In May I attended the first historical joint meeting between the American and Chinese Acoustical Societies in Hong Kong, and then at the Ninth International Symposium on Modern Acoustics in Nanjing, China. Frankly, I had little knowledge about modern acoustics, and I saw few familiar faces from the many audiologically oriented meetings I have attended throughout the years.

The two meetings, as it turned out, were truly eye- and mind-opening experiences. Not only did I learn about acoustic bubbles in oceans and photoacoustic tomography in biological tissues, I also interacted with researchers and engineers from all over the world. I realized that scientific knowledge, technological innovation, and personalized marketing are converging to affect how we will conduct research, teach, and practice in audiology. Personalized hearing, a paradigm shift from hearing aids to hearing enhancement, is the game changer.

Personalized hearing is based on converging scientific evidence that individual differences matter greatly in hearing, speech, and language processes. Scientists, for example, showed that individual differences in brain size and structure predict pitch processing, speech perception in noise, and learning success. Personalized hearing is also supported by converging technological innovations.

These innovations are seen in various technologies. Korean researchers used a 32-speaker system to generate a personal sound space that allowed one person to listen to full-blown music while the person sitting next to him enjoyed almost total quietness. Funded by the European Union and developed by BBC R&D, project FascinatE takes personal viewing and listening to the next level. Imagine watching the NBA finals and being able to zoom in on LeBron James optically and acoustically to see and hear exactly what he does in real time on the court.

I was also shown a chip specification sheet with directional microphone, noise reduction, and echo cancellation, which are technologies typically associated with hearing aids. It turns out this was an audio chip from Audience, a Silicon Valley-based company, that is used in iPhones and most Android-based smartphones. Where will they go next? User personalization!

I asked what this meant and if hearing-impaired listeners will be included. I received a smile but no definite answer.

Personalized hearing is good for audiological practitioners and the customers they serve. All the courses and technical training in ear anatomy, sound level, real-ear measurement, and aural rehabilitation will best and uniquely position audiological practitioners to provide optimal personalized hearing to a much larger market than the current hearing-impaired population. One can imagine that hearing enhancement technology will improve speech clarity, reduce cognitive load, and enrich music listening even for those with normal hearing. The converging technology clearly indicates that it is only a matter of time before hearing aids and smartphones and other telecommunication devices will be integrated. The question is: Are you prepared for these technical and business challenges? We need to make sure we are not left behind when this shift occurs.

I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce some exciting new developments at The Hearing Journal. You asked for it and you got it: HJ’s iPad app is now fully operational. You can read all of HJ’s content and access enhanced resources from videocasts to informative external links.

I would also like to welcome Hamid Djalilian, MD, and Dennis A. Colucci, AuD, who have agreed to write regularly for HJ and to share their medical and audiological knowledge and wisdom. Dr. Djalilian is a neurotologist at the University of California Irvine, and Dr. Colucci runs a busy private practice in managing auditory and vestibular disorders in Southern California.

Last but not least, I warmly welcome Nina Kraus, PhD, the Hugh Knowles Professor at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, to HJ’s Editorial Advisory Board. Dr. Kraus, an outstanding scientific and technological innovator, exemplifies not only what audiology should be but what it could be. Dr. Kraus is pushing the audiology envelope to study and understand relations of hearing to reading, learning, music training, and autism. Together with her doctoral student, Samira Anderson, AuD, Dr. Kraus will contribute a regular column to share her knowledge, adventures, and vision.