



Postman's Persistence Reunites a Japanese Teacher with Students from Eighty Years Ago

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A letter was sent from Japan to an address in Taichung, in the middle of Taiwan, that did not exist anymore. The letter was sent by a 106-year-old Japanese woman who used to be a teacher at an elementary school there during the period of Japanese rule. A young Taiwanese mailman searched for clues to find the “student” to whom the letter from his Japanese teacher was addressed. The mailman’s persistence has reunited the friendship between the Japanese woman and her students, who are around 90 now.

The letter was sent by Ms. Takagi Namie, who lives in Tamana City, Kumamoto Prefecture. Her father was a police officer when she was an elementary school pupil in the Taisho period (1912–1926). Her family moved to live in Taiwan when her father was transferred there and they lived in Taiwan for about thirty years. For the ten years from 1929 through 1938 she primarily worked as a teacher for Taiwanese schoolchildren in the lower grades at Wuri Public School (currently, Wuri Elementary School).



What prompted Ms. Takagi to write the letter was the Taiwanese baseball film *Kano*, which was recently released in Japan. This movie was inspired by the true story of the Taiwanese baseball team from the old Chiayi Agricultural and Forestry Vocational High School who made it to the championship of Japan’s Koshien high-school tournament in the



summer of 1931. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the Taiwanese baseball team at the time, and cheered for them in the final game against Chukyo Shogyo High School. She was interviewed by the *Asahi shimbun*'s Kumamoto bureau for its local news coverage regarding her experience with the Taiwanese baseball team. This press interview took her back to the good old days that she had spent with her students in Taiwan.

Out of a compelling nostalgic desire to learn what had become of her students in Taiwan, Ms. Takagi sent a letter addressed to Mr. Yang Hantsung (87), with whom she had occasionally exchanged letters until about twenty years ago. The letter was written for her by her daughter Keiko (76). It reached a local post office in late February, but the address as it appeared on the envelope had been changed quite a few times and was no longer in existence today.

Mail packages like that are usually returned to senders, stamped with “address unknown.” But Mr. Po-Tsun Kuo (27), a local postman with only two-and-a-half years of experience, had a hunch that the thick airmail package from Japan must have a very important letter inside, and he started to look for the recipient of the mail. With a piece of advice from his senior colleague regarding the approximate location of the recipient's old address, the postman searched for clues to find out the addressee by asking neighbors in the area in addition to completing his round of mail deliveries each day.

Found the addressee in twelve days

It proved very difficult, though, to find anybody who remembered the old residents in the area because of a surge in the number of new local residents following the completion of the train station for the Taiwan High Speed Rail (Bullet Train) in the Wuri district. The young postman found a person who knew that Mr. Yang Hantsung was the father of Mr. Yang Penjung, an ex-president of the local residents' association, and he finally delivered the airmail to its intended recipient after twelve days of persistent efforts.

Mr. Yang Hantsung is elderly and bedridden, but his son Penjung, deeply touched by the letter, took great pains for his father to find the twenty individuals who used to be Ms. Takagi's students. Mr. Yang Tusheng (88) is one of them. He misses those days with his Japanese teacher and says, “I was surprised to hear Ms. Takagi is a healthy 106-year-old. She was very kind to us.”

The former students wrote letters to Ms. Takagi, which has rekindled the friendship

between teacher and students. Ms. Takagi says, “I am extremely happy.” Unfortunately, she will not be able to visit Taiwan again because she has difficulty walking. Her students also find it hard to visit their teacher in Japan because of their age. Their supporters in Taiwan are currently trying to find a way that would allow the students to get in touch with their teacher on a TV screen through the Internet. They are in talks with the administrative authorities in Taiwan for assistance.

Just like the plot of a movie

Wei Te-Sheng, who produced *Kano*, is also known as the director of *Cape No. 7* (2008), which was a major hit. The story is about love letters sent by a Japanese teacher to a Taiwanese woman and mailed to the old address under Japanese rule, which were eventually delivered to her by a local postman. After the war, the teacher was forced to return home. He wrote love letters to express his regret for leaving the Taiwanese woman. The story of Ms. Takagi’s letter gathered much attention from the media as it is just like the plot of the movie.

In an interview in the *Asahi shimbun*, Wei Te-Sheng says, “Anyone who has lived in Taiwan is just like my family, regardless of nationality. I do hope that Ms. Takagi will never forget the good old beautiful minds of the Taiwanese people.”

[Taichung, Ukai Satoshi]

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