

Presidential Interview

The Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies (EASTS) celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2024, marking three decades since its establishment in 1994. As the centerpiece of our commemorative events, we conducted a special interview project featuring Professor Akimasa Fujiwara (8th president) in conversation with four distinguished leaders who shaped the EASTS from its foundation: Professor Shigeru Morichi (3rd president), Professor Hajime Inamura (inaugural ISC chairperson), Professor Haruo Ishida (former treasurer), and Professor Tetsuo Yai (6th president).

These interviews were conducted to capture the founding vision and preserve the wisdom of our pioneering leaders for future generations. Through these conversations, we sought to document their reflections on the society's establishment, evolution, and achievements while obtaining insights on current challenges and future expectations.

This project provides a unique opportunity to look back at our journey while charting the course forward. The experiences and aspirations shared by these distinguished leaders will help shape our strategic direction and contribute to the continued development of EASTS as we advance transportation studies across Eastern Asia and beyond.

Through these interviews, we commemorate our remarkable journey and commitment to the future. We hope that future generations will inherit the spirit and vision shared by these distinguished leaders, thereby ensuring that EASTS will continue to contribute to the advancement of transportation systems and society throughout Asia and beyond.

Dr. Naohiko Hibino (EASTS 30th Anniversary Presidential Interview Project Leader)

Dr. Taro Aratani, Dr. Takeshi Kurihara, and Dr. Yu Suzuki

(Members of the EASTS 30th Anniversary Presidential Interview Team)



Shigeru Morichi

President of EASTS (2003-2007)

Background of the Establishment and Initial Goals of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies (EASTS)

Professor Akimasa Fujiwara: Could you tell us how EASTS was established and what were its initial objectives?

Professor Morichi: When it was first established, it operated in the Philippines. It was originally a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) project named the Transport Training Center (TTC), which was initiated based on Professor Takashi Inoue's opinion that "we should not only assist in planning but also train people." Ten years prior to my involvement in 1992, TTC trained approximately 1,500 experts for the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, and the National Police Agency. At its peak, TTC conducted training in four three-month batches annually and provided training in third countries. It was a pioneering project aimed to educate transport experts in Southeast Asia.

When TTC was launched, no traffic lights had been installed in Manila; therefore, one was installed at the University of the Philippines (UP). Human-resource development began while the police were on duty 24 hours a day to prevent light bulbs from being stolen. Experts from three organizations—the Urban Affairs Bureau, the Roads Bureau, and the National Police Agency—were dispatched from Japan for long term.

In the final two years of TTC, Associate Professor Hisao Uchiyama from Tokyo University of Science and Associate Professor Haruo Ishida from the University of Tsukuba were appointed as members of the TTC.

Our mission as JICA experts in overseas posts was to train higher-level experts—through activities such as transferring TTC from the Ministry of Transport and Communications to UP

and establishing the National Center for Transportation Studies (NCTS)—and to create two graduate programs—one in transportation engineering at the College of Engineering and the other in transportation planning at the School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP). This project was agreed upon by the Japanese side led by Professor Takeshi Kurokawa of the University of Tsukuba



and the Philippine government. The Japanese team included Mr. Masafumi Maejima, the head of the team; Mr. Seiji Nishioka, an expert from the Urban Affairs Bureau; Mr. Masaharu Kawashima, an expert from the Roads Bureau; Dr. Yasuhiro Hirohata, an associate professor at the Toyohashi University of Technology; Mr. Hideo Ito, a coordinator at JICA; and myself. At that time, an 8-hour power outage occurred daily, and the university's flush toilets had neither water nor seats. Despite JICA's refusal to "purchase generators, build water tank towers, and replace toilets, as they were unrelated to research and education," the team leader successfully negotiated for the facilities to be installed.

Our activities, including the establishment of an academic society, were fully supported by experts dispatched from various ministries such as expert Our activities, including the establishment of an academic society, were fully supported by experts dispatched from various ministries such as Mr. Yukihiro Tsukada from the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Mr. Hiroshi Ueda, Asian Development Bank (ADB) staff member, and representatives from Manila construction and transportation associations. In Japan, Associate Professor Uchiyama of the Tokyo University of Science and Associate Professor Ishida of the University of Tsukuba managed various aspects of the project, including negotiations with the Japanese government.

Before I assumed my post, I wondered whether scholarships would be required to entice students to the newly established graduate school course. However, both the Ministry of Education and JICA informed me that providing scholarships was impossible. I consulted with Mr. Keiichi Inoue, head of the Road Economics Division, and because of him, I was able to provide scholarships

equivalent to the salary of an associate professor at UP at that time.

I thought that the ultimate mission was to improve transportation in the Philippines. Therefore, after I arrived—before the new semester commenced—I made three visits to the relevant government offices and sought the cooperation of individuals whom I believed had the most insight. Some later became visiting professors and helped us develop the Manila Metropolitan Transportation Master Plan. One of them is now the Secretary of Public Works.

The first challenge at the beginning of the new semester was to secure students for the next academic year. People wondered about the availability of jobs in civil-engineering planning. Experts from JICA were required to limit my role to supporting local personnel, instead of undertaking direct implementations. Thus, without consulting JICA, I negotiated with UP to become a visiting professor and assume the role of lecturing to undergraduate students. Additionally, I succeeded in advancing the top four students to a newly established graduate school. They are now professors at UP. Additional students were from the Department of Public Works, the Department of Transportation and Communications, and the Philippine National Railways. One of the students is now the Undersecretary of the Department of Transportation and Communications, and another was the former President of the Philippine National Railways.

Professor Hideo Nakamura mentioned that it would be beneficial to establish an academic society in Asia. However, no academic society existed in the Philippines (technically, only the Society of Civil Engineers existed, although it resembled a social gathering). Therefore, we established the Transportation Science Society of the Philippines (TSSP). We asked Professor Primitivo C. Cal of UP to serve as the society's president, and we successfully held the first conference (a paper presentation session) before returning to Japan. We managed to launch this society owing to the support of experts from JICA dispatched to various government agencies, as well as by financial support provided by the local branches of Japanese automobile companies.

