



Perspective article

A brief life story of a new woman, the Taiwanese female dentist Dr. Jun Pai, during the Japanese colonial period



Feng-Chou Cheng ^{a,b,c**}, Yen-Hsin Lin ^d, Chun-Pin Chiang ^{e,f,g,h*}

^a Chia-Te Dental Clinic, New Taipei City, Taiwan

^b School of Life Science, College of Science, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

^c Science Education Center, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

^d Hsin-An Dental Clinic, Taipei, Taiwan

^e Department of Dentistry, National Taiwan University Hospital, College of Medicine, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

^f Graduate Institute of Oral Biology, School of Dentistry, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

^g Department of Dentistry, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, Hualien, Taiwan

^h Institute of Oral Medicine and Materials, College of Medicine, Tzu Chi University, Hualien, Taiwan

Received 16 December 2024

Available online 25 December 2024

KEYWORDS

Taiwan;
Taiwanese female dentist;
Historical research method;
Dentistry;
Women's education

* Corresponding author. Department of Dentistry, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, and Institute of Oral Medicine and Materials, College of Medicine, Tzu Chi University, No. 707, Section 3, Chung-Yang Road, Hualien, 970, Taiwan.

** Corresponding author. School of Life Science, College of Science, National Taiwan Normal University, No. 88, Sec. 4, Ting-Chou Road, Taipei, 11677, Taiwan.

E-mail addresses: 894430051@ntnu.edu.tw (F.-C. Cheng), cpchiang@ntu.edu.tw (C.-P. Chiang).

At the beginning of Japan's rule in Taiwan, with the establishment of a new education system, the women's education was officially included in the academic system. Since the 1920s, the trend of women studying had gradually begun in Taiwan.^{1,2} After the development of the women's education, the number of women receiving higher education was increasing day by day, while the number of women getting married at an early age was decreasing. The most significant impact was the rise of "new women". Some of them were involved in the various walks of life, and some were involved in the social activities. Even if they stayed at home to take care of the family and raise children, their understanding of themselves was different from before. The few female high school students who stood at the top of the education pyramid had therefore become a special group. They had created a "high school girl culture" that was different from the general ones in terms of the cultural upbringing, interests, thoughts, sports, etc. On the other hand, it had also contributed to the trend of scholars aspiring to advance to study abroad to receive the specialized education. After they returned to Taiwan, they continued to shine in the workplace, and many of them performed as well as the men. For example, the first Taiwanese female physician Dr. A-Hsin Tsai (1899–1990), the female painter Chin Chen (1907–1998), etc., could be considered to be the pioneers of the modern professional women.³ Few studies have explored the performance of the female dentists at that time. This article briefly reported the life story of a female dentist during the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan. It started when her daughter mentioned that her mother was also a dentist during the dental visits.

In October 2024, an 82-year-old female patient, Ms. Hong, came to a local dental clinic with a chief complaint of the missing teeth in the maxilla and requested the dental rehabilitation of the maxilla. The dentist's treatment plan included the extraction of the tooth 24, and the fabrications of the fixed crown for the tooth 14 and the removable partial denture for the maxilla. The treatment process including subsequent adjustments of the removable partial denture took several dental visits during a period of more than 3 months. At the beginning, Ms. Hong told the story about her mother, Dr. Jun Pai, who was also a dentist. This aroused our interest. Through the dentist, we asked Ms. Hong to provide more information about her mother, Dr. Jun Pai, in her memory. On the other hand, we also used the historical research method to dig out the historical materials about Dr. Pai and provided them to Ms. Hong. Based on Ms. Hong's oral account and the relevant historical materials, Dr. Jun Pai's life story was initially restored as follows.

Dr. Pai was a pioneer of the female dentists in the central Taiwan. She was born in Nantou and grew up in the Taisho era during the Japanese colonial period. She showed her bright academic talent in the elementary school. She later attended Taichung Prefecture Changhua Girls' School, a well-known female high school in the central Taiwan at that time. After graduation, she worked at a credit union in her hometown of Caotun, Nantou. She served as a secretary and was well received. She had the opportunity to study in Japan because she was entrusted with taking her younger brother to study in Japan. In 1930, she went to Japan to

○有志的婦女
草鞋墩信用購買組合書記白潤女士、是彰化高女畢業生自入組合以來、萬事不讓男子、忠實服務。這次感着月給生活者的悲哀、得其丈夫林守章君的同意、決意負笈東都、入女醫專肄業、於去十五日離鄉了。若白女士的立志可謂地方婦女界的模範。

