

It is rare to be able to say that one person helped change the face of their nation, but in the case of Iowa-born surgeon Samuel Noordhoff, who died at the age of 91 in the US on Monday, it is true.

Noordhoff, better known by his Chinese name, Luo Huei-fu (羅煨福), helped change the face of medical care in Taiwan and the faces of many Taiwanese during his 40 years in the nation, and will continue to do so for decades to come.

Although he retired in 1999 and moved back to the US, Noordhoff left a substantial legacy in the form of the hundreds of surgeons who he helped train; the organizations that he created, such as the Noordhoff Craniofacial Foundation (NCF) and the Chang Gung Craniofacial Center; and the myriad of patients in Taiwan and abroad whose lives he helped improve.

Noordhoff left the US with his family in 1959 to be a missionary doctor, sent by the Reformed Church in America to take up the job of superintendent at Mackay Memorial Hospital.

At Mackay, he established the nation's first intensive care unit for burn victims, its first polio-rehabilitation center, suicide prevention center and mobile clinic.

In the mid-1960s, he returned to the Michigan hospital where he had begun his career to complete a plastic surgery residency, and upon his return to Taiwan, focused on craniofacial surgery.

After 16 years at Mackay, he moved to the newly established Chang Gung Memorial Hospital to chair its plastic surgery department, and the craniofacial center that he established there has become one of the world's leading facilities for such care.

Noordhoff once said that while surgery for cleft lips or palates takes about two hours, the patients' lives are changed forever.

The center and the 28-year-old NCF have truly changed the lives of tens of thousands of people.

The NCF has become the face of Taiwanese medical outreach for people in many countries, ranging from China and ASEAN members to the Dominican Republic, Nigeria and Kenya, providing surgery and other medical care, as well as helping patients' families. It has also helped train more than 200 craniofacial specialists from 18 countries.

The foundation was promoting Taiwan's "soft power" long before the term became a staple of government policy.

The NCF's assistance with Taiwan's health aid programs was recognized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs three years ago with a Friend of Foreign Service Medal, while Noordhoff himself received the Presidential Cultural Award last year for his promotion of rural healthcare while at Mackay and medical efforts nationwide.

Noordhoff's work was also recognized abroad, with lifetime achievement awards from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons in 1994 and the British Association of Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons in 2012. However, as always, he credited the Taiwanese medical personnel and others that he worked with over the decades for those accomplishments.

In 2000, on a trip back to Taipei to promote his Chinese-language biography, Noordhoff said in Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese, which he and the rest of his family spoke fluently along with Mandarin) that he considered Taiwan his "home country" and that he was "proud of being Taiwanese."

In an interview with a Michigan business journal in 2012, when asked to describe his biggest career break, he said it was deciding to move to Taiwan to be a missionary doctor.

It proved to be a big break for Taiwan as well, and one that will continue to benefit this nation.

## Changing the face of the nation

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