduced. This if carried out will be a great thing as the proceeds of their labour will assist in supporting them and in keeping the buildings in order."⁵⁰ The Committee were however wrong in their assessment. The nett result was that more patients absconded! Those who could not and found life intolerable hanged themselves. One inmate left a suicide note (in Chinese) which read "No cure and cannot go out, therefore hang."⁵¹

The Annual Report for the year from 1st May 1864 to 30th April 1865 was about the same as in the previous years. The number of deaths was as usual large. The return of Sick showing the number treated and died is quoted. There was high mortality from gangrenous ulcers, diarrhoea, "atrophia" and anasarca (most probably the result of malnutrition, cirrhosis of the liver and heart failure).⁵²

	Treated	Died
Febris Quotidiana		
Intermittens	2	0
Bronchitis Chronica	7	2
Phthisis, Pulmonalis		
Tuberculosa	2	2
Diarrhoea	86	58
Dyspepsia	3	1
Amentia	3	0
Paralysis	8	2
Anasarca	33	22
Rheumatica Chronica	135	0
Syphilis Primitiva	1	0
Syphilis Consecutiva	8	3
Phlegmon et Abscess	1	0
Ulcers	590	155
		(1 drowned in central well, 1 suicide by hanging.)
Gangrene	1	1
Contusio	1	0
Vulnus Incisum	1	1 (drowned)
Blind	56	0
Lepra	78	9
Erysipelas	1	0
Atrophia	69	27
Cynanche Tonsillaris	2	0
Scrofula	2	1
	1089	284

Average daily number of sick—310.
Ratio of deaths to treated—26.08%.”

The Senior Surgeon in desperation made the same harsh recommendation as he did a few years previously:

“ . . . If these vagrants received from six to a dozen lashes on being found begging or stealing, we should see but a few of them about our streets, a nuisance as they are to the public at large.”⁵³

On 3rd August 1865, the Straits Times once again drew attention to the appalling conditions at the Hospital. “The accommodation provided for the unfortunates, who as a last resort are sent there, is pitiable in the extreme. The patients have abundance of good water but are pent up in such a manner that nothing would prevent a contagion breaking out amongst them, and carrying away many of its inmates who would rather avail themselves of an opportunity of dying such a death and put an end to their sufferings. The accommodation, we must say, is very limited in the extreme. . . .”⁵⁴

This matter was taken up by the Grand Jury when they next met, and in their Presentment of 16th October 1865 they suggested that the Gambling Farm be introduced and the proceeds “be applied exclusively to charitable purposes connected with the Natives. At present, there are 413 patients in the Pauper Hospital and it is in debt to the Treasurer over \$3000/-.”⁵⁵

There was an immediate strong protest by prominent members of the Chinese community against the introduction of the Gambling Farm, even for charitable purposes. They were certain that the evils of legalised gambling would outweigh the little good its revenue would generate. They proposed instead that a fee of 50 cents be imposed for each pig killed within the limits of Town, and that fees charged for permits to hold wayangs and other public entertainments be considerably increased, and the proceeds handed over to the Hospital.⁵⁶

The Daily Times and the Singapore Free Press were also against “the proposal to establish a Gambling Farm under the cloak of charity”. They tried to analyse the reasons why the Chinese were reluctant to support Hospital and volunteered remedies for the Hospital’s insolvency:

“ . . . True, it is that the Chinese community are backward in supporting the Chinese Hospital, and that the excellent institution is \$4000/- in debt, but are there no other means of compassing the deficit than that proposed. What is the cause of this lukewarmness on the part of a portion of the community which for many years furnished the funds required? We think it will be found in the fact that Singapore is rapidly becoming the Hospital of the Archipelago. The sick, diseased and maimed from neighbouring islands are sent hither in shoals, and there exist no police regulations to prevent such importations. It is quite natural that our resident Chinese should object to support such an establishment as the hospital is and will become. If the system is persisted in, it will be and is beyond their means, and notwithstanding that the extensive building is crowded, our streets are full of horrors of every sort and nature, and lepers and other wretches die daily in the highways. The first remedy to be applied is, therefore, a police regulation simple in its action and severe in its punishment to prevent these importations, then we shall find that the expenses will not be so heavy. . . . If the Gambling Farm is to be re-established. . . let it be on its legitimate basis and not brought in by a side wind on the wings of charity. Let it become a part and parcel of the revenue with a portion, say a tenth, put apart for the support of hospitals, but let it not be said that we sought to obtain such legislation under a cloak of virtue, being afraid of claiming the intervention of the law to counteract a recognised evil. . . .”⁵⁷

