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## Correspondence

# The first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan



## KEYWORDS

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In Taiwan, at the beginning of Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), a new education system including the girls' education was established and officially included in the academic system. However, the situation of the girls' education in Japanese-ruled Taiwan was polarized. At that time, the girls generally did not have many educational opportunities, but the girls from wealthy families could receive higher professional education through certain channels. The young Taiwanese girls could not get the opportunity to study medicine in Taiwan. If they wanted to practice medicine, they often chose to study in Japan. Moreover, most of them chose the girls' medical school, followed by the girls' dental school and the girls' pharmacy school.<sup>1</sup>

There are detailed literature records about the first Taiwanese female physician in Taiwan. Dr. A-Hsin Tsai (1899–1990) was born in the Taipei City. After graduating from the high school, she went to Japan to study in the Tokyo Girls' Medical College. After completing her medical studies, she returned to Taiwan in 1921 (Taisho 10) and became the first Taiwanese female physician in Taiwan who received the modern formal medical education. In 1926 (Taisho 15), Dr. Tsai operated an obstetrics and gynecology clinic in Taichung and a midwifery school was attached to her clinic, becoming a new obstetrics and gynecology center in the central region of Taiwan. Dr. Tsai acquired a good reputation in the medical and social services.<sup>2</sup> However,

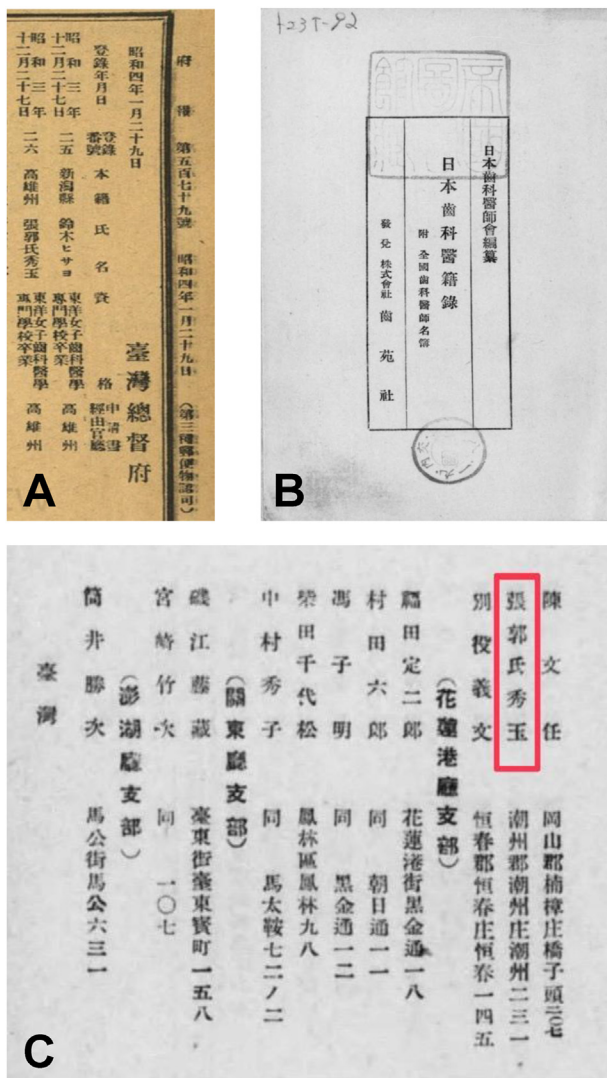
there has been a lack of relevant research on the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan, so we know nothing about this matter. This article attempted to use the historical research method to search for historical records related to the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan and conducted a preliminary exploration of this issue.

This study first searched for the earliest female dentist in the dental registration published in the Official Gazette of Taiwan Government from the Taiwan Historica query system. This was because the Taiwan Government during the Japanese colonial period had implemented the management measure for the registration of medical practitioners (including physicians and dentists), and had published their registration records in the government gazette in sequence, giving us the opportunity to search for the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan from the earliest registration record related to the female dentist. Then, we searched the Japanese National Diet Library query system for historical materials related to the list of dentists during the Japanese colonial period, and further confirmed the relevant information about the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan. The results are shown in Fig. 1.

According to the dental registration published in the Official Gazette of Taiwan Government, two female dentists appeared simultaneously for the first time in the record registered on December 27, 1928 (Showa 3). They

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**Figure 1** The historical records of the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan. (A) In the dental registration published in the Official Gazette of Taiwan Government No. 579 on January 29, 1929 (Showa 4), two female dentists appeared simultaneously for the first time. They were Hisayo Suzuki from Niigata Prefecture, registered No. 25, and Hsiu-Yu Kuo from Kaohsiung Prefecture, registered No. 26. Dr. Suzuki was the first Japanese female dentist in Taiwan, while Dr. Kuo was the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan. Both of them graduated from the Toyo Girls' Dental College. The registration date was December 27, 1928 (Showa 3). The registration application was made through the Kaohsiung Prefectural Government Office. (B) In 1930 (Showa 5), the Japanese Dental Records (with a national list of dentists) compiled by the Japan Dental Association was published. (C) In the national list of dentists, Dr. Kuo was listed under the Kaohsiung Prefecture Dental Association and was the only Taiwanese female dentist in the Taiwan chapter. Her address at that time was located at the place where is now the Pingtung County.

were Hisayo Suzuki from Niigata Prefecture and Hsiu-Yu Kuo from Kaohsiung Prefecture. We could infer that Dr. Suzuki was the first Japanese female dentist in Taiwan, while Dr. Kuo was the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan. Both

of them were the first female dentists in Taiwan who received the modern formal dental education and graduated from the Toyo Girls' Dental College. Moreover, both of them operated their dental clinics in Kaohsiung Prefecture (Fig. 1A). We further confirmed that both of them were the members of the Kaohsiung Prefecture Dental Association based on the national list of dentists in 1930 (Showa 5) (Fig. 1B). At that time, Dr. Kuo was the only Taiwanese female dentist in the Taiwan chapter. Her address was located at the place where is now Pingtung County, while Dr. Suzuki's address was located at the place where is now Kaohsiung City (Fig. 1C).

In Taiwan, the first Taiwanese female dentist appeared seven years later than the first Taiwanese female physician. However, after 11 years of development, there were 40 female dentists in 1939 (Showa 14), accounting for 10.87 % (40/368) of all dentists. Among them, there were 33 Taiwanese and 7 Japanese female dentists.<sup>3</sup> As of today, there were 5160 female dentists in Taiwan in 2023, accounting for 31.41 % of all dentists (5160/16,426).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, there were 1039 female undergraduate dental students in Taiwan in 2021, accounting for 42.00 % (1039/2474) of all undergraduate dental students. This means that Taiwan's "gender gap" in the current dental education and clinical dental practice has the opportunity to be gradually filled.<sup>1</sup>

Since the rise of the women's movement in the 1980s in Taiwan, the government followed the UN's human rights guidelines in 2005 and advocated the promotion of "gender mainstreaming" policy in areas such as health care, education, internal affairs, and national defense. The gender-related issues have gained prominence in the medical field in the recent decades.<sup>1</sup> The contribution of this study is to serve as a preliminary confirmation of the basic information of the first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan. Based on this result, it will help to further explore her life story in the future. Just like we previously introduced an extraordinary female dentist, Dr. Hsueh-Wan Kwan (1923–2022), appeared in the early stage of dental development in Taiwan.<sup>5</sup> These studies on the gender issues of female dentists in Taiwan, dental history, and local cultural history are of extremely great importance.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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