

Saisei-Gakusha and Hideyo Noguchi's Temporary Return to Japan

Toshiro Shimura¹, Akihiko Gemma² and Takeyuki Tokura³

¹Department of the Second Clinical Laboratory Medicine, Japan Organization of Occupational Health and Safety

Tokyo Rosai Hospital, Tokyo, Japan

²Nippon Medical School, Tokyo, Japan

³Fukuzawa Memorial Center for Modern Japanese Studies, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

During the period from September 5 to November 4, 1915 (Taisho 4), the bacteriologist Dr. Hideyo Noguchi temporarily returned to Japan after living and working in the United States for 15 years. This article discusses the many lectures he delivered during his visit, particularly those at the alumni meeting of Saisei-Gakusha, the institution from which he graduated, and the Mita Speech Meeting at Keio University. Additionally, this paper provides an overview of Saisei-Gakusha, a private medical school from the Meiji era that later became the predecessor of Nippon Medical School, highlighting its founding philosophy of “Saisei” (to save lives). It also introduces materials such as Noguchi's handwritten Curriculum Vitae and Autograph, which he prepared while studying abroad at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Furthermore, we examine an article from *The New York Times* reporting on Noguchi's serious illness several years after his return to the United States, as well as related articles from Japanese newspapers. We also present a thank-you postcard and a business card sent by Noguchi to his close friend Dr. Shinichi Wani, a fellow alumnus of Saisei-Gakusha, illustrating their enduring friendship. These materials reflect Noguchi's meticulous nature, thoughtful personality, and warm character, as seen through his relationship with his dear friend Wani. (J Nippon Med Sch 2025; 92: 138–144)

Key words: Hideyo Noguchi, Saisei-Gakusha, temporary return, *The New York Times*, newsprint

Introduction

Bacteriologist Dr. Hideyo Noguchi (1876–1928) graduated from Saisei-Gakusha, a private medical school that was coeducational during the Meiji era. Saisei-Gakusha was founded in 1876 (Meiji 9) by Tai Hasegawa and later became the predecessor of Nippon Medical School. During the Meiji period, individuals in Japan could become licensed physicians by passing the Medical Practice Opening Examination, established in 1875 (Meiji 8) by the Ministry of Home Affairs, as stipulated in Article 37 of the Medicine System¹. Reports about Noguchi at Saisei-Gakusha are believed to be extremely scarce².

This review focuses on Noguchi's activities during his temporary return to Japan, from September 5 to November 4, 1915 (Taisho 4), after 15 years in the United States. We highlight the welcome receptions and lectures related to his alma mater, Saisei-Gakusha^{3,4}, as well as his lecture

at Keio University, which was connected to Saisei-Gakusha's founder, Tai Hasegawa, who was a special alumnus of Keio University⁵. Additionally, we examine newspaper articles from the United States and Japan on Noguchi's serious illness after his return to the United States.

Brief History of Hideyo Noguchi

Noguchi was born on November 9, 1876 (Meiji 9), in Inawashiro Town, Fukushima Prefecture. In 1904, he became a regular member of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in the United States. He was a world-renowned bacteriologist and was considered as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Coincidentally, the year of his birth also marked the founding of Saisei-Gakusha, the predecessor of Nippon Medical School.

Correspondence to Toshiro Shimura, Department of the Second Clinical Laboratory Medicine, Japan Organization of Occupational Health and Safety, Tokyo Rosai Hospital, 4-13-21 Ohmori-Minami, Ohta-ku, Tokyo 143-0013, Japan

E-mail: t-simura@nms.ac.jp

https://doi.org/10.1272/jnms.JNMS.2025_92-213

Journal Website (<https://www.nms.ac.jp/sh/jnms/>)