I wished for the students to obtain doctoral degrees at a Japanese university after they had completed their

master's degree such that they can advance to becoming professors at UP. I secured this commitment through persistent negotiations with UP president. I asked him to enable Filipino students to assume faculty positions after Japanese faculty members—dispatched as experts—have returned to Japan, thereby allowing them to conduct various research projects. Additionally, I asked UP president to secure 10 teaching positions not only for the two majors at NCTS but also for other majors such as economics, information, and tourism, to which he agreed. These human resources are now nurturing young talent and working diligently for TSSP and EASTS.

Professor Kurokawa established and implemented a policy to send faculty members from many Japanese universities to UP, which allowed Filipino students to conduct diverse doctoral research under different faculty members.

During my business trips to Indonesia, South Korea, and Singapore, I consulted with professors and researchers about establishing an Asian society for transportation studies, which marked the beginning of my efforts to establish EASTS.

Financial Support and Human-Resource Development

Professor Fujiwara: What financial challenges did you encounter while establishing EASTS?

Professor Morichi: At the time, traffic congestion and accidents were severe problems in major Asian cities, and identifying a solution to them was critical for both economic growth and for improving people's quality of life. Thus, I felt that it was necessary to establish an academic society to develop human resources and policies to address these issues.

Japanese people typically write down the knowledge they have acquired, including information from overseas, and share it in lectures. However, in developing countries, established people are not to share information with young researchers, as having that information is valuable to those established people. If information is not conveyed to young people, then they would not be motivated to conduct research. In my opinion, establishing an academic society is necessary for solving this problem and increasing incentives for research.

Additionally, I wished to provide financial incentives to young researchers and students to undertake research and participate in EASTS. Although unusual for an academic society, we proposed to foot the registration, hotel, and travel expenses. However, monetary support is required for realizing such a proposal.

I visited various transportation-related bureaus within the Ministries of Construction and Transport to explain that the establishment of EASTS would benefit the Japanese government. After gaining their understanding, I asked the executives of the Urban Affairs Bureau, which had a small budget at the time, regarding the amount of funding that they could provide to us. After obtaining their response, I



asked the Road Bureau and the Ministry of Transport for the same amount. As we could not cover such costs using tax money, I suggested each bureau to approach private organizations.

Expansion to Other Countries and Challenges

Professor Fujiwara: Please describe the expansion of EASTS across different countries at the time of its establishment and the challenges that arose during the process.

Professor Morichi: The purpose of EASTS was to improve the quality of research conducted by young scholars, create opportunities for them to participate in international conferences, and consequently improve transportation in their respective countries.

In the Philippines, there were only two people who had transportation degrees: Professor Cal (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Ricardo DG. Sigua (University of Tokyo). Indonesia had five or six, similar to Thailand. This scenario is similar to that in Japan in the early 1960s. However, approximately a quarter-century later, Japan had several hundred faculty members.

In preparation for the establishment of EASTS, we assigned each young Japanese faculty member to oversee one country and convene meetings with professors from that country. We rented a guesthouse in Kawana—owned by a construction company—through the assistance of a friend of Professor Nakamura and held a meeting with representatives from each country. In that meeting, we decided on various rules, such as the name “Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies (EASTS),” membership fees, and venues.

To avoid burdening each country, we established a system in which contributions are paid based on the number of members. To allow each country to conduct human-resource training independently, we created a condition for participation in EASTS, i.e., each country is required to establish its own academic society. Japan covered most of the associated costs. Regarding the activities, we began with the submission of non-reviewed papers.

The first president was Professor Nakamura, and Professor Cal was appointed to be the next president, with Professor Nakamura’s consent. Professors Uchiyama and Ishida, both former members of TTC, contributed significantly to the establishment of EASTS.

As for the award, Yokohama City was the first to bear the expense for it. When Professor Yoshinosuke Yasoshima passed away, we received a donation and created the “Yasoshima Yoshinosuke Prize.” In 1994, EASTS was established within a year of my stay in the Philippines from 1992 to 1993.

Although transportation societies existed in Korea and Taiwan, we needed to encourage the establishment of such societies in other Asian countries. Thailand and Indonesia had only two or three professors. Thus, securing participants for EASTS from each country was

challenging.

Owing to limited financial resources, we decided to organize a conference in Asia, where Japan’s presence is important. Therefore, we decided to hold a yearly board meeting in Tokyo between biennial conference years. Additionally, we established various rules—including a self-nomination system for selecting the conference hosting city.

At the first TSSP meeting, several problems were encountered, such as staff not arriving timely or not being able to print the Proceedings. Such issues should not occur at the first Manila conference. Therefore, Professor Uchiyama, Professor Ishida, and I held nine preparatory meetings, five of which were held in the Philippines. At the time, the University of Tokyo and other universities located in Tokyo jointly held student training seminars, which allowed us to discuss the issues. We had to manage all aspects ourselves, including the venue, participant registration, invited guests, financial resources, papers, panel discussions, hotels, and staff cooperation. Among a total of 130 papers, 40 were from Japan.

Professor Nakamura mentioned that a fourth conference would be held in Hanoi. Professor Nguyen Xuan Dao, the director of a road-related research institute, and Professor Nakamura—both of whom love Germany and got along well—decided to hold it in Hanoi. I was worried about the capability of people in Hanoi in organizing a conference. Therefore, I traveled to Hanoi to book the venue and hotel, as well as conducted a rehearsal for the research presentation. Various issues were encountered, such as the secretariat having no experience in international conferences and inadequate knowledge regarding the registration process.

For the fifth conference, Fukuoka was selected as no countries had applied to host it. Fukuoka became popular owing to the availability of direct airline flights from various cities in Southeast Asia. As having a conference in Japan is a financial burden, we asked the prefectures and cities to host their first and last dinner parties. Through the cooperation of organizations such as JR, the Port Bureau, and Nishi-Nippon Railroad Co., Ltd. (Nishitetsu), we organized a session in which the participants shared their experiences in Japan. This session was beneficial for these organizations and useful for people participating from other countries. The support organization agreed to pay for the participants’ lunch boxes and plastic bottles, which implied cost savings for the lunch party. The participants appeared happy to attend and had a meaningful time. Additionally, we asked



Professor Takeshi Chishaki to allow us to use Kyushu University as a venue.

