

# Oral Health Care Activities for High School Students in Taipei City during the Japanese Colonial Period

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## Abstract

During the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), Taiwan underwent significant transformations in public health and education. Among these developments was the introduction of oral health care initiatives, particularly in schools. This study examines the policies, implementation, and impact of oral health care activities for high school students in Taipei City. Using historical records, government reports, and medical literature from the time, we analyze the colonial administration's approach to dental hygiene, including school-based dental check-ups, hygiene education, and treatment programs. The findings reveal that oral health care was closely tied to Japan's broader public health strategies, which aimed to improve the well-being of students while also reinforcing colonial authority. The study also highlights the long-term effects of these early initiatives on modern dental care practices in Taiwan.

# Introduction

Oral health is a crucial component of overall public health, and its importance was increasingly recognized during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Under Japanese rule (1895–1945), Taiwan saw significant improvements in public health infrastructure, influenced by Western medicine and Japan's own modernization efforts. Schools became an essential avenue for health promotion, with structured programs aimed at improving hygiene, including oral health care for students [1].

This paper explores the oral health initiatives introduced in high schools in Taipei City during the Japanese colonial period. By analyzing historical records, official health policies, and medical literature from that era, we aim to understand the motivations behind these programs, their implementation, and their long-term impact on Taiwanese dental health care. The Japanese colonial government placed a strong emphasis on public health to control diseases and improve the productivity of the local population. The Government-General of Taiwan established sanitation measures, medical inspections, and vaccination programs as part of its broader colonial strategy. Schools were targeted as sites for instilling health awareness and enforcing hygiene regulations. Japanese educational reforms in Taiwan integrated health education into the curriculum, following models used in Japan. Schools were required to conduct routine medical check-ups, hygiene lessons, and physical training. These measures extended to oral health, with systematic dental examinations and treatment programs becoming a part of student welfare initiatives. Regular dental checkup were introduced in high schools in Taipei to identify and treat common dental issues such as cavities and gum disease. School doctors or visiting dentists conducted examinations, often reporting their findings to school administrators and health officials. Dental clinics were set up in some schools, while others referred students to local hospitals for treatment. To prevent dental diseases, students were taught proper oral hygiene practices, including tooth brushing, diet control, and the importance of regular dental visits. Educational materials such as posters and pamphlets were distributed, often emphasizing Japanese standards of cleanliness and discipline. There is historical evidence suggesting that Japanese authorities experimented with fluoride and other preventive methods to improve oral health. Although these practices were not widespread, they laid the groundwork for modern preventive dentistry in Taiwan [2-8].

#### Discussion

The Japanese administration had both public health and political motivations for implementing school-based oral health initiatives. Beyond improving students' well-being, these programs reinforced Japanese cultural and medical superiority, fostering loyalty to the colonial administration. After World War II, many of the Japaneseintroduced health initiatives, including oral health education, continued to influence Taiwan's public health policies. The emphasis on school-based dental care persisted, shaping modern approaches to preventive dentistry in Taiwan.

Despite these advancements, access to quality dental care was not universal. Socioeconomic disparities affected students' ability to receive treatment, and some traditional Chinese practices conflicted with Japanese dental approaches. Additionally, while hygiene education was promoted, resources such as toothbrushes and dental clinics remained limited for many students [8-10].

#### Conclusion

The Japanese colonial government played a crucial role in shaping Taiwan's oral health care policies, particularly through schoolbased initiatives. High school students in Taipei benefited from dental checkups, hygiene education, and early preventive measures. These efforts not only improved student health but also reinforced Japan's colonial authority. Despite limitations in accessibility and implementation, the foundations laid during this period influenced Taiwan's post-colonial dental care system. Understanding these historical developments provides insight into how colonial policies have shaped modern health care in Taiwan.

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# **Conflict of Interest**

None

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