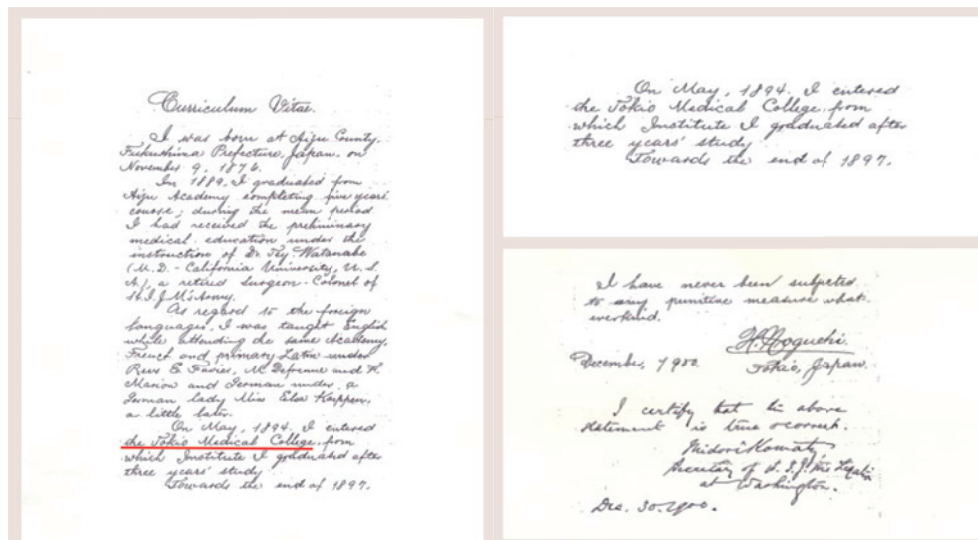


Fig. 1 Handwritten resume by Hideyo Noguchi, addressed to the Rockefeller Institute⁶. The red line indicates the Tokyo Medical School Saisei-Gakusha. Reproduced with permission from Okuni H. [Hideyo Noguchi and the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research: His research mindset] [unpublished lecture notes]. Tokyo: The 17th Annual Research Meeting of the Japan Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery; lecture given 2008 Oct 2. Japanese.

In 1896 (Meiji 29), Noguchi moved from Inawashiro Town, Fukushima Prefecture, to Tokyo. In September of the same year, he passed the preliminary examination for medical practice (Examination No. 68) and enrolled in Saisei-Gakusha. In 1897, he passed the final examination for medical practice (Examination No. 154) and graduated from Saisei-Gakusha in the same year. Noguchi's medical registration number, issued on September 13, 1900 (Meiji 33), by the Minister of the Interior, Tsugumichi Saigo, and the Director of the Health and Medical Bureau, Tai Hasegawa, was No. 13,572.

According to Noguchi's handwritten resume, preserved in the records of the former Institute for Research in Infectious Diseases from 1899 to March 1916, he wrote that he "studied medicine at Saisei-Gakusha from November 1896 (Meiji 29) to August 1897 (Meiji 30)." Noguchi's curriculum vitae and autograph sent to the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research during his time abroad stated that he "enrolled in Tokyo Medical College and graduated in 1897" (Fig. 1)⁶. Furthermore, with the permission of the Noguchi Memorial Foundation, we discuss a hanging scroll inscribed by Noguchi himself, titled "Saisei," which is fitting for Noguchi, a graduate of Saisei-Gakusha. The term saisei (Fig. 2)⁷ embodies the founding spirit of Saisei-Gakusha, a private coeducational medical school during the Meiji period. It reflects the philosophy of "Saisei-Kyumin," meaning "to save the lives of the poor and those suffering from illness, which

is the true path of a physician¹."

Dr. Noguchi's Temporary Return and Saisei-Gakusha

Noguchi temporarily returned to Japan for the first time in 15 years, traveling aboard the Yokohama Maru from September 5 to November 4, 1915 (Taisho 4). The purpose of his return to his hometown was to reunite with his mother, Shika Noguchi (October 18, 1853, to November 10, 1918), who, at the age of 45, had passed the national certification exam for maternity nurses (Imperial Ordinance No. 345) in 1902.