Future Prospects and Challenges

Professor Fujiwara: Please tell us about the future prospects and challenges of the EASTS.

Professor Morichi: Japanese university staff and educators, as well as many young people in Asia, struggle to write papers for Western academic journals and are not particularly interested in improving transportation in Asia. I wish to train people to write papers about Asia. Research themes that target the unique characteristics of Asian transportation phenomena and policy issues abound. Additionally, problems unique to Asia that differ from those in Europe exist. For example, wealthy people typically do not use public transit. Additionally, we must understand Asian issues, such as the relationship between public transportation and road policy, station plazas, parking policies, continuous overpass projects, urban planning systems, and land systems.

One value of Asian Transport Studies (ATS) is that it conducts international comparative research and studies based on actual data pertaining to Asian issues. These studies appeared to gain zero recognition from Westerners; in fact, not all Westerners can solve Asian problems. A typical example of this is when Westerners mention that bus rapid transit and light rail transit would benefit megacities larger than Tokyo but do not implement the relevant plans, thus causing issues to people.

Researchers of civil-engineering planning, including those in Japan, must commit to practical work. Otherwise, results for solving actual problems cannot be achieved.

EASTS provides an opportunity for Japanese faculty and students to increase their interest in transportation in Asia; for many students, EASTS enables them to attend an international conference for the first time.



Furthermore, while improving the quality of papers is important, papers that do not address the problems in Asia would be meaningless; therefore, the contributions should not be limited to only peer-reviewed papers.

I am aware of a discussion regarding the discontinuation of the EASTS journal and for ATS to be the sole journal. However, to address the issue of insufficient papers from countries that joined later—such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Mongolia, and Laos—I think we must consider the university at which research will be conducted as well as the associated leader. Young people and practitioners from these countries should be able to participate in research in their own country.

One issue that must be addressed is the weak commitment from practitioners such as local governments, private transport operators, and urban-development companies. Stronger ties between academia and government and greater involvement by academics in planning are required. Establishing EASTS sessions to discuss practical transport policy issues and cooperating with local officials and politicians may be beneficial.

I wish to see a stronger commitment by the Japanese government. The government holds regular meetings with ASEAN members; therefore, I wonder if university staff and educators can participate in these meetings.

Previously, we have implemented several plans to increase the interest and ability of UP researchers and students in practical work. When JICA created the Manila Metropolitan Transportation Master Plan, I established their consultant offices in NCTS building at UP. Both the teachers and students gained practical experience as part-time workers. After a year, I proposed donating computers, person trip data, and software if UP staff mastered their use after a three-week course. Consequently, when projects from the World Bank or other countries became available, UP staff were contacted for their expertise with person trip data, which allowed them to gain valuable experience.

What I have just described is only an example. Having university students participate in such projects is crucial.

Finally, a debate is ongoing about changing the name “East Asia Society for Transportation Studies,” which had likely stemmed from the fact that non-Southeast Asian countries, such as Mongolia, Central Asian countries, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India, should be included. It appears natural to allow them to join an academic society operated by ASEAN countries, such as EASTS. However, this is to be decided by future generations. Southeast Asia is extremely important to Japan’s foreign policy, and I hope that EASTS would attract Southeast Asians to Japan. This may be realized by organizing a session at EASTS with people who have studied in Japan.

Another aspect that I am concerned with is the secretariat. The success of EASTS is attributed to the effort of members from the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

Many practical decisions have been made among those members.

As this system is no longer sustainable in the future, appropriate plans must be devised.

Hajime Inamura

Chairperson of International Scientific Committee (ISC) (1994-1997)

30 Years of EASTS History

Professor Akimasa Fujiwara: An event to celebrate the 30th anniversary of EASTS will be held in November 2024. First, I would like to ask Professor Hajime Inamura about EASTS's 30-year journey.

Professor Inamura: When EASTS was launched, I was asked by Professors Shigeru Morichi and Hideo Nakamura to join the launch group. Although not directly related to EASTS, I was posted to Bangkok and returned to Japan in 1989. When I became a professor at Tohoku University in 1992 and changed the personnel therein, I noticed a few papers published by young researchers in the planning field, particularly those in English. This shortfall in the civil-engineering field compared with the mechanical and chemical fields is assumed to be caused by the lack of academic conferences and opportunities to submit papers. In 1979, when I was an associate professor, the World Conference on Transport Research Society (WCTR) was established; however, international academic conferences participated by researchers in the transportation-planning field were few. In the United States, the Transportation Research Board was established for the transportation field. At the time, opportunities to submit papers were few; thus, the motivation for me to participate in the launch of EASTS was to increase the opportunities for Japanese researchers to present overseas. Another major reason for my participation was that I wished to increase opportunities for young researchers to easily write and present papers in English.

To digress from the main topic, few papers were written in the field of transportation planning at that time, even in Japanese. To increase the number of peer-reviewed papers, we changed the requirements for papers used in the Conference on Infrastructure Planning and Management such that peer review would occur after the presentation. Consequently, the number of papers included in the Proceedings increased, and the volume of the peer-reviewed collection increased significantly to the point where it was referred to as an "extremely voluminous proceeding." At the time, when we requested submissions from researchers in the planning field, the number of annual submissions to the JSCE Journal was only approximately six. By contrast, the structural engineering field had a high volume of submissions to Structural A and Structural B, while the hydraulics field



had a high volume of submissions to coastal engineering, thus resulting in a large volume of Proceedings. Therefore, our aim was to facilitate the submission of Japanese-language papers to these domestic journals while strongly encouraging English-language submissions to EASTS.

