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Geographical distribution of hometowns of female dental graduates from Toyo girls dental college in Japan in 1932



KEYWORDS

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After the Meiji Restoration began in 1868 (the first year of the Meiji era), the Japan government launched a series of modernization reforms. Regarding the medical education reform, the Meiji government adopted the advice of leading Western medical professionals in Japan at that time, deciding to implement the German medical education system. This pivotal step was intended to cultivate Western medical talent and develop a modern medical system in Japan. Ultimately, this led to the establishment of two separate systems, medicine and dentistry, each with its own distinct education, licensing, organizational structure, and legal system.¹ As Japan's national power expanded in the early 19th century, the Japan government also established the modern medical system in its overseas territories. In addition to local Japanese students, medical institutions in mainland Japan also attracted outstanding students from overseas territories to pursue medical studies.² Initially, only medical institutions for men were available. As female education became more widespread and the level of education improved, specialized medical institutions for women were established and began to recruit female students who aspired to pursue their dreams of becoming medical doctors. Dentistry, of course, was no exception. During the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan (1895–1945), many outstanding female high school graduates traveled to Japan to study dentistry.^{3,4}

Previous research on the history of dentistry has not provided information on the composition of female dental students in Japan during that era, such as where they came from. Fortunately, the graduation yearbook owned by Dr. Mei Hsieh-Yu (Fig. 1A), who graduated from Toyo Girls Dental College in 1932, was donated to the National Museum of Taiwan History (NMTH) in 2002 by her daughter. The images including this yearbook content were available through the NMTH Collection Search System. This study analyzed the hometown records listed in this yearbook to explore the geographical distribution of female dental graduates from Toyo Girls Dental College, which provided indirect evidence regarding the composition of female dental students in Japan in the 1930s.

A total of 94 female dental graduates from Toyo Girls Dental College in 1932 took a group photograph in front of the affiliated hospital as their graduation commemoration (Fig. 1B). This study categorized the hometown records of these female dental graduates by location, including mainland Japan and Japanese overseas territories or spheres of influence. The mainland Japan included Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, and Hokkaido, while the Japanese overseas territories or spheres of influence included Okinawa, Karafuto (current South Sakhalin), Taiwan, Choson (current Korea), and Manchukuo (current Northeast China). Honshu encompassed Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and other prefectures.

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Figure 1 The photographs were taken from the 1932 Toyo Girls Dental College Graduation Yearbook owned by Dr. Mei Hsieh-Yu, including her graduation photograph (A) and the group photograph of the female dental graduates in front of the affiliated hospital of Toyo Girls Dental College as the graduation commemoration (B). This study counted the number of hometowns of female dental graduates in each region and mapped the geographical distribution of their hometowns (C).

The number of female dental graduates' hometowns in each region was counted and a geographical distribution map of the hometowns of female dental graduates was plotted (Fig. 1C).

Among the 94 female dental graduates, the largest number (81 graduates) came from the mainland Japan, accounting for 86.2 % (81/94) of the total number of graduates, while there were only 13 graduates from

Japanese overseas territories or spheres of influence, accounting for 13.8 % (13/94) of the total number of graduates. Among those from the mainland Japan, the largest number came from Honshu (63 graduates), followed by Kyushu (9 graduates), Shikoku (6 graduates), and Hokkaido (3 graduates). Among the graduates from Honshu, 17 came from the three major metropolitan cities, with the largest number coming from Tokyo (15 graduates), followed by

Kyoto (1 graduate) and Osaka (1 graduate). There were 46 graduates from other prefectures in Honshu. In addition, among those from the overseas territories or spheres of influence, the largest number of them came from Taiwan (8 graduates), followed by Manchukuo (2 graduates), Okinawa (1 graduate), Karafuto (1 graduate), and Choson (1 graduate).

Toyo Girls Dental College was located in Tokyo, and its students came from all over Japan and surrounding areas. In 1932, the largest number of female dental graduates (63 graduates) came from Honshu, representing 67.0 % (63/94) of the total graduates. A notable 15 graduates were from Tokyo, demonstrating that geographical location significantly influenced the composition of its student body. Of the 13 overseas graduates, eight were from Taiwan, accounting for 61.5 % (8/13) of the total number of overseas graduates. Compared with other Japanese overseas territories, the level of communication between Taiwan and Japan was high. A survey of overseas students showed that there were 150 Taiwanese students studying dentistry in the mainland Japan in 1937, of whom 35 were female, accounting for 23.3 % (35/150) of the total number of Taiwanese students. These students were distributed among three girls' dental colleges in Tokyo (Toyo Girls Dental College, Tokyo Girls Dental College, and Japan Girls Dental College).²

The first batch of Taiwanese students studying in Japan began in November 1895. At that time, the Taiwanese government vigorously promoted higher education and encouraged Taiwanese people to send their children to study in Japan. The political intention was to allow Taiwanese people to understand the true nature of Japanese civilization.² According to the 1939 Taiwan Dentist Directory, there were only 33 Taiwanese female dentists in Taiwan, accounting for 14.7 % (33/225) of the total number of Taiwanese dentists.⁵ At that time, the trend of female students in Taiwan choosing to study dentistry was gradually emerging. Furthermore, an oral history interview with a Taiwanese woman who attended Toyo Girls Dental School in 1940 mentioned that her class had 203 students from all over Japan, as well as Choson, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, China, and Manchukuo. This may reflect the improvement in the quality and quantity of dental education in Japan at that time, which in turn attracted more students from Japan's neighboring countries to study dentistry. Since these female dental students returned to their own countries or hometowns to practice after completing their dental studies, their achievements not only promoted the improvement of dental technology in East Asia at the time, but also laid the foundation for the continued development of the dental profession in East Asia after World War II.

Declaration of competing interest

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

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