

More Recurrent Themes

Editor's Note: Shortly after this Editorial Comment was written and prepared for publication, we were delighted to receive correspondence from Dr. Heng De Li indicating that the C-MRS '90 Meeting will indeed proceed as planned. A report on this upcoming meeting appears in the international news section in this issue.

Postterminaries first appeared in the January 1987 MRS BULLETIN (Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 88). Both its self-definition and the topic chosen for that debut, titled "Recurrent Themes," were treated with tongue somewhat planted in cheek. Not that there were no nuggets of seriousness or truth, but by and large they were overshadowed by and entwined with fun poking and irreverence. The majority of columns since have followed suit. There is a theme, however, for which a glib style and frivolous exposure of ironies and quirks is inappropriate. Serious for all and tragic for many, it is the recent political situation in China.

Sadly, from a global and historical perspective, this is a *recurrent theme*. It touches the scientific community in a disproportionately frustrating way. As researchers, as discoverers of new knowledge for the greater good of humankind, we like to feel, and usually behave, as if our pursuits transcend national boundaries and rise above political realities. In the best of times, we even hope on some level to knit together elements from disparate cultures and political systems.

In China, we seem to have come up against a reality we cannot easily transcend. Who among us does not know one or, more likely, several Chinese students, postdocs, and professors who either were or are now in our classes and laboratories, or who joined us at conferences. Many are caught away from home, are now disenfranchised, and may require asylum. Our colleagues in China have fallen silent—an ominous sign.

We cannot help but sympathize with their plight, but given the motives of our disciplines, we face a vexing and familiar

choice. Do we continue scientific intercourse, maintain open collaborative channels, and keep our colleagues in touch with the rest of the world? Or, do we refuse to do "business-as-usual" lest it be taken as validating governmental actions which run counter to every tenet we hold dear?

This issue of MRS BULLETIN was to have included an article on the C-MRS conference scheduled for June 1990 in Beijing. In anticipating the arrival of the conference information from our usually prompt and reliable Chinese counterparts, mixed feelings did indeed arise over business-as-usual. The BULLETIN would have printed the article because, as a print medium, the BULLETIN is devoted to open, broad, complete communication of information to a worldwide constituency. It does not function to send messages of disapproval to any group or government. The hard choice, however, did not arise. We have not heard from our colleagues in Beijing and hope their silence is short-lived and not a reason for concern.

E.N. KAUFMANN

POSTERMINARIES

Quotable Quote

"It might be argued that there is no need for an interdisciplinary journal, that an assortment of large specialty journals, each with a limited circulation, is enough. To me, the answer is that both are needed. The excellent specialty journals print thousands of pages that will never be feasible for *Science*. At the same time, this is an age of increasing interdisciplinary research and it is not always apparent which contributions in our field will have dramatic importance in another...The scientist who is too provincial is liable to miss interdisciplinary applications to his [*sic*] own research."

"...to aid in interdisciplinary communication,...research articles at the cutting edge of many disciplines in a single journal are essential..."

Daniel E. Koshland Jr.
Editor, *Science Magazine*
(*Science* 239, January 15, 1988, p. 241)

Substitute *Journal of Materials Research* for *Science*, prepend a materials-related modifier to fields and disciplines, and we couldn't have said it better!

E. N. K.

**Lame
Language
Lament**

There is a time to be concise and a time to wax poetic.
There is a time to be precise and a time to indulge rhetoric.
There is no time to substitute *bureau-speak* for content
In hope of seeming quite astute without leaving language too bent.
Why say "at this point in time" when "now" would do quite well.
"Because of the fact that" in a rhyme, the meter does compel,
Or is it to gain time to think and make the listener wait
While fuzzy logic has a chance to *self-reorientate*?
Hopefully there is no price to pay for sloppy speech,
And far too late, it certainly is, good grammar to *reteach*.

E. N. K.