My main goal was to increase the number of opportunities for Japanese and Asian researchers in the planning field to present at international conferences and to increase the number of peer-reviewed papers in English. To be promoted to the position of associate professor or professor, a significant number of papers that were comparable not only to those in the civil-engineering field but also to many other fields of engineering were required. In other fields, such as electrical and mechanical engineering, some peer-reviewed papers were as short as two pages. Their peer review was not as strict in terms of the literature review and paper format, and papers demonstrating novel contributions were favorably considered for acceptance. By contrast, I felt that the peer-review process for the field of civil engineering was strict, particularly in transportation planning. Similar to the case with foreign collections of research papers, publication was impossible in some instances owing to the absence of literature review. When I was the Chairman of the ISC, the policy for the peer review of EASTS papers was to accept papers if they contained new knowledge, without regard for insufficient reviews or minor English deficiencies. When the journal was first established, discussions regarding the title of the Proceedings were lively. The original title was "Journal of EASTS," and I was very adamant about the word "Journal." I even asserted that I would not accept the position of Chairman of the ISC if the title did not include "Journal." This is because, during personnel performance evaluations at the

university, papers published in "Proceedings" were not considered to be formal peer-reviewed papers and thus did not constitute a researcher's achievements, hence my adamantness regarding the use of the word "Journal." In addition, at the time, young researchers did not have many opportunities to review peer-published papers in English. If they had the opportunity to be a reviewer, they would also learn how to write English papers. Therefore, I assigned the task of peer reviewing to young researchers who probably had not had the chance to do so until then. Subsequently, I checked and corrected review papers that were not peer reviewed or were not written well in English.

Professor Fujiwara: Currently, approximately 500 papers are submitted to each conference, of which approximately 400 are selected as candidates for journal publication and approximately 300 are ultimately published. Furthermore, approximately 10% of them are published in ATS. Considering this situation and the original vision of Professor Inamura at the time, do you believe that the "Journal of EASTS" should continue to be maintained in the future?

Professor Inamura: I completely agree.

Memories from the Early Days of EASTS

Professor Fujiwara: If there were any particularly memorable events or experiences during the early years of EASTS, could you kindly share them with us?

Professor Inamura: Of course, it was the Kawana meeting. Professors Morichi and Nakamura selected representatives from among the WCTR's Asian members to participate at the meeting. In this regard, Professor Morichi was central in raising funds from the Ministry of Construction and other sources. We wished for the members to be enthusiastic and to become representatives of their countries. At that meeting, we decided to establish EASTS. Next, we discuss the establishment of domestic academic societies for each country. At first, I did not think the matter would come to fruition at this meeting; however, I remembered being happy that it had materialized. I think Professor Morichi had a scenario in mind: if any representative had to step down, then that person would have to nominate the next representative. Few participants participated in WCTR, and most were professors in Asian countries. Ideally, a representative should be recommended by the transportation academic society in each country; however, this was not always the case in reality.

I was responsible for Thailand; therefore, I asked Mr. Prapansak from the Department of Highways to represent Thailand. People from the Ministry of Construction in Japan, who cooperated in providing funding, participated in this nomination as well. I used to work in government offices; therefore, I was aware of the fact that government agencies do not easily provide money for causes not directly related to their projects or policies.

ISC was in charge of editing and printing the Journal. The Journal was segmented into separate volumes, numbered Nos. 1, 2, 3, and so on. These volumes were created by Associate Professor Hirano and others at Tohoku University by pasting copies onto paper. Because printing costs were high in Japan at the time, the volumes were sent in small packages to the Philippines, where they were printed and numbered. The volume number was the conference number, and the following numbers (1, 2, 3, and so on) were based on the field of study, with several volumes bundled into sets.

Difficulties in Establishing EASTS

Professor Fujiwara: Can you tell us about the academic challenges you encountered during the establishment of EASTS?

Professor Inamura: The most difficult challenge that I encountered during my appointment as ISC Chair was the lack of peer reviewers. Although I knew of the fields with strong participation by Japanese researchers, I had little idea about overseas researchers. I had to assign approximately 300 papers to reviewers, and selecting them was difficult. I created a list of people by country who had published papers previously and were listed in the references of those papers. I simply persuaded those individuals. Additionally, I sent review requests to people who were not members of the society. Email was not yet available at the time; therefore, I made requests via phone, post-mail, and facsimile. I was in charge of conferences in the Philippines and Taiwan.

It was around the time of the Taiwan conference that I began receiving 500 paper submissions. Therefore, I had only less than 200 papers at the Philippines conference. Each paper was approximately six pages long; it was a difficult challenge.

Additionally, some review requests did not result in any response. Thus, ISC organizing committee had to perform





the review, which was laborious. After selecting the reviewers and sending out the papers, approximately 30% of the reviews were never returned.

Professor Fujiwara: When did you introduce the Topic Group Chief system? In response to the increasing burden of the review process, a new system was adopted, in which specific individuals, labeled A through F for each field, were assigned to select reviewers.

Professor Inamura: I would ask representatives of their countries to recommend 10 reviewers and then send papers to them. However, in reality, many countries do not have 10 reviewers available. I remember that a few of us remained in our laboratories and conducted dozens of peer reviews therein.

Professor Fujiwara: EASTS is currently undergoing a major transition. One aspect considered is the positioning of the “Journal of EASTS” moving forward, as mentioned earlier. Another aspect is the peer-review process, which has become increasingly complex and sophisticated.

Professor Inamura: I believe that the peer-review system should be changed. It would be better to simplify the peer-review process for the Journal of EASTS and adopt a stance of accepting any papers that exhibit promising features. Those who value the impact factors or strict formatting should submit to the ATS. Papers published in the Journal of EASTS have aided the promotion of many researchers. In academic societies in other fields, papers with 30 co-authors are common, and the identity of the actual first author is typically unknown. In other fields, when recommending someone for professorship, the five representative papers may not necessarily bear the person’s name as the first author. In science, the first author is occasionally unknown because papers are written in the alphabetical order. However, such a custom does not exist in engineering; therefore, the reason for not listing a researcher who made an important contribution cannot be easily identified. Nevertheless, these papers are accepted as a condition for professorship; therefore, their number is important. One of the roles of the Journal of EASTS is to help improve such situations.

Academic Society Named EASTS

Professor Fujiwara: Currently, the participants of EASTS are not limited to Southeast Asia but are expanding into South-Asian countries. Thus, the term “Eastern” in the association’s name is inconsistent

with the current reality. Therefore, do you think it is an appropriate name for a conference? Additionally, could you please tell us the background behind the name “EASTS” and how it was originally selected?

