



## Correspondence

# The dental career development of physicians during the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan: A case study of Dr. Ying-Fang Chen



### KEYWORDS

Physician;  
Medical students;  
Dentistry;  
Dental training

Although Taiwan did not have a dental school system during the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), the Taiwan Government still designed a system to train the dental practitioners in Taiwan. Drawing on the regulations related to the dental profession of the physicians that was first implemented in the mainland Japan on September 8, 1916, the Taiwan Government promulgated similar regulations regarding the Taiwan physicians obtaining a dental practitioner license on July 13, 1918. The regulations consisted of two articles, as follows:<sup>1,2</sup>

Article 1: A physician applying for a license to practice the dentistry must submit his dental training records to the Governor-General of Taiwan. The application form referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be accompanied by a certificate issued by the head of a school or an institution offering the dental courses, certifying that the applicant has completed the specialized dental training and possesses the corresponding dental skills.

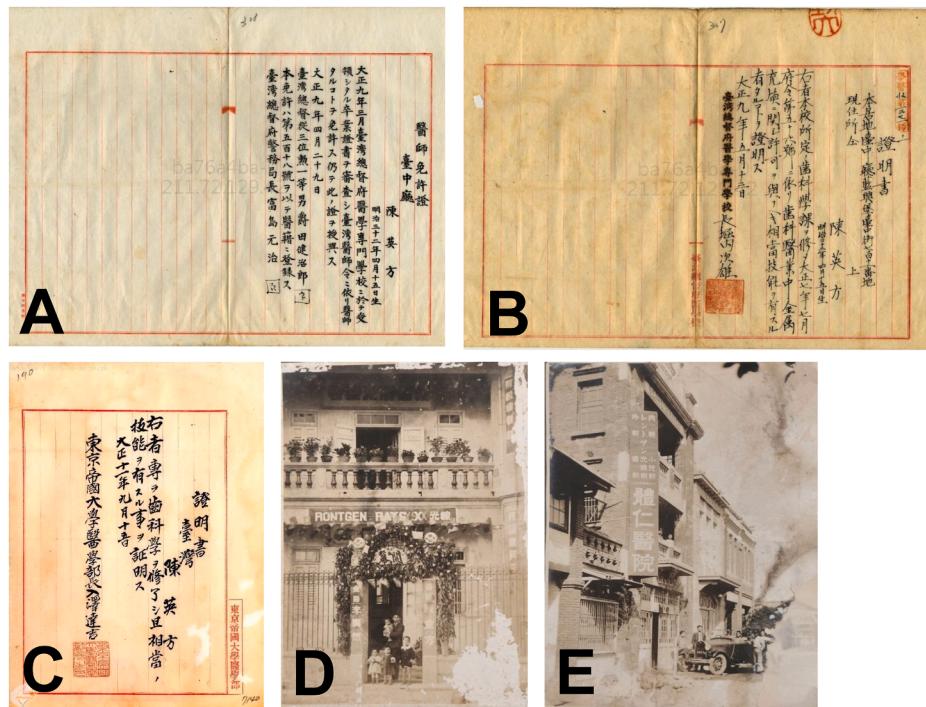
Article 2: A physician applying for a license to perform metal fillings, inlays, dentures, crowns and bridges, orthodontics, and palate obturators in the dental practice shall also be handled in accordance with the provisions of the preceding article.

This unique system allowed physicians who had received the dental training and acquired sufficient dental skills to apply to the government for a dental practitioner license

and thus practice dentistry. This was equivalent to a physician obtaining a dental practice qualification, but it was not equivalent to a dentist certificate. However, few studies have specifically examined the dental career development of the physicians who also engaged in the dental practice under this system. Therefore, we sought to explore the dental career development of Dr. Ying-Fang Chen, a graduate of the Taiwan Government Medical College, by collecting relevant historical documents and describing his dental career.

This article used the historical research method to unearth records of the dental profession of the physicians from the Taiwan Historica. We screened Dr. Ying-Fang Chen's documents and summarized his dental career development process as shown in Fig. 1.

