

Summary

Dr Gui Meen-Wah from the Department of Civil Engineering and Office of International Affairs of National Taipei University of Technology (Taipei Tech) visited Chiba Institute of Technology and Department of Architectural and Civil Engineering between 24th January and 15th February, 2016. During the three weeks stay in Chiba Institute of Technology, Dr Gui has had the opportunity to observe the educational system of Japan, in particular that at Chiba Institute of Technology, to cooperate and exchange research viewpoints and to interact with President Komiya's research team/students, to travel and to explore attractions in Japan so as to bridge the society and cultural differences between Japan and Taiwan. It has been a very fruitful and successful trip that has no doubt broadened the visitor's horizons.

Journey

At 18:15 of January 24, flight CX451 from Taipei landed at Narita Airport, Chiba Prefecture. After telling the custom officer that my destination is to Chiba Institute of Technology, I then passed through the custom check-point without any problem. This is my first impression on the efficiency of Japan. The moment I stepped out from the baggage hall, I saw Mr Toru Doteuchi - the Section Chief of International Relations of Chiba Institute of Technology - has been waiting there. He then brought me to the Guest House located at Shin-Narashino Campus. Waiting, in the cold night, at the main gate of the dormitory blocks was Mr Lv Xiao Wei, I felt sorry for him. After unloading my baggage to my room, Mr Lv brought and introduced me the nearest supermarket – BeLX - where I could get raw food and ingredient for cooking. First day schedule was indeed very smooth.

The next morning, Mr Lv took me to Tsudanuma Campus via the bus service provided by the university and reported to International Relations Section. I met the vice Section Chief of International Relations Ms Yukie Kurata and her colleague Ms Aya Suzuki. The purpose of this trip was that I was a visiting scholar in the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering. As my appointment with President Kazuhito Komiya was scheduled to be at 13:00, Mr Lv introduced the facilities in the campus and shops off the campus around the Tsudanuma Station. The thoughtful arrangement by CIT was very touching. I eventually met President Komiya in his Presidential Office, and he brought me to his Research Office on the 18th floor of Building No 1, where I was introduced to his associate Dr Munehito Endo and his students. Also present in the office was Prof Fan Jian Hua of Jilin University, China; he was visiting President Komiya for a period of 10 months (10/2015 to 8/2016). Prof Fan was also my neighbor in the Guest House at Shin-Narashino campus.

There are three areas of research conducted by President Komiya are:(1) pore-water pressure monitoring of deep underground water, (2) permeability of sintered metal filter injected with suspension type chemical grouting, (3) strength of soil cement under accelerated curing, and (4) bearing capacity of rectangular tunnel constructed via open shield. The first two topics were each conducted by a Master Degree student, assisted by undergraduate students while the last two topics was conducted by several undergraduate students. The undergraduate students were doing these studies as part of their final year project.

The master and undergraduate students were required to submit 4- and 2-page abstract, respectively before 31st January. Thereafter, the undergraduate students were required to make a 3 group oral presentation on 9th February, while the master degree students were required to make their own oral presentation on the 10th February.

During the first week of my stay, I have witnessed how hard the students worked in order to prepare and submit their abstract on time. They engaged Dr Endo every day so that he could help them in revising their abstract, the checking-revising process took place virtually every day until they have submitted their abstract.

During the second week of my stay, I saw the students rehearsed their oral presentation, also almost every day to Dr Endo. President Komiya would also join the oral presentation rehearsal, mostly during the hours across the lunch break and after official duties. I was very amazed and impressed to see the President himself, finding extra time out of his busy daily schedule, to attend such rehearsal and to provide valuable comments and suggestions to the students, in particular to the two master degree students.

President Komiya's students were very diligence, well-discipline, and industrious. They put a lot of efforts in order to produce high quality result. The intense daily oral presentation rehearsal not only helped the students in preparing a well-organized power-point presentation file but also helped the students to get rid of their fear in delivering, perhaps, their first presentation and in a smoother way. President Komiya, Dr Endo and their students in the laboratory tell me that Japanese are very hardworking. Japan has the culture that their job take precedence over other matters. Many times I have seen that President Komiya, Dr Endo and their students stayed till very late to complete their scheduled work. Some students even slept in their laboratory overnight but they would wake up before 9:00am the next day knowing that people like Dr Endo, Prof Fan or myself would be coming in to start work.