Professor Inamura: At that meeting, a discussion was held regarding approaches to ease the participation of New Zealand and Australia. This is related to the fact that the paper reviews are conducted in English. However, these two countries cannot be included under the regional name “Asia.” Initially, the idea of “EAST” was proposed; however, it was rejected because it would imply “far East.” The name “Eastern” was selected to maintain a balance of members and to aim for equal management of the society. In the future, we may reconsider whether to change the name when we are ready to include a wider region. Currently, the society is operated primarily by Japan and values academic fairness.

EASTS in the Future

Professor Fujiwara: As Asia undergoes significant transformation, what do you think EASTS should change to keep pace with the times? Conversely, what values or aspects do you believe EASTS should continue to uphold?

Professor Inamura: For countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and New Zealand, where the number of researchers is limited, we must ensure that the countries’ representatives are represented well. It would have been ideal if Hong Kong’s researchers were uniformly distributed; however, this is not the current situation.

In Thailand, young researchers and others are creating new academic societies. It would be beneficial if they could take the lead in creating a domestic society. Thailand has a history of selecting people from the Department of Highways as its representative. EASTS board of directors cannot directly select its board members; therefore, we suggest having more people from other universities to be included on the board. Additionally, I think it would be beneficial to include two or three representatives from good universities as the board members.

I hope that these efforts will help the universities in Japan become even more international. With the yen weakening, travel costs to Asia are low, so I think promoting exchanges with this region would be effective.



Haruo Ishida

Treasure of EASTS (1998-2006)

What it was Like at the Time of EASTS's Establishment

Professor Akimasa Fujiwara: Please tell us about the circumstances surrounding the establishment of EASTS, as well as your thoughts and the challenges you encountered at that time.

Professor Ishida: Before the inception of EASTS, we worked on a project named TTC, which involved faculty members and government officials from Japan. TTC was originally led by the Urban Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) and the police. In the Philippines, traffic accidents abound and congestion is common. Therefore, TTC was an education and training project to develop specialized human resources for solving these problems. TTC was a great success, and activities were launched to develop human resources capable of more advanced policy decision-making. The center was later named NCTS and was specifically tasked with establishing a graduate school and research center specializing in transportation at UP, with the responsibility of functionally managing them and developing human resources. During the preparation stage, I visited UP to offer assistance. Subsequently, JICA's NCTS project commenced officially. As the first project leader, Professor Shigeru Morichi traveled to the Philippines, where he established NCTS, its operating methods, and its initial framework. At that time, Professor Morichi negotiated with JICA to obtain a multiple-entry official visa, which was difficult to obtain. He traveled to candidate countries for EASTS to promote his vision and invite participation. I heard this story when Professor Morichi returned to Japan after completing his one-year term, and I was amazed to learn that it was actually a double mission.

From the beginning, Professor Morichi negotiated with JICA and MLIT. At that time, he was not working alone; in fact, he worked out a strategy together with Professors Hideo Nakamura and Takeshi Kurokawa in crafting a strategy. In 1994, a meeting was held in Kawana to discuss the basic structure and concept of EASTS. Retrospectively, 1994 marked the onset of Japan's prolonged economic stagnation period. Apart from South Korea and Taiwan, an overwhelming level of disparity in economic power occurred between Japan and other Asian countries. The aim of EASTS was to enable motivated and capable researchers to participate actively on a global scale without experiencing such



economic disparity. At the time, one of Japan's major roles was to secure the funds necessary for EASTS activities. Professors Morichi, Nakamura, and Kurokawa strived to secure the funding. We received a large amount of sponsorship money from JICE, IBS, and others. To manage the funds appropriately, I was requested to assume the role of treasurer. EASTS had a President, two Vice Presidents, a Secretary General, a Chair of the International Scientific Committee, and a Treasurer; five of the six members were elected from Japan. I believe that this is a testament to the importance of Japan, and that this recognition was shared internationally.

From the beginning, I collaborated with SG to manage meetings. Similar to the case in international conferences, participants at the Kawana Conference held various opinions, and the discussions occasionally diverted in unexpected directions. In such cases, I approached the participants and corrected them. Notably, the contributions of Professors Morichi, Nakamura, and Kurokawa were significant. Personally, managing such an international conference was an educational opportunity. Subsequently, I served as JICA Work Management Committee Chairperson, which was a valuable experience.

Professor Fujiwara: Who attended the Kawana meeting? Were there any participants from overseas at the meeting?

Professor Ishida: Yes, there were participants from overseas at the Kawana meeting. EASTS website lists the attendees of the first Kawana meeting in an article titled "The Birth of EASTS." It also includes the profile of Professor Nakamura in his younger days. It was difficult to identify, select, and appeal to representatives from each country; however, as I mentioned earlier, I understand that Professor Morichi and Professor

Primitivo C. Cal (UP and a counterpart at NCTS) traveled to each country to advance the discussions. Professor Nakamura was a representative for Japan. In addition to participants from Japan, those from China, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and other countries attended the meeting as well. I served in various roles, such as being a driver and managing the logistics, and I was in charge of the Philippines. Later, I worked on a JICA project in Jakarta, in which I was responsible for Indonesia.

One difficulty for me as the Treasurer was that the reform of public-interest corporations resulted in a significant cutoff in the flow of money. I approached industry groups and general contractors who were not public-interest corporations for funding. As Professors Morichi and Nakamura had already obtained their consent over the phone, I was tasked with explaining the contributions and importance of EASTS. Currently, EASTS comprises 37 corporate members from Japan.

Are you now receiving a fair amount of money?

Professor Fujiwara: We are trying our best to preserve the funds as much as possible.

Professor Ishida: I found the role of the Treasurer interesting, although I was cautious about the selection of the international cooperative research activity. Moreover, securing results was challenging in some occasions. I am glad that we managed it without any major problems. I would like to thank Professor Tetsuro Hyodo for digitizing the results of many individual surveys, including JICA's comprehensive overseas systematic surveys. He contributed significantly to this process. Centralizing the data benefited practitioners and researchers in EASTS member countries and became a significant source of income. Additionally, I am grateful to Professors Tetsuo Yai and Morichi for obtaining financial support from South Korea for EASTS.