On October 19, 1915, during a temporary return to Japan, Hideyo Noguchi visited the Ministry of Education and was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, Fourth Class. This honor was bestowed upon him in recognition of his research on *Treponema pallidum*, formerly known as *Spirochaeta pallida*. Earlier that year, in April 1915, at the age of 39, Noguchi received the 5th Imperial Prize of the Japan Academy. Later, in November 1923, he was inducted as a member of the Imperial Academy of Japan. On November 3, just before his return to the United States, Noguchi met with Shigenobu Okuma, the 17th Prime Minister of Japan. During his stay, he was also kept extremely busy with various events, including welcome receptions hosted by figures in the medical community, such as Shibasaburo Kitasato⁸. According to Dr. Noguchi's diary, Noguchi gave a lecture on the medical conditions of North Amer-

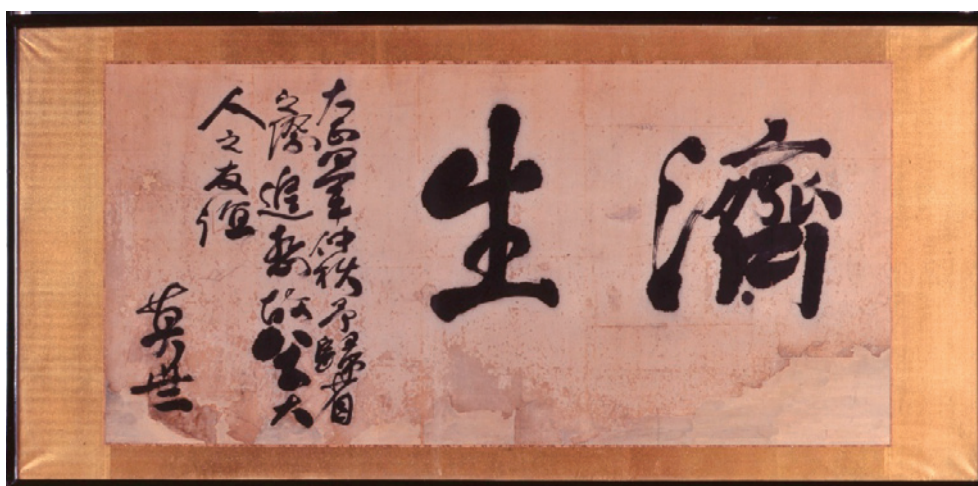


Fig. 2 Hanging scroll inscribed with the calligraphy Saisei by Hideyo Noguchi⁷. Reproduced with permission from [Saisei: A hanging scroll written by Hideyo Noguchi] [photograph]. Fukushima: The Hideyo Noguchi Memorial Foundation; 1915 Sep 5. Japanese.

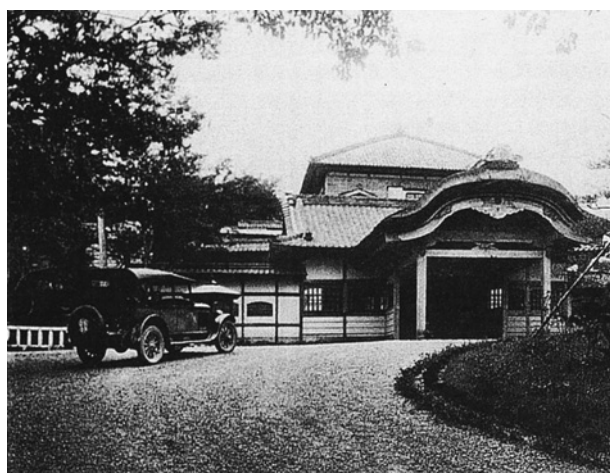


Fig. 3 The Goni-kai Hotel in Ise-Yamada, which served as both the meeting hall and guesthouse where Noguchi delivered his lecture¹¹. Reproduced with permission from Tsujimura S, Uratani H. [Visual history of Ise and Shima: A turbulent century in a hometown through photographs]. Nagano: Kyodo Publishing; 1990. [Photograph 1], Goni-kai Hotel; p. 74. Japanese.

ica, the realities of research life at the Rockefeller Institute⁹, trends in medical research, and evaluations of infectious diseases¹⁰. These lectures were delivered at various venues, including Tokyo Imperial University and Niigata Shihan-Gakko.

Additionally, the alumni association of Saisei-Gakusha, the medical school from which Noguchi graduated, held four separate welcome receptions in his honor. The first welcome reception and lecture were held on September 22, 1915, at the Seiyoken Restaurant in Ueno Tokyo. Noguchi delivered a lecture titled "Circumstances Before

and After Traveling to the United States and the State of American Medicine." The second reception was organized on October 8, 1915, at the Goni-kai hotel in Ise-Yamada, Mie (Fig. 3)¹¹. This event was initiated by alumni of Saisei-Gakusha, including Kabun Hata, who graduated from Saisei-Gakusha in 1902 (Meiji 35) and later studied at the Rockefeller Institute in the United States in 1918 through Noguchi's introduction. It is said that Noguchi engaged in lively discussions about Saisei-Gakusha and the state of American medicine during this gathering.

