

## JSPS Fellowship report

I work at the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Nagasaki University with Professor Koya Ariyoshi as host, on a one-year JSPS Fellowship to conduct research in the field of public health and epidemiology. The institute takes many international Master and PhD students, mainly from South-East Asia and Africa, which is why the research and work climate may not be typical for Japanese Universities as a whole. It was not difficult to settle in. Also, life in Nagasaki is very easy and pleasant, with many opportunities for mountain walks and swimming in the ocean. Since most of my colleagues are quite good at English I find it difficult to become more fluent in Japanese. I made some progress in written Japanese which helps greatly in everyday life. I used J.W. Heisig's controversial Kanji learning method and can recommend it.

Originally we had proposed for the Fellowship that I work on two different projects on childhood pneumonia in Vietnam, but one of the projects became unfeasible due to an unexpected change at our research site in Vietnam. We found an alternative research topic, the epidemiology of dengue fever, a mosquito-borne infection, based on data from the same research site in Vietnam. I could use similar methods as we had proposed for the pneumonia projects. Since dengue research was new for me it took a substantial amount of time to make progress, and I needed to become familiar with additional methods. What first started as an exploratory analysis became more interesting when we discovered by chance a well-defined human population density where somehow the right mix between host and mosquitoes leads to severe dengue fever outbreaks. This finding was so striking that the real dengue fever experts do not believe it, maybe a good sign.

The other project, access to health care for pneumonia treatment in Vietnam, went quite smoothly. The data acquisition and collation was easier than we had anticipated. The results showed that the strongest barrier to health care utilization in children may be female gender, perhaps not surprising in a culture preferring boys. With hindsight, identifying in advance a suitable research project was perhaps the most challenging aspects of this JSPS fellowship. Often, the feasibility of a project only becomes clear when one is working on it. Apart from research, I am occasionally involved in teaching Master and PhD students. We have developed a short course in epidemiological methods, which we also want to give next year for the new students after the end of my fellowship.



Typical view of the Nagasaki Peninsula



View from Nagasaki Peninsula to Unzen, the notorious volcano





Nagasaki Medical University. Centre: Institute of Tropical Medicine. Centre-right, Institute for Atomic Bomb Research. Far left: University Hospital.