Plague Fighter Dr Wu Lien-teh
A Penang Hero who modernized medicine in China
by Ong Lay Hong
Managing Director, Singapore Media Academy, A MediaCorp Enterprise
About Penang Story Lectures

The Penang Story Lecture Series aims to create awareness about Penang’s history and heritage. The theme this year is “Penang in Global History” focusing on the role the people of Penang played in local, regional and global histories. Equally fascinating is Penang as a place, a refuge and centre for knowledge development and intellectual movements.

The lecture series also aim to explore Penang’s unique “place-identity” and strengthen the enabling factors that continue to make Penang attractive to talent. These public lectures examine a particular theme from a multi-disciplinary perspective.
Foreword

The Penang Story Initiative: Local, Regional and Global Histories

With UNESCO World Heritage Site Inscription in 2008 and the growing awareness about cultural heritage issues, this new chapter of the Penang Story not only continues “celebrating cultural diversity” but expands to include a “re-discovery” of Penang’s place in local, regional and global history. There will be a special emphasis on Penang as a place of “conjunctures, confluences and contestations”; highlighting the cosmopolitan society that contributed to the making of Penang’s “spirit of place”; and all this by concentrating on Penang’s multi-ethnic community and their contribution to local, regional and global histories.

The Penang Story is an open platform for all those with an interest in Penang from different parts of the world to contribute towards “deepening” the story. The project’s focus is not only on events & people but also other intangible heritage involving foodways, economic activities, values and beliefs, education and all other aspects related to George Town’s ‘Outstanding Universal Values’.

The Penang Story will build a greater sense of solidarity amongst locals particularly stakeholders in George Town. It will also deepen the public’s understanding of Penang’s role as a place attractive to talent and a home where ideas germinate and return to influence world affairs. This will boost the sense of possibility so important to Penang’s civil society movement. Lastly, as in the project’s original objective, communities will become proud of their own heritage whilst having great respect for the traditions and history of other communities. Ultimately, all communities will become aware of having contributed to Penang’s development and progress.

Dato’ Anwar Fazal
Chairman
Penang Story
Ong Lay Hong was born in Singapore and has spent more than 30 years working in Television Industry. She received her Bachelors in Telecommunications (Radio and TV Production) with a Certificate in Film Studies from Indiana University, USA. She started off as a camera woman in an America TV Station then joined Hong Kong Rediffusion Television as a News producer. She joined Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (now MediaCorp) in 1982 and rose from the rank and file to become Chief Editor of Chinese News and Current Affairs on 2000 onwards. Since June 2007, she has been designated to lead the China team in developing the China market for Channel NewsAsia. In 2009, Lay Hong became the Managing Director for the channels of Suria and Vasantham and their supporting units.

Her work as the Producer for documentary films ‘Ode to a Humming Bird’ and ‘A Day is Too Long’ received 1989 Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union Television Prize and 1981 Prix Futura in Berlin respectively; recognition and accreditation from members of the International Film Industry. Since 2000, Lay Hong has been invited to be the juror of the International Emmy Award. She was part of the jury panel of the final round for the categories of News and Breaking News in the International
Emmy Award held in Doha, Qatar in 2006. Besides working in the media, she was awarded scholarship to study media in United Kingdom in 1991 and at the University of California, Berkeley in 2004. As a Visiting Scholar in UC Berkeley, Lay Hong devoted her academic studies in the field of New Media.

Lay Hong has launched many television programmes for MediaCorp in which most of them still air regularly. These programmes include ‘Crime Watch’, ‘Tuesday Report’, ‘President Stars Charity’, ‘Good morning Singapore’ etc. As the Chief Editor of MediaCorp, Lay Hong looked after the output of all the Chinese News bulletins and Current Affairs programs on Channel 8 and Channel U.

In 2008, Lay Hong produced the first High Definition with 5.1 Dolby surround history documentary for MediaCorp: “Plague Fighter-Dr Wu Lien teh”. This documentary won the 2010 China Dragon Award Bronze Prize. In 2012, She was appointed as the Managing Director of Singapore Media Academy (SMA), a wholly owned subsidiary of MediaCorp. SMA is the only media Continuing Education and Training (CET) centre in Singapore running media related training programmes for media professions and those who want to join Media industry.
Dr Alex Ooi’s seven formative years at the Penang Free School were enriching: in studies, sea-scouts, sports and serving as a Prefect. He went on to study medicine at the University of Singapore and then obtained his Masters and Royal College degrees in Obstetrics & Gynaecology. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Medicine (Singapore), International College of Surgeons (USA) and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (London). He was a visiting professor to demonstrate surgery at Shanghai’s Fudan University (and other regional hospitals) and, now 30 plus years on, continues in active work and teaching.

At the completion of his medical studies, he was awarded the Kesatuan Akademis Medal as an all-rounder and made Honorary Life Member of the International Federation of Medical Student Associations (working also with UN agencies). His passion for management and community service led him to obtain a Masters in Business Administration (USA). Besides personal pursuits and involvement in academia, he has also served as Deputy Director of Tan Tock Seng Hospital, President of Warren Golf and The Tanglin Clubs and leadership in Rotary and other service avenues, such as the Singapore Red Cross.