The third event took place on October 14, 1915, at Kyoto Imperial University, where Noguchi gave a lecture titled "On the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research." The following day, October 15, the Saisei-Gakusha Alumni Association hosted another welcome reception at the historic Maruyama Asami, a Kyoto restaurant established in 1849. The fourth and final reception was held on October 30, 1915, at the Oriental Palace Hotel, located at 11 Yamashita-cho, Yokohama, Kanagawa.

On September 21, 1915, Noguchi visited the Kitasato Institute in Shirokane, Minato City, where he delivered a lecture. From 1898 (Meiji 31) to 1899 (Meiji 32), Noguchi worked as an assistant at the Infectious Disease Research Institute, where he was mentored by the renowned bacteriologist Shibasaburo Kitasato. Noguchi was one of Kitasato's prominent disciples and benefited greatly from his guidance in fostering the next generation of researchers⁸. On October 18, 1915, Noguchi gave a special lecture titled "On Medical Research in North America" at the newly established Keio University Auditorium (Fig. 4 A)¹². This lecture, part of the 506th Mita Public Lecture

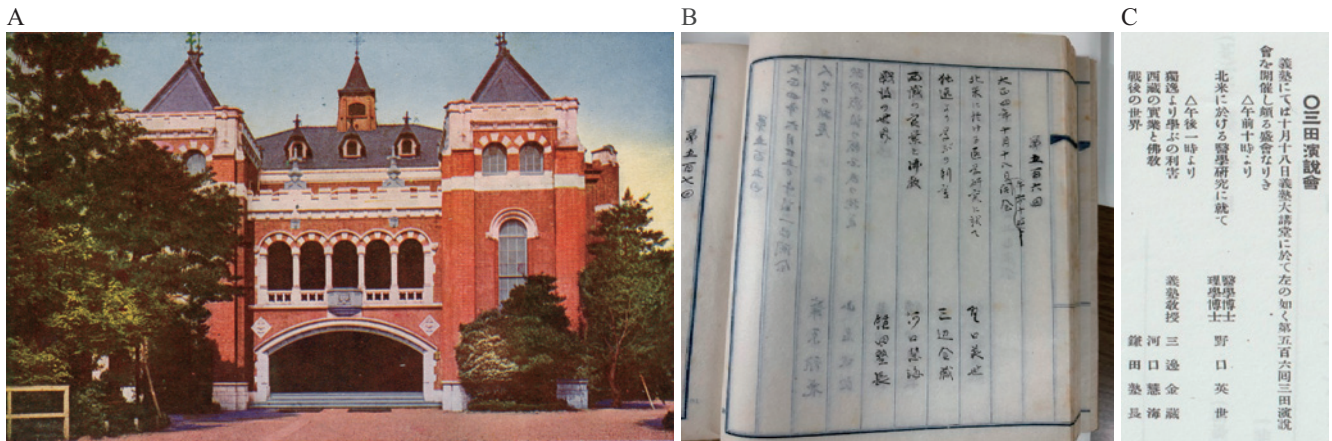


Fig. 4

- A: The Grand Auditorium of Keio University, where Noguchi delivered his lecture (established in 1915 during the Taisho era)¹². Reproduced with permission from The Grand Auditorium of Keio University [photograph]. Tokyo: The Keio University Fukuzawa Research Center; [1921].
- B: The 506th Mita lecture meeting featuring Hideyo Noguchi¹³. Reproduced with permission from [The 506th Mita Speech Meeting]. Proceedings of the Mita Speech Meeting from 1906 to 1918; Tokyo. Tokyo: Keio University. Japanese.
- C: Mita Speech Meeting¹⁴. Reproduced with permission from [Mita Speech Meeting]. Jiji Shimpō, Keio University Press. 1915 Nov 5. Japanese.

