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The dental clinic on the postcard with the theme of Taiwan street scene during the Japanese colonial period: The story of a Japanese immigrant, Dr. Akira Sugiyama

KEYWORDS

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After the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki between China and Japan in 1895, Taiwan and Penghu entered a 50-year period of Japanese rule (1895–1945). As Japan established new systems in Taiwan and Japanese immigrants moved to various parts of Taiwan, new culture and new lifestyles gradually took root and developed in Taiwan. Out of curiosity about the new territory, the postcards issued at that time were popular with images of Taiwan's landscape as the theme. These images of Taiwan's landscape were presented in the form of color drawings and photographs. The organizations that issued the postcards mainly included souvenir dealers, photo studios, and bookstores. The images of these postcards showed the topography, natural scenery, bronze statues and monuments, cities and villages, customs of the local people, customs of the aboriginal people (indigenous culture) in various parts of Taiwan. These images were very valuable historical materials for studying the Japanese-ruled Taiwan.¹ This study reported a visual record of Taiwan street scene with a dental clinic from the postcard published by the Seibanya Store.

In this article, a color drawing on the postcard represented the Keelung street scene, as shown in Fig. 1A. This color drawing was one of a series of images of the postcards with the theme of Taiwan street scene issued by the

Seibanya Store. Printed above the color drawing was a title in both Japanese kanji and English: "175, Keelung Shosento Street, Formosa". Moreover, there was an indication: "Keelung Fortress Headquarters Permit No. 420 (no reproduction allowed)" (Fig. 1A). In addition, on the back of the postcard, it was a blank vertical writing surface. There were a stamp sticking area on the right upper corner, the words "Postcard" in Japanese kanji and katakana on the right, "Carte Postale" on the top, and "Published by the Seibanya Store" in Japanese kanji on the middle (Fig. 1B).

The Seibanya Store was one of the largest souvenir shops in Taiwan at that time. The main store was located in downtown Taipei and was run by the Suzuki family, selling a variety of Taiwan specialties and postcards. The postcards it published were mostly themed on images of Taiwan landscape. As the port city closest to the mainland Japan, Keelung was often the first stop for many Japanese coming to Taiwan. As such, it was the first place to be built and became the first modern city in Taiwan.² As a result, it became the protagonist of the early postcards issued by the Seibanya Store.

This color drawing showed a street scene in downtown Keelung in the 1920s. The building on the right was a two-story red brick house completed in 1913, where the Kishida family operated the Kishida Gofukuten (Kishida Gofuku

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Figure 1 Old and current Keelung street scenes hidden a dental clinic and the history of a Japanese dentist in the Japanese colonial period. (A) The color drawing on the postcard displayed the Keelung street scene with a dental hospital (equivalent to the current dental clinic). Printed above the color drawing was a title in both Japanese kanji and English: "175, Keelung Shosento Street, Formosa". (B) On the back of the postcard, it was a blank vertical writing surface. (C) According to the street view of the same perspective on the Google Map in May 2024, the original building with this dental hospital on the left no longer exists. (D) According to Dr. Akira Sugiyama's resume, he was from Okayama, Japan, was born in 1892, and completed his high school education in Taiwan in 1913 and dental education in Japan in 1917. (E) The Taiwan Office Gazette (No. 1927) in 1933 reported that the dental registration of Akira Sugiyama was revoked due to his death. This postcard is the personal collection of Feng-Chou Cheng, the first author of this article. (D) and (E) were available from the Taiwan Historica.

Studio). The great-granduncle of the former Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was the main operator of this store. At that time, the two-story red brick house on the left already existed. The horizontal sign on the first floor of this building was Okura Trading Company, which began operations in 1923.³ The horizontal and vertical signs on the second floor of the same building were Sugiyama Dental

Hospital (equivalent to the current dental clinic). This means that a dentist named Sugiyama once performed his dental practice here. According to the street view of the same perspective on the Google Map in May 2024, the original building on the right still exists, but the decorative gable wall above it has been demolished. The original building on the left no longer exists (Fig. 1C).

Through the excavation of historical materials, we found a file in which Akira Sugiyama, who lived in Keelung Shosento, applied for a dentist license from the Taiwan Government in 1917. We speculated that the owner of the Sugiyama Dental Hospital mentioned in this article should be Dr. Akira Sugiyama. According to his resume, he was from Okayama, Japan, was born in 1892, and completed his high school education in Taiwan in 1913. He should be the first generation of Japanese immigrants and came to Taiwan with his family in his childhood. After completing his studies in the Japan Dental Medicine College in July 1917, he returned to Taiwan and applied for a dentist license in August of the same year (Fig. 1D). He died in Taiwan in 1933 at the age of 41. This was based on the report in the Taiwan Office Gazette (No. 1927) in 1933, in which the dental registration of Akira Sugiyama was revoked due to his death (Fig. 1E).

Since Japan's medical modernization during the Meiji Restoration, the modern medicine has gradually become part of people's daily lives, and the medical professionals (including dentists) have become a good career option. Initially, most dentists in Taiwan were already dentists in Japan who immigrated to Taiwan to develop their dental careers. It was not until 1920 that the first Taiwanese who studied dentistry in Japan and returned to Taiwan for practice.⁴ Dr. Sugiyama was a Japanese immigrant who completed his high school education in Taiwan. His experience showed that for young Japanese immigrants, returning to Japan to study medicine (including dentistry) was also one of the career development options. Moreover, Dr. Shizuo Kobayashi, the first dental teacher with a dental background in Taiwan, and Dr. Heijirou Oohashi, the teacher in charge of the Chair of Dentistry in the Taipei Imperial University, both graduated from the Japan Dental Medicine College,⁵ indicating that Japan's dental education at that time had a significant impact on the development of dentistry in Taiwan.

The research on Taiwan dental history still provides limited information on the dental environment of Japanese-ruled Taiwan. However, the collection of historical materials from various sources to restore the life stories of early dentists has helped researchers to reconstruct the early dental environment in Taiwan, and to further explore the impact of these dentists' experiences on the development of dentistry and dental education in Taiwan. This will be one of the important research directions for the dental history in the future.

Declaration of competing interest

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

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