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Perspective article

Career choices in graduates from the Taipei Third Girls high school in 1936 – With special emphasis on those hoping to study dentistry



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Received 9 June 2025

Available online 23 June 2025

KEYWORDS

Taiwanese;
Dentistry;
Dentists;
High school girl culture

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During the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), Taiwan's society had developed a Western medical system. Since then, Taiwan's medicine had gradually developed into a modern medical system. The medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing and other medical disciplines had gradually matured, and the division of medical disciplines had also gradually become clear. Although the medical education institution of the Taiwan Government at that time only aimed to train male practitioners, this did not mean that Taiwanese girls had no right to pursue the medical education.^{1,2} Even though it was still difficult for the girls to receive higher education in that era, with the increasing popularity of the basic education, more and more Taiwanese girls attended the high schools. In addition to getting married, starting a family or finding a job, continuing to study and receive higher education had also become a career choice for those girls after graduation. For example, the first female Taiwanese physician (Dr. A-Hsin Tsai) and dentist (Dr. Hsiu-Yu Kuo) who studied the medicine and dentistry in Japan returned to Taiwan to practice in 1921 and 1928, respectively. They graduated from the Tokyo Girls Medical College and the Toyo Girls Dental College, respectively, and were the good role models for women studying the medicine and dentistry at that time.^{3,4}

In the past, research on the medical history of women studying medicine was mostly limited to the description of female medical figures who returned to Taiwan after

completing their medical studies. However, the career stage before they became medical personnel was relatively less discussed. Through the excavation of historical materials, this study had the opportunity to explore the distribution of career choices in graduates from the Taipei Third Girls High School at that time. A name list of graduates of the Taipei Prefecture Taipei Third Girls High School published in 1936, recorded not only the basic information of each graduate, but also the aspiration of each graduate after graduation (Fig. 1A). According to this name list, there were 146 graduates from the Taipei Third Girls High School in 1936. In the column of each graduate, there was a record item about their aspirations after graduation. It was equal to a survey on career choices of the graduates. These aspirations had 13 items totally, which could be further summarized into 3 major categories, including (A) non-employment and non-study: housework (75 girls, Fig. 1B); (B) employment: bank and society (25 girls), government office (12 girls), nanny (2 girls), and midwife (2 girls) (Fig. 1B and C); and (C) further study: cram school (18 girls), girls medical college (3 girls), girls dental college (3 girls), girls pharmacy college (2 girls), girls senior college (1 girl), imperial girls college (1 girl), advanced girls college (1 girl), and girls university (1 girl) (Fig. 1B and D).

Among these graduates, more than half of them chose the housework (51 %, 75 girls). This indicates that most of them want to enter into marriage and play the role of a

