

Reflections from a Journey to Japan



Having just returned from a remarkable first visit to Japan, I find that this *Bulletin*, showcasing Jefferson's deep

connections to Asia, could not be more timely. The visual of late autumn leaves in Nara and Kyoto is still fresh in my mind, capturing Albert Camus' phrase, "Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower."

I return from this fascinating journey with a number of reflections that touch on the essence of Jefferson's international collaborative ventures.

As dean, I host delegations from other countries with some frequency. There are, of course, all the expected pleasantries and formalities, as my team delicately guides me through the well-choreographed and audience-specific process. But the reality is that such visiting delegations are *per force* just a sea of faces, absent context—no real resonance is possible since there is no overlay of shared history or personal connection.

How different after one meets these individuals on their turf, back in their home country. It may have been but one afternoon together, or one hour, or even a 10-minute brush-up in the hallway of a hospital clinic—and suddenly, on their return visit to Jefferson, we embrace as friends, bonded at the hip. To understand the other, one must slow down, carve out time, and, importantly, see the other in his or her own element. As Charles Kuralt put it: "Thanks to the Interstate Highway System, it is now possible to travel from coast to coast without seeing anything."

A second reflection touches on the profound impact we at Jefferson have on those we host. Shortly after arriving in Tokyo from Kyoto, a visit to the Noguchi Medical Research Institute was our first order of business. This was the big interview day, with medical students from all over Japan vying for coveted Jefferson training slots. As I entered the seminar hall, I was struck by the image projected at the front of the room—a large "Jefferson" emblazoned on the screen. The speaker, a trainee who had recently returned from Jefferson, was describing what the experience had meant for him. Simply put, there is nothing like witnessing such a testimonial to remind me of why I do what I do. For this visiting trainee, living half a world away, Jefferson was now an integral part of his lexicon, likely to add rich color to the rest of his career.

The Q&As were enlightening, too. Students repeatedly commented about the high-level medical knowledge they hoped to glean while in the U.S. Once I reached the podium, however, my message was twofold. First, I suggested that the primary purpose of crossing the Pacific for a Jefferson experience was not necessarily to gain factual knowledge, though some would certainly be forthcoming. Rather, the true value added was to witness a contrasting healthcare culture in play—how physicians relate to patients, how physicians relate to each other, how physicians and patients relate to the systems around them. Not necessarily better, just different.

This message dovetailed with a subtheme that had been percolating up from two of the earlier student presentations: how

impressed they had been by what was to them a radical difference between Japanese and American atmospherics in the physician-patient relationship—in the way rounds are conducted, in the way the American physician seems to touch the patient on an emotional level. I do think I held back from qualifying that this was not necessarily a general feature of American medical care, but rather of Jefferson's!

Second, in providing yet more rationale for an overseas experience, I referenced Stuart Kauffman's *Adjacent Possible*. New ideas are spawned where adjacencies are fostered—adjacencies of knowledge domains, pathways for thinking and perspectives. By trekking across the ocean, students start to bank their own personal suite of adjacencies. The creative fruits of such adjacencies then emerge over career lifetimes. So it's not just going somewhere else to gather some specific content—it's all about bumping up against the other, gathering novel concepts to marry with your own.

The trip was, of course, creating new adjacencies for me, including a *Eureka!* moment or two. One example—at the glittering, ultra-modern clinics of the Hasumi International Research Foundation, I learned about a novel vaccine for acne—using peptide immunogens corresponding to culprit bacteria. How creative! There were other such flashes of insight, as I learned about the Japanese Association for the Development of Community Medicine's (JADECOM) innovative approaches for extending advanced primary care into Japan's underserved areas in far-flung places, or glimpsing how the world-class immunology lab of Dr. Toshinori Nakayama



at Chiba University is looking to create a clinical imprint where allergic pathogenesis meets lung.

Japan is but one of the countries on which Jefferson has set its sights over the years. Others include China, Israel, Great Britain, Portugal and Italy. In these countries we think *multi-institutional*—top-down Jefferson planning to connect multiple Jefferson physicians and scientists to multiple partners, with such critical mass creating its own set of strategic possibilities, up to the governmental level. Good things are likely to follow, sometimes hard to predict. While at first blush, Jefferson's selected countries seem disconnected from each other, interconnectedness uncannily seems to blossom. Witness the news of growing R&D and commercial ties between Japan and China, China and Israel and so forth. Jefferson, in some instances, can serve as the catalyst.

There are three essential elements for success in Jefferson's multi-institutional alliances. One is having an in-house champion for each respective country. For Japan, it is Dr. Takami Sato; for China, Dr. Xin Ma. These are individuals who have made their mark as elite faculty at Jefferson, all the while leveraging their extensive academic roots and deep personal ties in their home countries. Meaningful roots translate into the implicit trust that key thought leaders in those countries have in them, and by extension, in Jefferson.

The second element is having forward-thinking leaders in the partner country. In Japan, these are exceptional people such as Dr. Yoshihisa Asano of NMRI, Dr. Michiyasu Yoshiara of JADECOR, Dr. Fumimaro

Takaku of the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences and Drs. Toshinori Nakayama and Hiroshi Shirasawa of Chiba University, among others. These are individuals who have a core understanding of the dividends and demands of true partnerships. One of my sayings: Successful people are not those who merely know a lot, but more importantly, those who know exactly what they don't know. These Japanese leaders understand this implicitly, and this is what makes them such effective overseas champions for Jefferson—complemented, of course, by their generosity of both spirit and resources.

There is a third important element, and that is having the right leaders at the top of the Jefferson pyramid. No one is more emblematic of this than Dr. Joseph Gonnella, our former dean who championed international alliances and cultivated our deep connections to places like Japan, Italy and Portugal. And there is Dr. Charles Pohl, who has ably picked up the mantle for our Japan alliances as director of our Japan Center.

There is an overarching logic behind Jefferson's push on the international front: *programmatic initiatives* are key to our future success, whether in the research or education realms. At the heart of "programmatic" is inter-institutional collaboration.

The Jefferson of today is relentless in looking beyond our walls. Partnering will allow us to continue to diversify our revenue sources, but even more importantly, to plant new seeds and coalesce new ideas that simply would not have happened otherwise—autumn leaves morphed into flowers. International is front and center in this approach, as we cultivate adjacencies that bridge continents.

For more about Jefferson's ties to Japan as well as to China, see page 12.

Develop interest in life as you see it; in people, things, literature, music—the world is so rich, simply throbbing with rich treasures, beautiful souls and interesting people. Forget yourself.
—Henry Miller

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