Series, was delivered in his capacity as a Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Science (Fig. 4B, C)^{13,14}.

Medical Conditions after Returning to New York City and Coverage in *The New York Times*

After returning from Japan for a brief period, a few years later, on May 24, 1917, Noguchi contracted typhoid fever while conducting bacteriological research. This illness was attributed to the accumulated fatigue from his nationwide lecture tours during his stay in Japan. He was admitted to Mount Sinai Hospital, affiliated with Mount Sinai Medical College in New York City, where his condition became critical. However, he recovered and was discharged on July 22 of the same year. The first reports of Noguchi's illness in the United States appeared in *The New York Times*. On May 28, 1917, the headline read, "DR. NOGUCHI ILL. Noted Japanese Pathologist Has Typhoid Fever." The following day, on May 29, the headline stated, "DR. NOGUCHI VERY ILL. Japanese Scientist's Condition from Typhoid Fever Is Serious." By May 31, the newspaper reported, "Dr. Noguchi Slightly Improved." These detailed reports in the American press highlight how esteemed Dr. Noguchi was as a medical scientist in the United States at the time, especially as a Nobel Prize candidate.

His illness was also reported in newspapers in Japan. *The Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* on May 30, 1917 (Issue No.

11,103) (Fig. 5)¹⁵, carried the headlines, "World-Renowned Scholar, Japan's Pride: Dr. Hideyo Noguchi in Critical Condition" and "Despairing News of Typhoid Fever." Concerned about Noguchi's health, Dr. Shinichi Wani, a fellow alumnus of Saisei-Gakusha (graduated in 1898), sent him a letter of encouragement. In response, after his recovery, Noguchi sent a thank-you postcard to Wani in August of the same year from the United States.

An article in *The Yomiuri Shimbun* on November 16, 2009 (Issue No. 48,036), revealed the existence of two postcards sent by Noguchi to Wani, reflecting their close friendship¹⁶. One of these postcards was a thank-you note for Wani's letter of encouragement during Noguchi's illness (Fig. 6A, B)^{16,17}. Additionally, the article mentioned the discovery of Noguchi's business card, which he had given to Wani (Fig. 7)^{16,17}, detailing his schedule upon his return to the United States. Wani graduated from Saisei-Gakusha in 1898 (Meiji 31) and later worked at Tokyo Kyoundo Hospital. In 1904, he opened his own practice in Kōzu Town, Kanagawa Prefecture. During this time, he also served as a lecturer in dental pharmacology at the Institute of Tokyo Dentistry starting in June 1901. Noguchi, during the same period, was a lecturer in general pathology at the same institution¹⁸. Their shared time at Saisei-Gakusha and their overlapping roles at the Institute of Tokyo Dentistry fostered a close friendship, which became a cherished memory of their youth. Further evi-



Fig. 5 Dr. Hideyo Noguchi in Critical Condition¹⁵.

Headlines: “A World-Renowned Scholar, Japan’s Pride”; “Dr. Hideyo Noguchi in Critical Condition”; “Conducting Bacteriological Research in the United States”; and “Tragic News of Hopeless Prognosis Due to Typhus.”

Reproduced with permission from [Dr. Hideyo Noguchi in critical condition]. Asahi Shimbun (Reprint Ed). 1990 Aug 25; 5. Japanese.



Fig. 6 A, B: A letter from Dr. Hideyo Noguchi addressed to Shinichi Wani^{16,17}.

Reproduced with permission from [Hideyo Noguchi: A postcard addressed to his schoolmate]. Yomiuri Shimbun. 2009 Nov 16; Society: 36. Japanese.

dence of their bond can be seen in a commemorative photograph taken on the deck of the *Sado Maru* on November 4, 1915, when Noguchi returned to the United States after a brief visit to Japan. In the photograph, Noguchi is surrounded by his mentors and friends, including Wani, symbolizing their enduring friendship.

Noguchi's Social Contributions

Noguchi died of yellow fever on May 21, 1928 (Showa 3), while conducting research on the disease in Accra, in what is now the Republic of Ghana. He passed away at the age of 51, deeply mourned and missed. On the same day, he was posthumously awarded the Senior Fifth Rank (Shogoi) and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star, Second Class. As previously mentioned, Noguchi had earned significant academic degrees in Japan. In February 1911, he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine by Kyoto University, and in April 1914, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by Tokyo University.