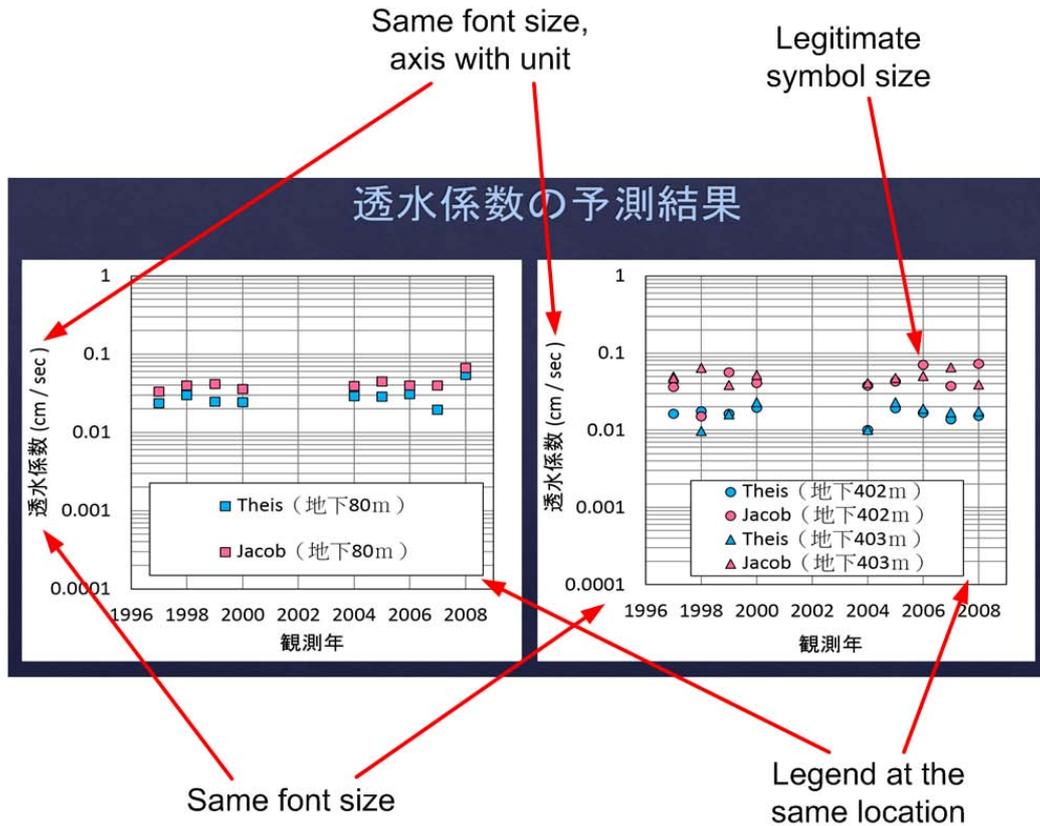


Figure 1: A meticulously prepared and presented PPT file made by Ms Kawanami.

In addition, I have also observed that the presentation power point file prepared by the students, particularly, by Ms Kirika Kawanami, was of high quality. I noticed that the size of the sub-4 figures, the size of the fonts used in both the sub-figures on the same page, and the location of the legends panel shown on the same page were all carefully unified or uniformly provided (see Figure 1). Furthermore, all the axes title were properly labelled with the necessary unit.

The oral defense session for both the master degree students, Ms Kirika Kawanami and Mr Takuya Shiozawa, was on 10 February (Figure 2). President Komiya was the chairman of the session, while sitting in the audience seats were Prof Makoto Suzuki, Prof Hideyuki Utsumi and other professors. Each presenter was given 20 minutes to present their work and 10 minutes of Q&A from the examiners sitting in the audience seat. Both the master degree students demonstrated their oral articulateness during their oral defense and able to defense themselves through the Q&A session.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2: (a) Oral defense by Ms Kawanami on “Estimation of coefficient of permeability and coefficient of storage in deep sedimentary ground;” (b) oral defense by Mr Takuya Shiozawa on “Evaluation of the permeability of sintered metal filter injected with suspension type chemical grouting.”



Figure 3: Celebration (Hamburger) party held in the Soil Mechanics Laboratory immediately after the master degree oral defense.

Cultures and Travel

According to Mary Ritter Beard: Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living!

Hence, the other fruitful achievement of this trip was the visit to Yonezawa in Yamagata. On the 11th February Bank Holiday (Thursday), President Komiya invited me to visit the snow land “Yonezawa” in the southern part of Yamagata. On the Sinkansen to Yonezawa, President Komiya briefed me the geography and weather of Honshu Island, in particular, those of Saitama, Tochigi, Fukushima and Yamagata. Not too long after the Fukushima Station, we entered the snow land of Yamagata. Yonezawa was covered by white snow and

this was the first time that I have ever seen such a thick snow. It was very exciting and an unique experience to me. According to the President, Yonezawa is famous for its local delicacies such as beef, apples and carp. It was the home to the Uesugi clan. We visited the shrine that was built to honor one of the greatest and bravest warriors in the age of provincial wars - Kenshin Uesugi. Next to the shrine was the Uesugi Museum at which we had a cup of coffee. We then went to Clan Uesugi's Mausoleum - a place that was surrounded by many over 400-year-old cedar trees. We took the 4:35pm Sinkansen back to Tokyo, in time to meet up with Mr Toru Doteuchi and Prof Yuichi Tonami over a dinner and to discuss about the Chinese Language Program conducted by Taipei Tech. It was a wonderful day for me!

