Academic journals and cultural diversity

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To this issue of *Science Editing*, Jung-Il Jin, Emeritus Professor of Korea University, has contributed a fascinating article on the early history of the journals published by the Korean Chemical Society (KCS), which is the oldest and largest academic society in Korea [1]. The KCS was established in 1946, a year after Korea became independent from the Japanese colonial rule. It was an extremely chaotic period in Korean history and the launching of the official journal of the KCS, *Journal of the Korean Chemical Society*, was delayed until 1950. The first issue of the journal was printed in June, 1950, but the Korean War broke out on June 25, just before the copies were going to be distributed. During the war, the office of the KCS was completely destroyed and most of its documents including those copies were burned. Nowadays only one copy of the first issue is being preserved by the KCS. The development of the KCS and its journals followed the same path as that of the Korean society. As the Korean economy began a rapid growth in the 1960s, the KCS and its journals also grew rapidly. Now the KCS has thousands of active members and its journals publish over 1,000 high-quality papers annually. This story illustrates the fact that academic societies and journals are a part of the larger society and its culture and are strongly affected by the events occurring in the society.

During the last few decades, there has been a dramatic progress in international transportation and communication. The spreading of the Internet is an especially important development. Since the Internet became widely available and fast during the late 1990s, it has changed human life extensively. Nowadays it's a common scene in many countries that a lot of passengers on subway trains spend their time surfing through the Internet using smart phones. The Internet has also changed the way researchers do their research greatly. When I was a graduate student during the late 1980s, the only way to obtain relevant references was to go to a library, look up a particular article in a heavy bound journal volume, and make a photocopy of it. Therefore the quality of the library was very important for the quality of a research institution. These days I rarely go to a library because I can get most references from the Internet very easily. The expansion of online journals and open-access journals are leading to further changes.

The economic growth of the world and increased interaction between countries have led to the movement of globalization, which basically tries to make the world more uniform. The number of academic journals and conferences has increased greatly in recent years. In a large number of international conferences and journals, English is the only permitted language. Due to the great importance of having a fluency in spoken and written English, many countries whose mother tongue is not English are trying to educate their children to learn English as early as possible. The so-called English immersion education that tries to make students think in English, not in their

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mother tongue, is an extreme example. However, is this a desirable trend? If this trend continues, it may be possible that many languages disappear in not so far a future, while only a small number of languages survive.

Language is one of the most important ingredients of human culture. Every language has expressions which are unique and cannot possibly be translated into other languages. This is because vocabularies and expressions reflect everything a group of people collectively experience in their natural and cultural environment. Therefore the extinction of a language amounts to the loss of precious human experiences. One of my favorite quotes is from Chief Seattle, "What would man be without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of the spirit." The word 'beasts' can be replaced by many other words including 'diversity'. Human beings need diversity for survival. We do not want to live in a boring, uniform and standardized world, where all the trees are of the same kind and everybody speaks the same language.

I have an anticipation that within the next 20 or 30 years, the information technology will be developed sufficiently fast so that interlanguage translation softwares become much more accurate and practical than they are today. If that happens, then journals will be able to publish articles written in any language with no difficulty in communication. At the moment, there exist several full-text databases of scientific literature where a language translation service is provided under the help of an automatic translation program. A representative example is the ScienceCentral, which is a free or open access full-text archive of scientific society journal literature at the Korean Federation of Science and Technology Societies (KOFST) [2]. Users of ScienceCentral are able to read articles in their local languages since its translation program supports 81 languages of the world.

The laws of science are universal. They are the same regardless of the nationality or ethnicity of a scientist. The ways to organize and support the scientific community and to conduct

the research, however, are part of the culture of the underlying society. People in different countries inevitably have different experiences, and sharing those will be interesting and useful for everybody. We can get ideas and insights from those experiences. In the past and present issues of *Science Editing*, articles on Indonesian, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Korean experiences in scientific publishing have appeared [3-5]. I think these articles are highly valuable and strongly encourage the authors from all over the world to share their unique experiences and thoughts with people in other parts of the world by contributing to future issues of *Science Editing*.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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