

THE LAST WORD

THE HARMONY FELLOWSHIPS

by Ronald E. Cape

Some people won't even use the word "competitiveness" anymore—they call it "the C-word." Like "biotechnology," the term has been so over-exploited it's become an embarrassment. Like it or not, though, if we don't stop talking and start doing something, we are going to repeat history and "lose the biotechnology race." [See Cape's "Who Will You Blame When the Other Guy Wins?" *Bio/Technology* 4:368, Apr. '86.—Ed.]

The private sector is the key to doing something constructive, and doing it reasonably quickly. Government seems fascinated by biotechnology. But government, judged by its deeds rather than its rhetoric (usually just empty grandstanding), seems content to focus almost exclusively on regulation. Whatever imaginative proposals are being considered in Washington face endless discussions while every conceivable constituency figures out how to dine out at the expense of biotech. In short, the inertia is terrific.

A Special Opportunity

Even this sorry state of affairs presents a special opportunity—and some of us are trying to make the best of that opportunity. The United States and Japan lead the world in biotechnology. Each wants something from the other, and neither makes any secret of that. As each assesses its advantages and shortcomings, it finds that its strength is the other's weakness and the other's weakness is its strength. Fortunately.

The Japanese continually expresses their admiration for, and their wish to adopt, the West's innovative skills—best exemplified in the United States. Americans and Europeans wish they could better emulate the oft-demonstrated Japanese ability to apply technology efficiently, economically, and well. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished, to bolster our weaknesses by learning from another's strengths. And what better way to bring that about than by exchanging today the technological leaders of tomorrow—exchanging them reciprocally and symmetrically?

This kind of exchange has gone on across the Atlantic for many years. And it does go on—in a one-sided trickle—across the Pacific. This is not surprising; the language and cultural barriers between Japan and North America are imposing—so imposing that some have suggested that they are insurmountable.

The Harmony Fellowships

For a little over a year, I have been developing the concept now known as the Harmony Fellowships. These fellowships will ask a great deal of the recipients, but the return is also great, and recipients should find their career prospects significantly enhanced. All in the name of the C-word.

Harmony Fellowships will support study abroad in biotechnology—any kind of biotechnology—during the final post-doctoral years. Awards will be made on the basis

of excellence, not relevance or trendiness. This is appropriate—those chosen are expected to be among the leaders of the field, internationally, twenty or more years in the future. Who can predict now what will be most important to them then?

The fellows will be required to meet one unique condition—one intended to make their time overseas much more worthwhile in human terms: They must undertake to learn the language and customs of their host country. The fellowship program will try to facilitate this. For the Western fellow, for example, we might establish in Japan an intensive, total-immersion program in Japanese. The idea is under study. Fellows from all countries should also attend joint seminars (about two weeks long) offering sophisticated insights into what their host country offers beyond science and language—history and literature along with social, political and economic issues of common interest. Although these subjects cannot be offered in the same depth as the crucially important language training, the shared experience should help the fellows from different countries get to know each other—a common experience that should help make the years of foreign study much more rewarding.

This is not easy, especially without help. The paucity of the current West-to-Japan exchange attests to this.

Widespread Support Building

This proposal has been discussed extensively with scientists and others—in Japan and the West, in the private and the public sectors. While there have been constant reminders that the undertaking is very difficult, there has been almost uniform encouragement—along with offers of help and participation from all quarters. A prestigious scientific board has been assembled, and the specifics of the program are being discussed with major universities. We hope that momentum will continue to build, and that the first awardees can begin their overseas studies in the summer of 1990. The details will be announced as they become firm.

The participating sponsors of the fellowship program have some obvious self-serving motives—they stand to benefit from an easier flow of highly trained, highly flexible technical staff. In addition, however, the program's supporters say they are glad to be able to take part in something positive and optimistic, particularly considering the growing acrimony which unfortunately characterizes the public discussion of international competitiveness. (There's that word again.)

And many of us feel that, with the initiative coming from the private sector, there's a good chance that the Harmony Fellowships will become a reality. And soon.

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