Though he shared the same school with Wu Lien The, it was only in 2008, at the launch of Dr. Wu’s museum in Harbin, that he developed an awareness of Dr. Wu’s work and impact on world health and the environment. He came to better know the Wu family and the Speaker, Ong Lay Hong when she visited Harbin in 2011.
Almost one hundred years ago, when Manchuria, North Eastern part of China was invaded by a pneumonic plague, a valiant fighter against the disease emerged in the form of Dr. Wu Lien-teh. Leading a group of inspired medical personnel, Dr. Wu researched countless scientific methods in an attempt to contain the plague. His efforts eventually resulted in a breakthrough in the medical world.
Besides being recognized in China as the founding father of modern medicine, Dr Wu (1879-1960), was also known in Singapore and Malaya as one of the three editors of the “Straits Chinese Magazine”, he was a Public Health Expert, Medical Science historian and pioneer of the Plague Quarantine and Prevention. Born in Penang, Dr Wu was awarded the Queen’s Scholarship of the Straits Settlement at the age of 17 (1896), making him the first Chinese Medical Science student in Cambridge, England. In 1902, he obtained his Medical Science and Surgical degrees (B.A) from Cambridge University. Dr Wu was later separately awarded the Cambridge University Medical Science doctorate degree, the John Hopkins University Public Health Degree and an honorary doctorate degree by the Japanese Imperial University of Tokyo respectively in 1905, 1924 and 1926.

In 1903, after his return from England, Dr Wu Lien-teh continued his medical research in Malaya (Federated Malaya States). Early 1905, he practiced medicine in Penang. He was under the invitation of Viceroy of Qing Dynasty/Government Yuan Shi Kai; in 1908 he was serving as Vice-Director of the Imperial Army Medical College in Tianjin (Tientsin). However, in 1910, there was a sudden outbreak of plague in three provinces of North-East China. At the age of 31, Dr Wu Lien-teh was appointed Director by the Qing dynasty/government. Being the Chief Medical Director, Dr Wu led a team of plague prevention personnel, despite immense difficulties and risk, he probed into the epidemic area, made a thorough investigation, Dr Wu also took many preventive measures in order to prevent the epidemic i.e. he heighten the railways’ quarantine, control of all the transportation, quarantine the plague area, cremation of all the corpse, built hospitals to house the patients etc. Within four months, he timely prevented the plague epidemic from spreading further and rescued countless lives and therefore, avoided/guard against a worldwide disaster.

In 1911, the International Plague Conference was held in Mukden (now ShenYang) chaired by Dr. Wu Lien-teh. 1912, the Manchurian Plague Prevention Service of the
North-Eastern provinces was officially established with its headquarters at Harbin and Dr Wu as its Director. He used this place as a base and had contributed a great deal in both the modernization of the Chinese Medical foundations as well as setting up many medical hardwares in China.

For the past 30 years in China, Dr Wu Lien-teh had contributed a great deal in the Medical arena i.e. Health epidemic prevention control, set up Quarantine preventive system and advocate Medical education. He was appointed the President for the 2nd and 3rd terms of the Chinese Medical Association, he had also established more than 20 hospitals and medical schools in China; Dr Wu also did his utmost to regain the China’s quarantine sovereignty; and he was also the main figure for the anti/prohibition of –Narcotics.

In July 1937, Dr Wu Lien-teh’s resident in Shanghai was also suffered due to the Japanese’s invasion of China. Dr Wu returned to Malaya after both the Quarantine hospital and his home were bombed. His whole family returned to his hometown Malaya to take refuge. In 1938, he continued his medical practice as a form of contribution to the society in Ipoh. For the past 20 years, from his return to the States of Malaya, Dr Wu was actively involved in community work and public welfare services, he also spent 7 years writing his autobiography, sharing his wisdom with others and had enjoyed a peaceful and healthy life of his elderly years.

Dr Wu Lien-teh passed away in his hometown Penang on 21 January 1960 due to a sudden stokes.

Channel NewsAsia featured Dr Wu’s heroic and selfless contributions on a specially produced 3-hour high definition documentary with 5.1 Dolby surround sound. This documentary was telecast to remember those who lost their life in the frontline when SARS broke out in Asia. Ong Lay Hong and Ng Toh Heong produced the documentary and Executive produced by her.
From Emmanuel College, Cambridge University

Dr Wu Lien Teh

At fifty years of age one looks back upon the past with a rather detached mind. One's early ambitions are somewhat toned down, criticisms of one's fellow creatures become fewer and less severe, and while surveying present-day conditions one tends to view things in a more optimistic spirit than in the earlier years.

Here I must ask my readers to excuse me if I miss out the unessential parts and devote the following pages to persons, institutions and surroundings I have been associated with during the life of moving picture screen, leaving to my readers any deductions to be gathered in whatever way they consider fit.