The inception year of EASTS coincided with a period of economic stagnation in Japan. However, owing partly to EASTS's contributions, the economies of member countries improved. Soon after the NCTS project began, the president of UP visited Japan and made a courtesy call to the president of the University of Tsukuba (Professor Leona Esaki). At that meeting, Professor Esaki remarked, "While the Philippines is important, I want to see efforts to be made in Japan's cities and transportation." Initially, I thought that his statement was redundant during a courtesy visit; however, I recently realized that he may have had a premonition regarding the subsequent stagnation.

Among EASTS countries, Japan was no longer sufficiently wealthy to manage these projects alone, and its declining economic capacity presented significant challenges in maintaining its leadership role. Thus, we decided to collect conference participation and membership fees from member countries, which proved to be challenging. Considering Japan's current total GDP, I felt that joint learning with ASEAN members is important.

As an accounting officer, I encountered difficulties with members who were lagging behind on their membership fees. Initially, I presented a strong request to the MLIT,

which resulted in a high number of participants. However, some members were lagging behind on their fees, and I had to identify a solution to this issue. Finally, the issue was resolved successfully.

EASTS is a project that prioritizes the future of Asia. I believe that it has contributed significantly to the development of the region by accumulating research, developing human resources, and establishing international networks.

Japan should consider learning to interact with EASTS and its member countries in the future, in particular for resolving issues such as membership fees and contributions.

Professor Fujiwara: Korea has been actively involved in EASTS for several years. In this regard, Dr. Jaehak Oh—KOTI chairman—has contributed significantly. As a new chairman has been elected, I am concerned about the future of EASTS. I plan to visit the new director in person soon. Unless Korea and Japan continue to collaborate actively, sustaining the operation of EASTS may be challenging.

Professor Ishida: We are pleased that Dr. Oh has become an International Advisory Member of the Cross-ministerial Strategic Innovation Promotion Program in Japan (SIP). In populous countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand—where infrastructure development and economic growth are rapid—the contribution of personal networks is significant, and the activities of graduates are particularly notable. Although this contribution is substantial, it is difficult to quantify.

The NCTS project began in Tokyo, and we are grateful to the faculty from various universities for accepting international students to participate in the project. EASTS is a pillar of Japan's international student policy and has successfully enticed students from different countries. I consider this a significant achievement as it allows international students to join EASTS and mingle with various Japanese faculty members.

Professor Naohiko Hibino: Professor Morichi told me that, before the Kawana meeting, he, Professor Ishida, and Professor Uchiyama held nine preparatory meetings, five of which were held in Manila, Philippines. Do you remember this?

Professor Ishida: We held several meetings, including one with Professor Cal, who was then the head of the NCTS. I do not remember this well as I did not maintain any records. I recall that we discussed with TSSP about



our plans. Professor Morichi's detailed recollection of these nine meetings is remarkable. In this regard, JICA's influence was significant in providing opportunities for such discussions. I visit the Philippines frequently and remember thinking about methods to manage transportation research, urban planning, and social-capital policy as an academic institution. I hope that people value their ideas on the importance of social-capital policies and work on each aspect. This is beneficial for countries that recognize the importance of transportation research and social-capital policy but remains difficult for countries without such positive experiences. However, as EASTS continues to expand, we must consider various factors.

Future Expectations for the EASTS

Professor Fujiwara: In addition to changes in the economic landscape and population distribution, various challenges transcending national borders—such as environmental issues—have become increasingly apparent. In this context, the 30-year legacy that EASTS has developed must be considered and the spirit of mutual support must be upheld.

Additionally, in the academic field, there is an increasing sense that we cannot lag behind other Asian countries. I feel that we are now at a turning point where achieving the right balance between cooperation and competition is essential.

What are your expectations for EASTS in the future?

Professor Ishida: I think that it is important to continue publishing journals. Young researchers, in particular, must publish many papers in English, and I believe that this can be facilitated by EASTS. Collaboration with ASEAN members is a key theme in SIP. Some countries are more advanced than Japan in terms of new mobility (smart mobility). Because of the domestic limitations of



Japan, new collaborations must be sought. Although SIP operates at a business level and is focused on social implementation, it must remain grounded in academic and evidence-based discussions. In this regard, the role of EASTS will become increasingly important. Despite the importance of EASTS, we are no longer in the era where Japan is capable of achieving results independently. New developments for EASTS that involve all member countries must be proposed.

Professor Fujiwara: Considering the recent surge in India's participation in EASTS international conferences, what are your thoughts regarding the possibility of incorporating India as a Domestic Society of EASTS?

Professor Ishida: If we include India, then issues concerning South Asia and West Asia—including Pakistan and Bangladesh—will arise. This must be considered carefully.

The relationship between Japan and Southeast Asia has changed considerably and will continue to evolve. Therefore, new cooperative methods should be devised. EASTS has been active for 30 years, with the involvement of people of all ages. We should identify methods to capitalize on these human assets, not only in academia but also in transportation companies, trading companies, and real estate. Although past tasks may be burdensome to the individual member in charge of the home country, I believe that such tasks are important. I am happy that everyone at UP has become increasingly influential.

Professor Fujiwara: The concept of “transportation” has gradually shifted toward “mobility.” This shift reflects a broader perspective that extends beyond the mere movement of people and goods, and aims to understand mobility in a more comprehensive and integrated manner.

Consequently, the scope of relevant fields has expanded significantly, thus creating new opportunities. Whereas the academic society will continue to use the name “EASTS,” the focus of its activities is increasingly evolving toward a wider and more inclusive view of mobility.

Professor Ishida: Although some countries have surpassed Japan in terms of economic development, they are likely to encounter challenges similar to those encountered by Japan. Japan cannot continue to fulfill its role as a member of the EASTS by merely highlighting issues; it must become a leader in solving them. To achieve this, Japan must not only consider its perspective but also cooperate with member countries to implement new systems. From the beginning, EASTS has been administered without a strict division between academia and business. Therefore, new perspectives must be adopted. Initially, this was managed by Professors Morichi and Nakamura. In the future, a domestic network must be created that extends beyond research to include transportation, real estate, and trading companies. In recent years, trading companies have shown active interest in this technology field. We should consider inviting such companies to join EASTS-Japan to help create dedicated EASTS sessions.