Dr. Ying-Fang Chen was born in Changhua on April 15, 1899. His father was a physician. He graduated from the Taiwan Government Medical College in March 1920. In April of the same year, he applied to the government for a physician license to operate his medical clinic in Taichung City (Fig. 1A). According to the regulations in Article 2, Dr. Chen submitted a certificate of dental courses from the Taiwan Government Medical College to the government for a license to practice metal fillings in dentistry (Fig. 1B). He operated his medical clinic until April 1921, when he went to Japan to study dentistry. From April 1921 to September



**Figure 1** The documents and photographs related to Dr. Ying-Fang Chen's dental career development. (A) Dr. Ying-Fang Chen applied to the government for a physician license to operate his medical clinic in Taichung City in April 1920. (B) He submitted a certificate of dental courses from the Taiwan Government Medical College to the government for a license to practice metal fillings in dentistry. (C) He submitted a certificate of dental training from the Tokyo Imperial University Medical Faculty to the government for a license to practice dentistry. (D) The horizontal sign in the front view of his medical clinic advertised "Rontgen rays X rays", while the vertical sign on the right indicated an attached dental department. (E) The vertical sign on the left in the side view of his medical clinic advertised various specialties of the medical clinic, including internal medicine, radiology, surgery, pediatrics, and dentistry. (A), (B) and (C) were available from the Taiwan Historica. The photographs are the personal collection of Feng-Chou Cheng, the first author of this article.

1922, he received 1.5 years of dental training at the Tokyo Imperial University Hospital. After completing his dental training, he returned to Taiwan and resumed his medical clinic in Changhua in October 1922. At the same time, according to the regulations in Article 1, he submitted a certificate of dental training from the Tokyo Imperial University Medical Faculty to the government for a license to practice dentistry (Fig. 1C). Dr. Chen had undergone at least one year of postgraduate dental clinical training. Therefore, he could claim to have a dental specialty and obtain a full dental practice qualification.

Previous research has revealed that the typical dental training model for the physicians in Taiwan at that time was to receive dental clinical training as assistants in the dental department of the Taiwan Government Taipei Hospital or the Japanese Red Cross Society Taiwan Branch Hospital. The Tokyo Imperial University Dental Classroom was the leading dental institution in Japan at that time.<sup>3,4</sup> This suggests that Dr. Chen may have received the most comprehensive dental training among the Taiwanese physicians during the Japanese colonial period. In addition, the Guidelines for the Members of the Tokyo Dental Association published in 1928 confirm this view: According to the internal regulations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, only graduates from the Tokyo Imperial University Medical Faculty, who have taken the dental courses, must prove that they have completed at least six months of dental training,

while graduates from other medical schools providing the dental courses must prove that they have completed at least one year of dental training.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, we have two photographs from the antique market that date back to the opening of Dr. Chen's medical clinic in 1922. The medical clinic was named Ti Jen Hospital. The horizontal sign in the front view of the medical clinic advertised "Rontgen rays X rays", while the vertical sign on the right indicated an attached dental department (Fig. 1D). The vertical sign on the left in the side view of the medical clinic advertised various specialties of the medical clinic, including internal medicine, radiology, surgery, pediatrics, and dentistry (Fig. 1E). This suggests that Dr. Chen's practice model was primarily based on general Western medicine, but he also boasted a specialty in dentistry. Interestingly, dentistry may have been a small part of Dr. Chen's medical and dental career, but it was his highest medical specialty training qualification.

Due to a shortage of dentists during the Japanese colonial period, a special dental practitioner training system was established. After completing dental courses during medical student period or undergoing short-term post-graduate dental training, the physicians were issued a certificate of dental expertise, granting them the right to practice dentistry.<sup>5</sup> However, since the 1930s, the number of Taiwanese dentists who received formal dental education in Japan and then returned to Taiwan to practice has

gradually increased. Consequently, the physicians who previously possessed dental expertise have gradually withdrawn from the dental practice. Few studies examined the dental training and practice of these physicians. We believed that these dental practitioners made certain contributions to the development of oral healthcare in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. However, this aspect has received relatively less attention in the previous research and remains a key research topic in the Taiwan dental history.<sup>1</sup>

## Declaration of competing interest

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

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