

Chemistry in Asia

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The inaugural issue of a new journal has just arrived in my office: Chemistry-An Asian Journal, which is the first global platform for the dissemination of Asian output in chemistry. As seen in this first issue, the scope of topics covered is very wide, ranging from state-of-the-art spectroscopy to total synthesis and chemical biology. Likewise, the current English issue of Yuki Gosei Kagaku Kyokaiishi reports on a wide range of diverse topics, such as C-H bond activation, target-oriented synthesis, DNA folding, and catalytic antibodies. The coverage of synthetic organic chemistry now has a much broader scope than before. In the first English issue in 1994, the coverage was much narrower, as the first issue essentially covered only synthetic methods and total synthesis. Wider social commitment of chemistry has changed the character of research in the past twelve years.

The prospects for science and technology in Japan in 2006 are mixed. The good news is that the government has promised continued support of science and technology for the next five years, although it aims to cut other expenditures. However, there has also been bad news from our own chemistry society, which has been widely publicized in the media. A group of chemists working on chemical biology, did not keep proper experimental records of a series of findings published in a prestigious journal. Then, when public interest in this, and in the Korean stem cell scandal, had subsided, a case of monetary fraud was reported. A chemist of high national and international standing had expropriated research money. We knew that scientific fraud had been a problem in the USA, but now we know that we, too, are not immune.

“Publish or perish.” Until some time ago, this American saying had little to do with Japanese, and perhaps with Asian chemists, as we received only small grants of government money and could use it in whatever way we wanted. However, Asian chemists do work for scientific, social, and financial reasons, on more up-to-date, solution- and society-oriented topics as we saw above in the range of journal topics. Socially speaking, we need to improve our public image and to sell ourselves, for example, as saviors preventing a future environmental crisis. In addition, we need to sell ourselves to our governments, who see science and technology as the deliverer of future economic growth. As a result, all of a sudden Asian chemists have been thrown into the midst of a whirlpool of the real world, and we may be losing our identity. Asia is now a discrete entity in the world of chemistry, and as Asian chemists we need to establish our own rules of scientific policy and ethics in order to establish our status in society.