Tetsuo Yai

Presidents of EASTS (2015-2019)

EASTS: Thoughts on the 20th and 30th Anniversaries

Professor Akimasa Fujiwara: Please tell us about the major events that occurred between the 20th and 30th anniversaries of EASTS, as well as your thoughts and feelings during that period.

Professor Yai: At the time, I felt that we had to undertake a number of initiatives to realize the direction for EASTS as well as our aspirations when it was founded. Developing human resources throughout Asia and Southeast Asia, in particular, remains the same goal for EASTS as when it was established.

During those days, there was a common sentiment regarding Japan's stance. In other words, we should not emphasize that Japan must take the lead over other countries. When EASTS was launched, overseas representatives gathered in Kawana; upon observing the diligence of Japanese people, other countries appeared to wish to emulate them.

Subsequently, we discovered that in some countries, domestic academic societies were not necessarily active; therefore, we operated the secretariat in a discrete manner.

Since our founding, we have had the desire to be a warm and friendly society for young researchers, and this culture has continued over the past 20 years; I believe that this culture remains unchanged.

Professor Fujiwara: Although Japan assumed a leading role, particularly in human-resource development, caution was exercised to avoid positioning itself as a special or dominant presence. Not only was capacity building emphasized, but also thoughtful efforts were directed toward creating supportive systems and fostering the establishment of domestic societies in each country. Later, Professor Yai upheld that vision and, as the Secretary General, fulfilled his responsibility with dedication.

Professor Yai: I think it was surprising that we created domestic societies in each country and established a system under EASTS. Once we implemented the system, we were able to follow up by having emerging countries create societies and join EASTS. Creating societies together benefits those countries as well.



The Most Memorable Experience

Professor Fujiwara: Your longstanding contributions as Secretary General prior to your appointment as President were truly indispensable for establishing the foundation for EASTS. Based on the history of EASTS, what was the most memorable event or moment for you?

Professor Yai: I served as the Secretary General for 15 years. I was able to assume the role such a long time owing to the dedication of EASTS members. Most of the secretariat members were Japanese, and we shared the same strong desire to advance the society. I think it was Professor Shigeru Morichi who brought these feelings together. However, this type of work by EASTS secretariat is neither visible nor appreciated by external entities.

This may still be the case today; however, once the conference started, we were always operating behind the scenes. Therefore, we were unable to participate in the sessions. Starting with recent conferences, we began to have secretariat members serve as session chairs; however, this was not realizable previously owing to time constraints. Supporting the conference, which is held once every two years, is a major task for the secretariat. As expected, operating the secretariat left a significant impression on me. It is a continuous job, and once you are involved in the secretariat, identifying another person to assume the role becomes extremely challenging.

If the secretariat stops functioning, then the society ceases to function. Therefore, creating a sustainable system is paramount. We must routinely work within the



society and perform outsourcing where possible. This is a concern for the current society, and the challenge is to realize a more systematic system. Moreover, several management issues remain unresolved.

When I was the Secretary General, the management was relatively successful, primarily because of the presence of Professor Naohisa Okamoto, who constituted the first generation involved in the establishment of the society.

Japan is likely to continue operating the secretariat in the foreseeable future. However, proactively outsourcing tasks would be beneficial. In my opinion, having university professors manage the finer details of conferences is not a good idea.

When I was the Secretary General, we had to address various problems. In retrospect, I think we could have managed them more simply if we had been able to improve the operation of the organization.

Professor Fujiwara: I believe this truly reflects the “capability” that Professor Morichi had envisioned. Human-resource development is not limited to developing countries; such an organizational structure has also been established in Japan. Although I joined partway through the process, there was much to learn, even only by inheriting the framework that had already been established. I can only imagine the tremendous effort that must have been exerted in establishing such a solid foundation.

Professor Yai: Approximately one year after the establishment of EASTS, a Japanese DS was formulated. I remember being asked to write down the constitution of EASTS-Japan, that is, how EASTS-Japan was established. At first, however, since everyone was focused on establishing the main body of EASTS, EASTS-Japan was merely a little more than a formality.

Professor Fujiwara: I feel that EASTS-Japan, with its membership centered around younger researchers, has a strong and well-established organizational core. To be honest, it is unsettling to imagine the situation without such a solid foundation.

Professor Yai: As I recall, EASTS-Japan secretariat was initially operated by the same people who worked in the main EASTS secretariat. The members joined EASTS-Japan and participated actively in EASTS conferences. Over the years, EASTS-Japan has gradually become more active through seminars.

What is Next for the EASTS?

Professor Fujiwara: The fact that Professor Yai has served as the Secretary General for 15. Years, i.e., half of the EASTS's 30-year history, is remarkable. We have frequently heard from other professors about the unwavering vision held at the time EASTS was founded.

From here on, I would like to ask about your thoughts on the future of EASTS. We already obtained candid opinions from Professor Morichi regarding the name of the society and the role of the Journal of EASTS. As for the society's name, I personally believe that considering “Eastern Asia” as a unified academic community is valuable. What are your perspectives on this point? In particular, I think it will be crucial to position our relationships with geographically distant countries, such as Australia, and to discuss the extent to which EASTS should expand its regional scope over the next decade.

Professor Yai: The requirements for joining the domestic society changed approximately 10 years after the establishment of EASTS. When EASTS was first established, strict restrictions were imposed for a domestic society; in other words, the requirements could be understood as limiting participating countries to Southeast Asia. I remember that we changed this restriction around year 2000. I traveled to the Philippines with Professor Okamoto and discussed this issue with the president, Professor Primitivo C. Cal.

Since then, the rules of EASTS have changed, which allowed any domestic society—regardless of country or region—to become a member.

Prior to the change, the wording was strict and did not allow participation from other regions; afterward, the wording became more lenient, and now any country is allowed to join. In extreme terms, even African countries are now permitted to join as a domestic society.