News of Noguchi's passing was reported in the May 22, 1928, edition of *The New York Times* (Issue No. 25,686) on page 16, accompanied by his portrait under the headline, “Dr. Noguchi is Dead, Martyr of Science” (Fig. 8)¹⁹. Noguchi's gravestone at Woodlawn Cemetery in New York City bears an inscription commemorating his dedication to science. It reads: “Through devotion to science, he lived and died for humanity.” This epitaph honors his

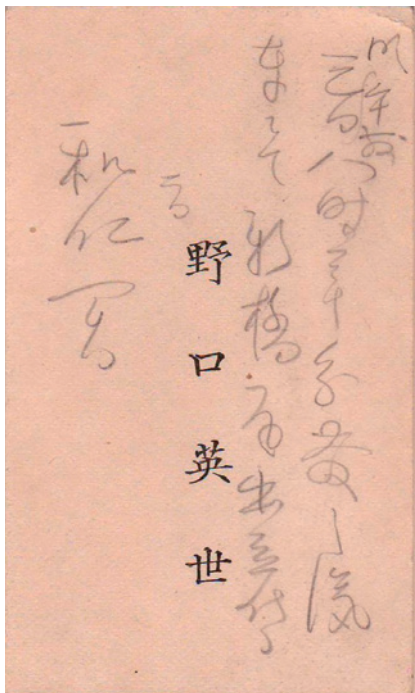


Fig. 7 A business card inscribed with "To my esteemed brother, Dr. Wani" (addressed to Dr. Shinichi Wani), which Dr. Hideyo Noguchi gave to his close friend from his Saisei-Gakusha days upon his return to the United States (Courtesy of Keiichi Wani)^{16,17}.

Reproduced with permission from [Hideyo Noguchi: A postcard addressed to his schoolmate]. Yomiuri Shimbun. 2009 Nov 16; Society: 36. Japanese.

tireless efforts and ultimate sacrifice in the fight against yellow fever as a full member of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research.

Conclusion

This report focuses on the four alumni gatherings and lectures related to Saisei-Gakusha, as well as the lecture at the Keio University Mita Speech Meeting, which took place between September and November 1915, during Hideyo Noguchi's temporary return to Japan from the United States after 15 years. Additionally, it provides an account of materials displayed in the Saisei-Gakusha Gallery within the Alumni Hall of Nippon Medical School, including Noguchi's handwritten curriculum vitae and autograph addressed to the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research during his time at Saisei-Gakusha and while studying abroad. Furthermore, the report includes details about Noguchi's illness after his return to the United States and his friendship with Shinichi Wani, a close friend and fellow alumnus of Saisei-Gakusha, as reported in newspapers in both the United States and Ja-



Fig. 8 Obituary Article of Bacteriologist Hideyo Noguchi: News of Dr. Hideyo Noguchi's Death¹⁹. Reproduced with permission from Dr. Noguchi is dead, martyr of science. The New York Times. 1928 May 22; Editorial: 16.

pan. It should be noted that this paper is the second report (2nd Report) for Reference 17.

Acknowledgements: We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the late Dr. Nobuyasu Karasawa, an honorary member of the Japan Society of Medical History, for his invaluable guidance as a pioneer in the preceding research on this topic.

We are deeply thankful to the late Professor Emeritus Hisashi Okuni of the Department of Microbiology at Nippon Medical School for his assistance regarding Hideyo Noguchi's handwritten Curriculum Vitae submitted to the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research.

Additionally, we extend our sincere appreciation to Dr. Teppei Morita, Curator of the Hideyo Noguchi Memorial Foundation, and Mr. Hirotaka Okutsu, a local collection researcher, for their guidance on the attribution of Hideyo Noguchi's Saisei illustration and the article in *The New York Times* (Fig. 8) reporting on Noguchi's illness and obituary. Their support enabled the creation of this work, including the original materials of the precious hanging scroll Saisei. We hereby express our deepest gratitude.