I have learned from these attractions some of the Japanese traditional cultures and their history. There were many temples and shrines around Japan, local residents and many tourists visited the temples and shrines to pray for peace/happiness and to pay their respect to the warriors.

The Japanese are very polite and respectful to others in the sense that everyone bow and greet to each other every time they meet or during any given exchange. Time management in Japan is taken seriously; this was proven by the tightly scheduled Sinkansen timetable and also the connecting metro and trains systems where the all these services were incredibly punctual.

Japan is the cleanest place I had ever visited. The brick walkways in Tsudanuma campus are very clean, I could use the word "dustless" to describe how clean the walkway is (Figure 4)! As a result, one can also enjoy quality air in Japan.

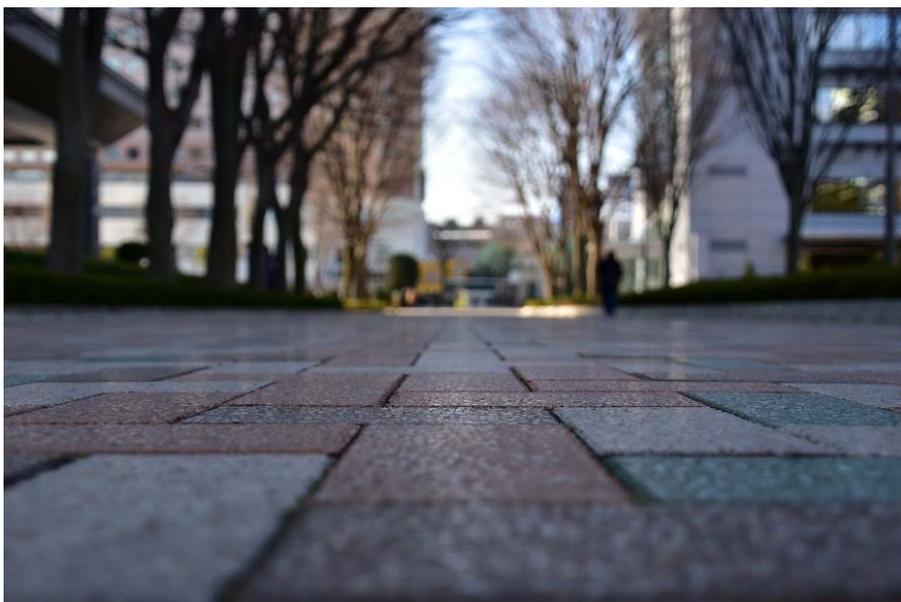


Figure 4: Dustless brick walkway in front of Building No 1 of CIT.

Conclusions and Suggestions

I am thankful to Chiba Institute of Technology and President Komiya for providing me this golden opportunity to visit Chiba Institute of Technology and also Japan. Before coming to CIT, I had little knowledge on Japan including its educational and cultural backgrounds. I now have a much clearer picture and understanding of its educational system, which is quite similar to that in Taiwan, and its cultural background and people.

Chiba Institute of Technology is actively seeking and conducting international exchanges of scholars and students. They have invited many international scholars to their campus and professors' laboratories trying to expose its students to acquire the international links. As such, they have provided various attractive international exchange programs and facilities to receive their visitors. I was provided a very comfortable guest room fully equipped with electrical appliances such as washing machine, refrigerator, micro-wave and oven, rice cooker, kettle, induction cooker and even pot and pan. It was so thoughtful of the University to provide such facilities for the convenience of their guests.

President Komiya's students are very diligence, well-discipline, and industrious with pleasant personality. They are very polite and respectful, they tried to talk to me even though they speak a little English and I do not speak any Japanese at all; we communicated through Google's online Japanese-English translator! They demonstrated great perseverance and initiative in delivering their final year project and master degree research. Both the two master degree students - Ms Kirika Kawanami and Mr Takuya Shiozawa - demonstrated their oral articulateness during their oral defense.

This has been a very fruitful and successful trip for me, it has certainly broadened my horizons, simulated new thinking and perspective in my research and administrative works, and bridged the cultural differences between Japan and Taiwan. If opportunity exists, I am certainly wishing to visit Chiba Institute of Technology again in the near future.

I wish the cooperation between Chiba Institute of Technology and Taipei Tech will not only be further enhanced but also long lasting in the coming future.

by Professor Gui Meen-Wah
(16th February 2016)