Radiation Chemist by Chance

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About 25 years ago I opened the door to my future in radiation chemistry. At the time, I did not know that this would become my future career nor did I know that there was a field called radiation chemistry. I was trying to find a project for my MSc thesis and I wanted to do something related to physical chemistry, but I did not like the projects that the department of physical chemistry had to offer at my university. So I went to the department of nuclear chemistry, a subject where I was completely ignorant. I had not even seen any of the faculty before.

The head of the department advised me to choose a project in radiation chemistry. As he explained about radiation chemistry I started to realize that this might be the kind of physical chemistry that I was looking for. I found it very intriguing that you could trigger chemical reactions by radiation and in principle make chemistry from a distance. I guess you could say that I entered the field of radiation chemistry pretty much by chance, in a state of complete ignorance.

After a while I found myself enrolled as a PhD-student. This was something I was convinced I would never do at the time when I was standing in front of that door. After a couple of years the time came to face the international community of radiation chemists. I attended my first conference in radiation chemistry, the Miller conference in Windermere. Names I had read on papers became faces. This was of course a major milestone for a PhD-student but it was also a quite scary experience since I had to talk at the young investigator session after the conference dinner. Nevertheless, I came back to the lab with new energy and inspiration and eventually defended my thesis. Then I made an attempt to escape the field by doing a postdoc in photochemistry and organic electrochemistry which was followed by work in the industry. But the escape only lasted for two years. After returning to radiation chemistry I have attended numerous international meetings in the field and met with old and new researchers in the same field.

Over the years, we have all noticed fluctuations in the number of people attending international meetings. We have also seen that representation from different nations fluctuate over time and also depending on the location of the meeting. However, I would say that there is one exception and this exception is Japan. Japan is almost always well represented at international meetings and represents an essential part of the backbone of the community. In addition, Japanese have also strongly contributed to strengthening the international community in radiation chemistry by hosting visiting scientists from all over the world and by arranging international meetings. This has made Japan one of the major international nodes in radiation chemistry.

In my view, the future of radiation chemistry has potential to be very bright but we have to play our cards wisely. In nuclear technology there are numerous problems that require radiation chemistry to be tackled successfully. The use of ionizing radiation in the synthesis of new materials and nanostructured devices is another area of great potential. To explore this potential, we need to make use of our global network in research as well as in education and we need to make a joint effort in attracting young people to the field and in attracting established researchers from other fields. We cannot only rely on chance!

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