Last but not least, we would also like to express our deepest gratitude to Dr. Takeyuki Tokura at Fukuzawa Memorial Center for Modern Japanese Studies, Keio University, for his support regarding Noguchi's materials for the Mita Speech Meeting at Keio University.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Shimura T, Gemma A. [Saiseigakusha, the predecessor of Nippon Medical School: Philosophy of Saisei-Kyumin and associates of Tai Hasegawa]. *Nihon Ika Daigaku Igakkai Zasshi*. 2022;18(1):86–97. Japanese.
2. Karasawa N. [Hideyo Noguchi during the Saisei-Gakusha Era—The path to bacteriology]. In: Kogure H, Tazaki K, editors. [Hideyo Noguchi: Living in the 21st century]. Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyoronsha; 2004. p. 20–64. Japanese.
3. Kohiyama R. [Dreams of studying abroad]. In: Fukushima Minyu Shimbunsha, editor. [The true face of Hideyo Noguchi: A Fukushima man who lived his life as a doctor]. Fukushima: Rekishi Shunju Publishing; 2005. p. 237–9. Japanese.
4. Kohiyama R. [The people who nurtured the medical saint, Hideyo Noguchi]. Fukushima Minyu Shimbunsha, editor. Fukushima: Rekishi Shunju Publishing; 2008. p. 137–41, 165–9. Japanese.
5. Shimura T, Tokura T. [On Tai Hasegawa and Keio Gijuku: Relations with Yukichi Fukuzawa]. *Nihon Ishigaku Zasshi*. 2013;59:469–85. Japanese.
6. Okuni H. [Hideyo Noguchi and the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research: His research mindset] [unpublished lecture notes]. Tokyo: The 17th Annual Research Meeting of the Japan Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery; lecture given 2008 Oct 2. Japanese.
7. [Saisei: A hanging scroll written by Hideyo Noguchi] [photograph]. Fukushima: The Hideyo Noguchi Memorial Foundation; 1915 Sep 5. Japanese.
8. [Shibasaburo Kitasato: Conquering infectious diseases is my mission]. Kitasato Institute Memorial Room, editor. Tokyo: Kitasato Institute; 2012. Part 2, Chapter 7, p. 95. Japanese.
9. Noguchi H. [The business of the Rockefeller Institute]. *Aizukai Kaiho*. 1915 Dec 12;(7):2–6. Japanese.
10. Okumura T. [Reflecting on Dr. Noguchi]. *The Shika Gakuho*. 1928;33(8):859–66. Japanese.
11. Tsujimura S, Uratani H. [Visual history of Ise and Shima: A turbulent century in a hometown through photographs]. Nagano: Kyodo Publishing; 1990. [Photograph 1], Goni-kai Hotel; p. 74. Japanese.
12. The Grand Auditorium of Keio University [photograph]. Tokyo: The Keio University Fukuzawa Research Center; [1921].
13. [The 506th Mita Speech Meeting]. Proceedings of the Mita Speech Meeting from 1906 to 1918; Tokyo. Tokyo: Keio University. Japanese.
14. [Mita Speech Meeting]. Jiji Shimpō, Keio University Press; 1915 Nov 5. Japanese.
15. [Dr. Hideyo Noguchi in critical condition]. *Asahi Shimbun* (Reprint Ed.). 1990 Aug 25:5. Japanese.
16. [Hideyo Noguchi: A postcard addressed to his school-mate]. *Yomiuri Shimbun*. 2009 Nov 16; Society:36. Japanese.
17. Shimura T, Gemma A. [Hideyo Noguchi in the Saisei-Gakusha Era]. *Nihon Ika Daigaku Igakkai Zasshi*. 2023;19(3):248–51. Japanese.
18. Moriyama T, Ishikawa T, Hasegawa M. [Bibliography of the first volume of lecture notes from Tokyo Dental College]. *Nihon Shikaishi Gakkai Kaishi*. 1987;14(2):97–101. Japanese.
19. Dr. Noguchi is dead, martyr of science. *The New York Times*. 1928 May 22; Editorial:16.

(Received, January 27, 2025)

(Accepted, February 3, 2025)

Journal of Nippon Medical School has adopted the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) for this article. The Medical Association of Nippon Medical School remains the copyright holder of all articles. Anyone may download, reuse, copy, reprint, or distribute articles for non-profit purposes under this license, on condition that the authors of the articles are properly credited.