“ . . . The Chinese Merchants opposed this. . . Suggested the Pork Farm if money is needed. . . The Pork Farm is unjust because one portion of the community is exclusively taxed. If money is required for charitable purposes, a very little exertion on the part of the local authorities would obtain it. The Chinese themselves are backward in moving in the matter as those who do are jeered at by their fellows and put to shame. Mr. Euchin was very much teased when he was in the

habit of going among his countrymen seeking subscriptions for the Poor House, but such would not be the case if the heads of Government were to collect the chieftains of each class together and lay the necessities of the case before them. We are quite certain that \$20,000/- would soon be collected if an influential officer of Government would put his shoulders to the wheel and work on the feelings of the wealthy natives. It is well that the Grand Jury brought the insolvency of the Pauper Hospital so prominently forward, and we trust every effort will be made to place it on a satisfactory footing by more legitimate means than the restoration of the highly objectionable Gaming and Pork Farms." 58

The Hospital was full of desperate and dangerous characters. An Indian boy, who lived nearby, was murdered, had his ear rings stolen and his body thrown into a well.⁵⁹ An inmate was assaulted and died of a ruptured spleen when he stole some fish and rice which had been served to another.⁶⁰

(To be continued).

APPENDIX A

Rules and Regulations to be observed by Executive Medical Officers in the Civil Department of the Straits Settlements.

1. The Medical Officer at each Station will visit all hospitals under his charge whether a Government institution or supported by voluntary contribution at least once a day, commencing with the principal hospital at 6 o'clock a.m. and taking the others as most convenient to himself.
2. When there are Europeans under treatment or serious cases amongst the Native patients, a second visit is essentially necessary—the hour being left to the convenience of the Medical Officer.
3. At these visits, he will carefully examine each patient and give such instructions to the Apothecary regarding treatment and dieting of the sick as he may deem proper.
4. It is expected that the Medical Officer will keep a Diary in detail of the History, Symptoms and Treatment of the more important cases amongst the European patients, and in important fatal cases (except when objections are raised by friends of the deceased) a careful description of the postmortem appearances.
5. That he is very particular in seeing that the Apothecaries and all the Hospital Subordinates under him are in constant attendance at the Hospital; and that no one quit it for any length of time without his knowledge and permission.
6. He will frequently examine the provisions served out to the patients in the different

hospitals and asylums under his charge and satisfy himself that they are good both in quality and quantity.

7. Lastly, he will take care that all the Books of the Hospital are neatly and regularly kept up and placed on the Dispensary Table for the inspection of the Resident Councillor at his monthly visit, should he deem it necessary.

Singapore, 15th November 1860.

J. ROSE
Senior Surgeon,
Straits Settlements.

APPENDIX B

ORDINANCE NO. VII OF 1880.

An Ordinance to incorporate Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.

And Whereas by a deed indented made in December 1862, the Secretary of State for India in Council, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen granted for ever, for a nominal consideration, a certain piece of land therein described as situated in the district of Rochore in the Island of Singapore, being marked No. 2 in the Government map of the said district, estimated to contain an area of seven acres, three roods and twelve poles, to TAN KIM CHING, a son of the founder and member ex-officio of the Public Institution at Singapore called Tan Tock Seng's Hospital, and HOH AH KAY, of Singapore, merchant, the Treasurer of the said hospital, to hold to them, as such member and treasurer, their and each of their successors in office, subject to the orders of the Committee of Management, or other body of persons having the management and control of the said hospital, for the time being, and subject to a condition to keep clear and cultivated the ground not covered by the hospital buildings, and in default the land so uncleared and uncultivated to revert to the Government of Singapore for public purposes.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED:

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S.F.P. = Singapore Free Press. Microfilm. National Library Holdings. Singapore.
S.S.R. = Straits Settlements Records. Microfilm. National Library Holdings. Singapore.
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