昭和四十一年八月

Figure 1 A brief life story of a new woman, the Taiwanese female dentist Dr. Jun Pai, during the Japanese colonial period (A) On March 21, 1931, the Taiwan Hsin Minpao reported that Jun Pai had gone to Tokyo, Japan, to study medicine last year, calling her as an aspiring woman (B) The Taiwan Government Transportation Department Information Bureau entered into an agreement with the Taiwan Dental Association (TDA) in July 1939 (Showa 14) to compile a name list of the contract dentists for the Postal Savings Insurance, which was issued in August 1939 (Showa 14). The original is from the collection of the National Museum of Taiwan History (C) Dr. Jun Pai was the number 8 from the left on the list of this page. Her own dental clinic was located in Caotun, Nantou County, Taichung Prefecture.

study and passed the "Tokyo Girls' Dental College". At that time, the Taiwan Hsin Minpao had a relevant report, calling her as an aspiring woman (Fig. 1A).

After completing her dental education, Dr. Pai returned to Taiwan and opened her own dental clinic in her hometown of Caotun, Nantou, becoming a pioneer of the female dentists with the modern dental education in the central Taiwan. According to the list of dentists in 1939, Dr. Pai was also a member of the Taiwan Dental Association (TDA) at that time (Fig. 1B and C). However, there were only 33 Taiwanese female dentists on the list. After the World War II, Dr. Pai ended her dental practice for a while. In order to provide a healthy living environment for her children to grow up in childhood, she later reopened her own dental clinic in Puli, Nantou and continued to serve the villagers. A few years later, in order to provide a convenient educational environment for her children, she moved her clinic to Beitun, Taichung. Her dental services focused on treating teeth, and she only charged her patients cheap treatment fees. In addition, she also personally operated the dental laboratory to make dentures. In addition to playing the role of housekeeper and raising children in her family and the role of dental professional in her dental clinic, she also often sponsored the local charity activities. She was highly praised by her fellow villagers for her work and conduct.

Through the exploration of Dr. Pai's life story, we understood that the girls in Taiwan had fewer opportunities to receive the education during the Japanese colonial period. At that time, the Taiwanese girls who could go to higher education were not only excellent, but also usually independent and strong. However, only the wealthy families could afford to send their children to study aboard.⁴ Although Dr. Pai's main task when she went to Japan was to take care of her younger brother, she also took the opportunity to study in Japan, even choosing the dentistry, which was still a relatively unknown field at the time, showing her adventurous personality. In addition, during the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan was still a very traditional and conservative society, which meant that the women were expected to play the role of good wives and mothers.³ Even Dr. Pai with a higher degree of education should still bear the heavy family care responsibility while working as a dentist. Her abilities and burdens were no less than those of the today's working women.

During the Japanese colonial period, the highest educational level for the Taiwanese girls was usually a high school degree. The women studying the medicine must go to Japan to study. In addition, the content taught in the female high schools was mostly preparatory courses such as

home economics, knitting, and painting, while the knowledge education such as science and mathematics was relatively insufficient. For those girls who wanted to study medicine abroad and pass the entrance examination, they might have to take tutoring courses in the subject. This shows the society's positioning and expectations for the women's roles as good wives and mothers during the Japanese colonial period. At that time, the women's participation in the medical education experienced a cultural dilemma that required their efforts to break through.⁵

During these dental visits, we experienced a wonderful fate and a fantastic journey. The dentist used her professionalism to cure Dr. Jun Pai's daughter's oral problems, while Dr. Pai's daughter also cured our desire to explore the appearance of the early female dentists in Taiwan by telling the story of her mother.

Declaration of competing interest

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

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Ms. Hong, daughter of Dr. Jun Pai, for her assistance during the writing of this article.

References

- Cheng FC, Wang YL, Wang LH, Chang JYF, Liu SY, Chiang CP. Overview of dental education system and gender distribution of undergraduate dental students in Taiwan. *J Dent Sci* 2023;18: 420–7.
- Cheng FC, Wang LH, Chang JYF, Chiang CP. The first Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan. *J Dent Sci* 2024 (in press).
- Women's education during the Japanese colonial period. *National Museum of Taiwan history*. 2024. Available from: <https://women.nmth.gov.tw/?p=1956>. [Accessed 1 December 2024].
- Cheng FC, Wang LH, Lin TC, Chang JYF, Chiang CP. Ethnicity, gender, and geographical distribution of dentists in Taiwan in 1939 (Showa 14). *J Dent Sci* 2024;19:1461–8.
- Female western physicians. *National Museum of Taiwan history*. 1920. Available from: <https://women.nmth.gov.tw/?p=2005>. [Accessed 1 December 2024].