Commentary and Perspective

Greetings from the President of Biophysical Society of Japan: Traditionally open culture for fostering creative biophysics

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In 2021, the Biophysical Society of Japan (BSJ), which was established in 1960, celebrated its 61st anniversary. For more than half a century, the BSJ has served as a vital platform for academic networking and exchange of knowledge in the biophysics field in Japan. Since its establishment, the BSJ has valued the international networking and knowledge exchange. This reflects our long contribution to the governance of the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics (IUPAB); BSJ has been producing many executive members in IUPAB: two IUPAB presidents, four IUPAB vice presidents, and six IUPAB councilors, including Setsuro Ebashi (1975–1978 president) and Kuniaki Nagayama (2008–2011 president). This year, Takayuki Nishizaka was elected as one of the IUPAB councilors for 2021–2024. In Asia, previous BSJ members have established the Asian Biophysics Association with other associated societies, thereby significantly contributing to the promotion of biophysics in Asia. Furthermore, our society holds annual conferences in English with an aim of expanding the role of our society in biophysics from the domestic to an international platform. In recent years, our annual conference has included 1300–1400 participants, including many overseas participants. This indicates our society is growing as one of the largest international biophysics conferences.

To further boost the international contribution of our society, we applied for the IUPAB Congress and won the bid in the second trial to hold the 21st IUPAB Congress in Kyoto to be held in 2023, which was later postponed to 2024 along with the rescheduling of the 20th International Botanical Congress in Brazil from 2020 to 2021 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The 21st IUPAB Congress of 2024 will be merged with the BSJ annual meeting as a joint congress, which will offer participants great opportunities to exchange cutting-edge research ideas with globally leading scientists. The joint congress will also bring blended flavors of biophysics from each region of the world, in particular, biophysics in Japan and Asian-Oceanian countries.

Thus, we are positively reshaping the BSJ by attracting global scientists with the aim of contributing to the growth of biophysics research worldwide. Our society is also open to researchers from associated disciplines, such as physics, chemistry, and nanoscience. This stems from our belief that creative ideas often originate from different intersecting fields, as biophysics itself represents the amalgam of biology and physics. Therefore, the BSJ greatly values the open culture to enhance the exchange of new ideas among researchers from various research fields.

Another characteristic feature of the BSJ is that our society is open for young students and early career researchers, not only regarding scientific networking, but also social governance. Along with this policy, our society highly appreciates the activity of the Society of Young Scientists in Biophysics, Wakateno-kai, in Japanese. Although Wakateno-kai works independently, the BSJ always attempts to reflect the opinions of early career members in its operation. For this reason, we invite at least one member from or suggested by Wakateno-kai, as an executive committee of the BSJ.

We also aim to foster next-generation biophysicists. To this end, we launched the “Early Career Award in Biophysics” to young BSJ members in 2005. After an initial document-based screening, the candidates are invited for an oral presentation in the candidate presentation symposium in the “Early Career Award in Biophysics” at the BSJ annual conference. In 2016, the society further established “Early Career Presentation Awards” to encourage students. Recipients of the awards are announced in the award ceremony held during the annual conference.

Gender equality is an ongoing social issue. An unbalanced population in terms of gender is still evident among senior

researchers, whereas gender inequality is fairly alleviated among students and early career researchers. This indicates the existence of structural problems in the academic society. The affirmative action committee members of BSJ executive committee have been addressing with this issue. In addition, to continuously highlight this issue to the society members, the annual conference holds a luncheon seminar to promote gender equality and career development of young researchers.

Thus, we believe that the merits and strengths of our society lie in the open culture of mutual respect regardless of age and title, a culture that includes researchers and young participants from other fields and having different ideas, and an attitude of indulging in open-ended discussions that mutually benefit all stakeholders. This is the traditional foundation of our society that has been fostering the greatest scientists in various fields of biophysics, such as single-molecule biophysics, electrophysiology, electron/optical microscopies, theoretical biology, structural biology, and molecular science of biomolecules. We will always remember the inheritance and development of this “identity of the BSJ” and pursue further development of the biophysics society, not only in Japan but also worldwide, thus, reshaping the society for a new era.

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