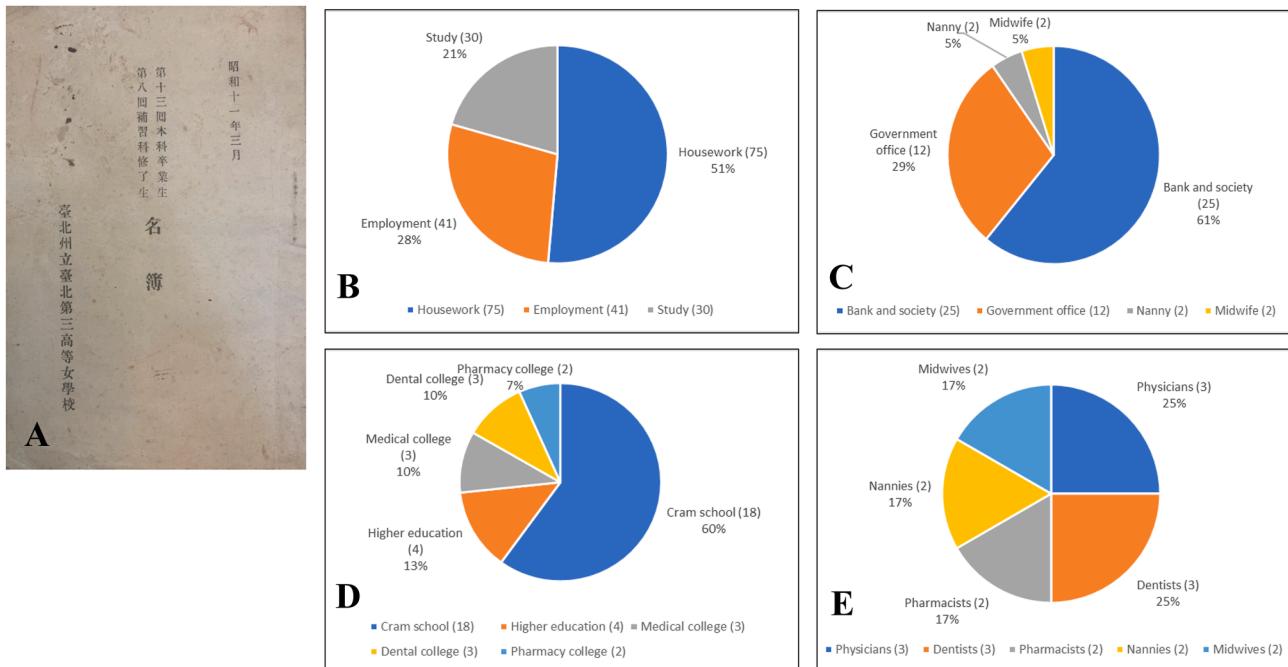


Figure 1 Career choices in graduates from the Taipei Prefecture Taipei Third Girls High School in 1936. (A) The cover page of the name list of graduates of the Taipei Prefecture Taipei Third Girls High School published in 1936. This name list is the personal collection of Feng-Chou Cheng, the first author of this article. (B) The three major categories of the graduates' aspirations were non-employment and non-study (housework, 75 girls), employment (41 girls), and further study (30 girls). (C) Among the graduates who wanted to find a job, the majority of them chose the bank and society (25 girls), followed by the government office (12 girls), nanny (2 girls), and midwife (2 girls). (D) Among the graduates who wanted to study further, the majority of them chose to study in the cram school (18 girls), followed by the medical education (8 girls), and other higher education (4 girls). (E) The career preferences related to the health care providers included the physicians (3 girls), dentists (3 girls), pharmacists (2 girls), nannies (2 girls), and midwives (2 girls).

good wife and mother after graduation. The others wanted to find a job (28 %, 41 girls) or enter into the further study (21 %, 30 girls) after graduation (Fig. 1B). Among the graduates who wanted to find a job, most of them chose the bank and society (61 %, 25 girls), followed by the government office (29 %, 12 girls) (Fig. 1C). This suggests that most of their career choices are to be employed by the private enterprises (25 girls), followed by the civil servants (12 girls). In addition, there were also graduates who wanted to work as nannies (2 girls) or midwives (2 girls) in the future (Fig. 1C). Among the graduates who wanted to study further, the majority of them chose to study in the cram school (60 %, 18 girls), which was a channel for training the primary school teachers at that time. The next choice was the medical education (27 %, 8 girls), and other higher education (13 %, 4 girls) (Fig. 1D). The survey results showed that the career preferences of these graduates were mainly the corporate employees and public servants and educators, followed by the health care providers (12 girls; including the physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nannies, and midwives) (Fig. 1E). There were 6 graduates who wanted to attend medical school (3 girls) or dental school (3 girls), indicating that becoming a physician or a dentist is the life goal of those 6 high school girls at that time (Fig. 1E).

During the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), the purpose of education in the girls high schools was to train the girls to be housewives of modern middle-class families. Although the education content included a lot of modern scientific knowledge, the ultimate goal was to hope that women could return to their families and play the role of good wives and mothers. Therefore, the majority of the girls high school students would get married after a short period of work after graduation and became the full-time housewives. Even so, these girls high school students who stood at the top of education had become a special group. They had created a “high school girl culture” that was different from the general ones in terms of cultural upbringing, interests, thoughts, social movements, and academic majors. On the other hand, it also promoted the trend of scholars aspiring to advance to study abroad to receive the specialized education, including the medicine and dentistry.^{3,4} For example, Dr. Hsiao-Yu Kuo, the first

Taiwanese female dentist in Taiwan, received the modern formal dental education and graduated from the Toyo Girls Dental College in 1928. She can also be said to be a pioneer of the modern professional women in Taiwan.³ By 1939, there were 40 female dentists in Taiwan, distributing in Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung. Among them, there were 8 female dentists in Taipei Prefecture.⁵ This means that by at least the 1930s, the professional image of female dentists had already existed in the various regions of Taiwan, becoming a reference for the girls high school students in their career exploration process. It also prompted that some outstanding students aspired to study dentistry, indicating that the development of dentistry in Taiwan was also influenced by the “high school girl culture”.

Declaration of competing interest

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

Acknowledgments

None.

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