In my opinion, expanding our society is crucial. EASTS is an academic society and a forum for research, and restrictions should not be imposed on its member countries. I welcomed the topic of Sri Lanka when it emerged. Thus, I traveled to Sri Lanka with Professor Shinya Hanaoka and expressed our sincerity in welcoming the Sri Lankan society. Since I was the president of EASTS at the time, it was an easier decision to allow them to join.

Previously, a shared sense of crisis that EASTS have been absorbed into WCTR might have been presented. However, that feeling could have vanished after the establishment of ATS.

The standing and status of EASTS have become clearer, and it is beginning to be recognized by external entities. This provides a sense of security, and joint sessions with WCTR have become more frequent, which is favorable.

Regarding the name “EASTS,” I understand Professor Morichi's sentiments and think that the name is fine. I have mentioned that the “E” in EASTS carries connotations

of “emerging Asia” and “entire Asia.” Provided that the content is consistent, I think that changing the name is unnecessary.

Professor Fujiwara: Professor Yai, what do you think of the future of the Journal of EASTS? For many researchers across Asia today, ATS is a major attraction.

Professor Yai: When I was the president of EASTS and when I handed over the presidency to Dr. Jaehak Oh, we actively discussed about the journal. My thoughts have not changed since then. I wish to maximize the role of ATS as an academic society. Professor Hitoshi Ieda created ATS, while Professor Hironori Kato was responsible for many of its aspects; however, an unpredictable future for ATS would not be a good idea. I feel that the most prominent theme for the survival of EASTS is to elevate ATS to the level of a journal that can receive a higher impact factor. Otherwise, EASTS becomes a mere event that occurs once every two years. To me, having journals worthy of the top rank is the most important.

Over the last 10 years, the number of transportation-related papers has increased significantly. However, once a paper is published in the Journal of EASTS, it cannot be published elsewhere. Previously, when only a few places were available to publish papers in English, the papers became valuable; however, that is no longer the case currently. I think the key is to determine the extent to which the Journal of EASTS can be used for promotion. We may need to consider creating a special session slot, similar to WCTR, such that papers can be published in other journals. Another noteworthy point is the number of papers published by practitioners. Gathering papers written by practitioners as special features may be a good idea.

Professor Fujiwara: Currently, ATS is indexed in the Emerging Sources Citation Index, and it may be upgraded to the Science Citation Index within the next two or three years. Before this happens, I believe that it is important to clarify our policy on how we intend to position and manage the Journal of EASTS.

Professor Yai: I would like to see ATS to continue publishing more high-quality papers. It would be great if ATS became synonymous with Asian research.

One possible route for the Journal of EASTS would be to outsource the editing and publication of practitioner papers in electronic form to organizations such as the Philippine Society, which would then release them sequentially.

Professor Fujiwara: Currently, Thailand is key in



supporting ISC, which is reassuring. Thus far, there was a strong sense that “Japan has to take the lead.” However, Korea—particularly through KOTI—has since engaged in the support significantly. Additionally, Taiwan has contributed significantly, particularly under the leadership of Professor Yu-Chiun Chiou. EASTS gradually expanded across the Asian region.

Moving forward, we should maintain strong ties with these countries and further strengthen our collaborations.

Expectations for EASTS

Professor Fujiwara: What are your expectations for the future development of EASTS?

Professor Yai: I think that connections with the industry are important, as are encouraging startups. Uber participated in a conference in Vietnam. Start-ups have many possibilities, many of which are related to transportation. Additionally, a system that entices people from the industry should be created.

To achieve this, we must lower the barrier to interaction. If people from the government and industry leave, it would simply be a gathering of people who write papers.

It would be beneficial for young people to increase the number of papers they publish; however, this is problematic if they are limited to writing. Although administrative and policy-related matters are being implemented, connections with new technology may remain weak in the society.

Professor Fujiwara: In Indonesia, GO-JEK has emerged as a competitor to Uber and Grab, and it has already established itself as a major business. In Korea, one of the most frequent topics of discussion is the technology of “flying cars,” such as electric vertical take-offs and landing aircraft. These technologies have the potential to expand rapidly across Asia in the coming years. However, such innovative mobility initiatives, particularly those led by startups, are still not actively discussed within EASTS.

Professor Yai: It is beneficial to have more startups in the software sector. EASTS would benefit from collaborations with industries that develop new innovations.

Professor Fujiwara: This November, I will visit Indonesia to observe its current transportation conditions. Traditional modes of transport, such as ojek (motorcycle taxis) and angkot (shared minibuses), have undergone significant changes over the past decade and appear to have gradually evolved into new forms. When I met with Professor Nakamura last week, he emphasized the importance of maintaining a good relationship with WCTR. Now that EASTS marks its 30th anniversary, strengthening ties and building relationships with WCTR may become key challenges.

| Reflecting on the Dialogue

These dialogues were conducted to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the founding of EASTS. They preserve the insights and experiences shared by the professors who contributed to its establishment as a valuable "asset". Owing to time constraints during our conversations, we could not discuss every event or future challenge comprehensively. However, we hope that this record will serve as a meaningful testimony to the founding period and will be passed down to future generations.



Dr. Akimasa Fujiwara, President of the EASTS

Profile

Shigeru Morichi

Professor Emeritus of Tokyo Institute of Technology
Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo
Professor Emeritus of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies
President of EASTS (2003-2007), Vice President (2001-2003),
Secretary General (1994-2001), Treasure (1995-1997)

Hajime Inamura

Professor Emeritus of Tohoku University
Professor Emeritus of Tohoku Institute of Technology
Member of Board of Directors, EASTS (2001-2005)
Chairperson of International Scientific Committee (ISC) (1994-1997)

Haruo Ishida

Professor Emeritus/Special Advisor to the President of University of Tsukuba
Treasure of EASTS (1998-2006), Member of Board of Directors (2001-2015)

Tetsuo Yai

Professor Emeritus of Tokyo Institute of Technology
Specially Appointed Professor of Institute of Science Tokyo
President for Research of Japan Transport and Tourism Research Institute
Presidents of EASTS (2015-2019)
Secretary General (2001-2015)

interviewer

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