Baron Takaki and the Mayo Family: The Long-Lasting Bond Between Japan and Mayo Clinic

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Two esteemed physicians on the opposite sides of the world, Kanehiro Takaki in Tokyo, Japan, and William Worrall Mayo in Rochester, Minnesota, each of whom founded a renowned medical center in his country, established a personal link more than a hundred years ago. Their sons, Yoshihiro Takaki and William James Mayo, evolved their friendship into a long-lasting medical interchange between the 2 institutions. In this vignette, we recount their stories and journeys around the globe.

ABOUT KANEHIRO TAKAKI
Dr Kanehiro Takaki is one of the most prestigious physicians in the Japanese medical history. He studied at St Thomas’s Hospital Medical School in London from 1875 to 1880. Upon return to Japan, he founded a private hospital and medical school with the mission to serving the poor, which later became the Jikei University School of Medicine. His academic contribution is best known for identification of the cause of beriberi (Kakke, in Japanese) as a nutritional deficiency in 1884, preceding the isolation of vitamin B₁ by 40 years. He led an experiment in which naval soldiers on a training ship were given a Western-style food instead of a rice-based diet, which reduced the incidence of beriberi by 90% during the voyage.¹ ² He was named the Surgeon General of the Japanese Imperial Navy in 1885 and ennobled with the title of Baron for his work on beriberi in 1905. He set out to travel around the globe in 1906. On route, he gave 3 lectures on his study on beriberi at St Thomas’s Hospital, which were published in the Lancet.³ ⁵

MAYO CLINIC AND THE SURGEONS CLUB
Dr William Worrall Mayo (W.W. Mayo) established a private practice in Rochester, which later evolved into Mayo Clinic. By 1906, Mayo Clinic was already an epicenter of medicine, and countless physicians around the world visited Rochester to observe the surgical expertise of his 2 sons, William James Mayo (W.J. Mayo) and Charles Horace Mayo. The Mayo brothers were at the peak of their surgical careers and prolific authors in national medical journals.

On June 7, 1906, 6 doctors visiting Mayo Clinic assembled in a room of the Cook House and founded the Surgeons Club.⁶ In a short time, this medical community became a popular travel destination for an international audience of medical professionals.

KANEHIRO TAKAKI AND W.W. MAYO
After the lectures at St Thomas’s Hospital in London, Baron Takaki traveled to New York, Canada, and then arrived in Rochester. On June 18, 1906, within 2 weeks of the inception of the Surgeon Club, he joined it with his eldest son, Yoshihiro, who was also a physician and had studied at St Thomas’s Hospital Medical School.⁷ They delivered a speech on beriberi and were awarded a life membership to the club. He was invited to W.W. Mayo’s house on June 18 as noted in his handwritten diary (Figure 1). The next day, a reception was held at the Cook House. Baron Takaki and his son were hosted by Dr Thompson of Edinburgh, Scotland, along with Dr and Mrs W.J. Mayo and their daughters.⁸

W.W. Mayo repaid his visit by traveling to Japan in 1907 when he was 89. Baron Takaki welcomed him royally and gave him a reception at Seyoken in Ueno, Tokyo, on May 19, 1907.⁹ The hospitality of Japanese people during the 2-month trip, including a visit to Yokohama and Kobe, impressed W.W. Mayo profoundly.
After returning to Rochester, Dr Mayo recounted his experience in Japan in the newspaper\textsuperscript{10}: “It seems as if I had been in a wonderland. I’ve been among new peoples; have seen new ways of doing things; have walked in a world that is practically upside down when compared with our little world.” A photo of the 2 with Baroness Takaki and others, taken during the visit, signifies the bond between them (Figure 2).

FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN YOSHIHiro TAKAKI AND W.J. MAYO

Baron Takaki’s eldest son, Yoshihiro, was also ennobled with the title of Baron and later became the president of the Jikei University School of Medicine. He maintained friendship with W.J. Mayo for a long time through correspondence since his visit to Rochester. It was evident in the letters that both physicians highly respected each other. This friendship led to a visit of the Japanese Medical Commission at Mayo Clinic in 1923. The commission consisted of Yoshihiro Takaki and other prominent Japanese physicians, and they came to Mayo Clinic at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation (Figure 3). They spent 4 days, from April 28 to May 1, visiting Mayo Clinic, the Mayo Foundation, and affiliated hospitals. They were entertained at a dinner at the University Club on May 1. The address of welcome at the dinner by W.J. Mayo emphasized their friendship as unified professionals dedicated to the patient, irrespective of political and commercial conflicts between Japan and the United States during that time (Supplemental Figure, available online at http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org).\textsuperscript{11}

…We meet not as Japanese and Americans but as members of a learned profession whose lives are given to the prevention of sickness, to the relief of human ills, and to these researches which will lessen human misery in the future…

Many physicians from Japan visited Mayo Clinic through their relationship according to the correspondence. Their correspondence continued until 1932, as archived in the Mayo Clinic Historical Unit.

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SUPPLEMENTAL ONLINE MATERIAL

Supplemental material can be found online at http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org. Supplemental material attached to journal articles.
FIGURE 2. A photo of Kanehiro Takaki and W.W. Mayo. The Japanese person sitting with W.W. Mayo was long unidentified. He was recently identified as Kanehiro Takaki by a staff of the Jikei University School of Medicine during a group visit of Japanese medical school staff to Mayo Clinic. This photo was taken during Dr Mayo’s trip to Japan in 1907. W.W. Mayo is on the front left and Baron Takaki on the front right. The lady standing on the left is Tomi, wife of Baron Takaki.
has not been edited, and the authors take responsibility for the accuracy of all data.

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FIGURE 3. A photo of Yoshihiro Takaki and W.J. Mayo. This photo was taken during a visit of the Japanese Medical Commission sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1923. People in the photos are (in the order from left to right) Baron Yoshihiro Takaki, Tokyo Jikei Hospital and Medical College; Dr Mataro Nagayo, Tokyo Imperial University; Dr William James Mayo, Mayo Clinic; Dr Akira Fujinami, Kyoto Imperial University; Dr Kinnosuke Miura, Tokyo Imperial University; Dr Allan Gregg, the Rockefeller Institute; and Dr Sahachiro Hata, Keio University.