

More Diversity Can Strengthen Synthetic Organic Chemistry in Japan

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Academia is characterized by diversity of many kinds. In academia there is more of everything—more students, more professors, more courses, more books in the library, more computers, more laboratories, and more student activities. Racial and ethnic diversity is a critical element in building the cultural values of academia, although, regrettably, it is still usually perceived as a problem. For example, the presence of international students and nationals of many backgrounds gives universities a textural richness unavailable in most societies, despite the difficulty this causes in pursuing a uniform education or catch-up type research. The challenge facing academia is to make this diverse texture a positive element in the lives of all who participate.

The social structure in Japan, however, has been homogenous for hundreds of years. We are used to a homogeneous system and do not generally favor diversity. Its homogeneous and homo-national society was a sort of strength when Japan strove to catch up to the level of Western science and technology. However, it turns out to be a drawback when true originality is sought for the 21st century. Japan's synthetic organic chemistry has long been thought to be at an extremely high level and has been one of the areas of scientific pride of the country. It is now clear that we must have heterogeneity in our scientific community if our future is to continue to grow even more significantly.

The Journal of Synthetic Organic Chemistry is justifiably famous for its excellent collection of fine review articles. Unfortunately, however, most of the articles have been written in Japanese with short English abstracts. The linguistic barrier means that this extremely interesting and valuable journal has garnered scant attention from its potential international audience. This special issue is TRULY special because all the articles are written in English, and it is my great personal hope that this trial edition will lead to a year-round form of publication.

I well recognize that publishing such a journal in English poses many new challenges for the editorial office. This is just what occurs when a college or university accepts international students, foreign postdocs, and foreign faculty members. We experience various difficulties which are not encountered in dealing with homogeneous individuals. Scientists in academia, however, are strengthened by and rely upon each other's scientific expertise--- not on similarities of background. Further, completely new ideas, new concepts, and new theories frequently evolve when talking with participants in other fields, from other countries, of other generations, and of the other sex. I believe a level of comfort with the differences, as well as flexibility in understanding various ways of thinking, must inevitably emanate from a true academic society.