I was born in 1879 in the Island of Penang, Straits Settlements, that stretch of British territory formerly belonging to the Malays and now intensely prosperous as a result of the tin and rubber industries. My father was of the usual Cantonese emigrant type who left his village home in Sinning (now Tainshan) to make his fortune across the "Seven Seas." My mother belonged to the second generation of Chinese in Malaya, her father being an emigrant but her mother was descended from resident Hakka parents, those sturdy fearless peasants of China who though possessing no province of their own and nevertheless able to succeed in business where others failed.

Until within recent years the education given by the local government was purely in the English language. The fees were low, varying from six to twelve dollars a year, so that even the poorest children could take advantage of it. I stayed in the Penang Free School for nearly ten years (1886-1896) and learnt not only how to write and read English but also a lot about English History and Literature, English Geography (including details of the smallest hamlet), Latin, Chemistry and Geometry. I won many prizes at school, but the most difficult to obtain, namely, the Queen's Scholarship, for which candidates had to proceed to Singapore to be examined, required three attempts before I was successful. On the first two occasions I was under-age, but in 1896 I reached the goal of my boy's ambition and was awarded the much coveted prize of that year, thus enabling me to proceed to England and enter my name as an undergraduate of science and medicine at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. The value of this scholarship was £200 per annum, out of which income tax had to be deducted by the London Government. Those who are conversant with university life in England will understand that this sum, even in those days, was barely sufficient to carry a student through the year, especially as travelling expenses, clothing, college fees, and holidays were included therein. However, by exercising the

PLAGUE PREVENTION SERVICE

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Emmanuel College is extremely proud to name Dr Wu Lien Teh as one of its Members. He was admitted to the College as an undergraduate of science and medicine in 1896, achieved a First in the Natural Sciences Tripos in 1899 and qualified as a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery in April 1902, the only 1896 entrant to achieve this in such a short period of time. His exceptional abilities were rewarded with numerous scholarships and prizes. Emmanuel, recognising his exceptional abilities, then awarded him a Research studentship. He was awarded the M.D. in 1905.

As Dr Wu’s incomparable achievements in the field of medicine are too well-known to need reciting, I would like in this letter to concentrate on the personal side and record the affectionate relationship that existed between Dr Wu and the College. Following his renowned campaign against the Manchurian Plague Epidemic of 1910-11 Dr Wu returned to Cambridge in 1911 for a visit, accompanied by his wife. They stayed at Emmanuel as guests of the then Master, Dr Peter Giles and his wife Mary and returned for a second visit in 1913. Dr Wu wrote to Dr Giles some years later describing his and his wife’s “very dear” memories of their Emmanuel friends and said that they both “treasure deeply the kindness and hospitality which you and Mrs Giles showed us.” He also expressed a hope that his younger son might one day
enter Emmanuel College. One of Dr Giles’s daughters later remembered that Dr & Mrs Wu were “much liked by all – great fun”, and that Mrs Wu wore “beautiful Chinese dresses topped with Paris hats”. The College Archives still preserve some humorous cartoons and sketches which resulted from parlour games played by the Giles and Wu families on these visits.

Dr Wu kept in touch with Dr Giles in later years, sending family news as well as copies of some of his articles. In 1920 he sent a recent photograph of his wife, who was a beautiful woman, asking with a note of pride whether the Gileses detected any change in her. Communication was not possible during the Second World War but Dr Wu re-established contact soon afterwards, asking after his old friends P.W. Wood (Senior Tutor) and Dr Giles’s successor as Master, Dr Hele, and expressing the affectionate thought that “perhaps the younger members of the staff have forgotten me, but I have not forgotten the old College”. I hope he would be pleased to know that the College has certainly not forgotten him.
Joint Organisers

THINK CITY SDN BHD (TCSB) is a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad, the investment arm of the Malaysian government, and an urban regeneration agency operating in the historic city of George Town. It manages the George Town Grants Programme (GTGP), which is a public grants programme designed to protect and preserve George Town’s Outstanding Universal Values. These include the city’s multi-ethnic and multi-cultural living heritage, architectural legacy and intangible heritage as a historic port city in the Straits of Malacca. Think City’s involvement in this project provides focus on the cultural mapping process (documentation and outreach activities involving local histories and heritage) and the intangible heritage of the city.

THE PENANG HERITAGE TRUST (PHT) is one of Malaysia’s most successful non-governmental organizations championing the heritage conservation with special emphasis on Penang and George Town. The PHT played a pivotal role in the nomination of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was also a key partner in the 2001/02 Penang Story Project bringing together local communities through a celebration of cultural diversity.

Knowledge Partners

GEORGE TOWN WORLD HERITAGE INCORPORATED (GTWHI) is the area manager of the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site. It provides consultation and public awareness regarding the World Heritage Site. GTWHI also provides advice to the State and Local governments regarding heritage conservation issues and assists private property owners about best practices in conservation.

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA (USM) is Malaysia’s Apex University with wide-ranging research programmes. USM initiated several projects directly related to heritage conservation work in Penang and elsewhere.