

Academic Cooperation Program with Thailand

Dr. Taki had been working as a coordinator of Core University Program supported by JSPS (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science) for six years, from 1994 to 2000.

The JSPS Core University Program provides a framework for international cooperative research in specifically designated fields and topics, centering around universities designated as core universities in Japan and in the counterpart Asian countries. Under the program, universities and individual scientists in the affiliated countries carry out cooperative research projects with sharply focused topics and explicitly delineated goals. This Program started with Thailand and Indonesia in 1978, and expanded to the Philippines in 1979, to Singapore in 1983, to Malaysia in 1984, to China in 1993, to Republic of Korea in 1998 and to Vietnam in 1999. The Core University Program includes scientist exchanges, cooperative research, and scientific seminars.

In reality, however, the Program had been a kind of human resource development project. In the sense, the aim of the program had been to motivate the faculties in Southeast Asian universities to conduct the research works. The researches were not always the duty there, and it was often the case that young staffs had never experienced to involve in the researches. The cooperative research was a kind of training for them, so that they could acquire the methodology of the research.

Tokyo Tech had been the pioneer of this Program. The first Program had been launched in 1979 for the cooperation with the Graduate School of Opto-Electronics and Laser Applications, University of Indonesia. To support the Program, Tokyo Tech had established the International Cooperation Center for Science and Technology (INCOCSAT) in 1979. Later, the program with King Rama IV University (KR4U) in Thailand had been launched in 1988.

Dr. Taki had been mainly in charge of the Program with KR4U. The field was named “Science and Technology,” which was too broad as the sharply focused topic.

When Dr. Taki became the member of INCOCSAT in 1994, Prof. Morinaga, the Director of INCOCSAT at the time, assigned him to be in charge of the Thailand Project.

However, he found that there were so many problems on the management of the Program which had not been solved for a long time:

- 1) The annual exchange plan should have been determined through the discussion between the coordinators of core universities. However, National Research Council in Thailand (NRCT) had had the selection committee of the candidates and they had made the public announcement for the application. The committee had been composed of the members from all the major national universities in Thailand. Therefore, the number of candidates from each of these universities was balanced, and the repeated applicants were rejected. The committee had pushed the list to Tokyo Tech coordinator for approval.
- 2) Most of the Japanese researchers on the list were from Meizan University. Meizan had had a long history of cooperation with KR4U under JICA projects for more than 20 years. Therefore, there had been a lot of alumni of Meizan in KR4U and they had applied to visit their academic advisers of their graduate studies.
- 3) Contrary, very few Tokyo Tech staffs had been listed as the candidates. Therefore, Tokyo Tech had just worked as the administration office of the Program, not as the coordinating core university.

Prof. Morinaga, as a Project leader, had repeatedly claimed the core universities' ownership of the Program to NRCT selection committee. He also emphasized to KR4U coordinators that this was the Program between Tokyo Tech and KR4U, and that the cooperation between these two universities should be accelerated. Prof. Phaisarn, the new coordinator in KR4U, agreed well with his opinion, and promised to encourage the KR4U staffs to establish the cooperation with Tokyo Tech members. Prof. Morinaga knew, however, that there had been no person in Tokyo Tech to push the cooperative research with KR4U. That was why he assigned Dr. Taki to be deeply involved in the Program.

Dr. Taki visited KR4U in March 1995 for his first time. Although he had not known anyone in KR4U, he had found a journal paper authored by a KR4U member, just a week before his leave. It was about the applicator of microwave hyperthermia. Dr. Taki was very interested in this paper as he also had been working on the same topic. Prof. Phaisarn had assigned some other person who majored the electronics circuit as his counterpart. Dr. Taki had difficulty to think about the research cooperation since they had difficulty to share the research interests. Dr. Taki could finally meet the author, Dr. Manop, during the stay. In his office, Dr. Manop showed a prototype antenna to Dr. Taki. It was a radial line slot antenna, which had been invented by Prof. Goda of Tokyo Tech in 1980. Dr. Taki had been a student of Prof. Goda, and he had accomplished his doctoral study of radial line slot antennas three years prior to this visit. Dr. Manop said that he had read the paper of Dr. Taki to fabricate this prototype. Dr. Taki was deeply impressed with this prototype, as his research had been recognized in Thailand. Dr. Manop had a very strong motivation toward the research, as he had just finished his doctoral study in KR4U. They soon became the good research partners. After their first meeting, they heavily utilized the Program to proceed the joint researches.

Although Dr. Taki was successful as a participating researcher of the Program, he still had a headache as a coordinator. In 1996, INCOCSAT received the strong objection from JSPS that their Program had not focused on the specific field, nor conducted the joint researches. Their claims were listed as follows:

- 1) The mission of the Program is to conduct the cooperative research, but Tokyo Tech had been just exchanging the researchers.
- 2) The participants had been changing every year due to the policy of the NRCT selection committee. Therefore, the cooperative researches could not have been implemented.
- 3) Researchers at Tokyo Tech side should also have the benefit. They believed that the research outcomes, i.e. co-authored papers were the measure of the benefit. But the Program had been producing only few papers.

They said that they could not be accountable to the Ministry of Finance for the Program, as the budget had been spent improperly.

Dr. Taki, however, doubted those claims they were just the accusation of JSPS. They had approved their Program to cover the general field of “Science and Technology” at the beginning. Without the review and the renewal of the Program, there was no reason to change the focus into some specific field. At the same time, he thought that it is impossible to implement the cooperative research that covers all the possible areas of “Science and Technology.” He concluded that JSPS had had no idea about the serious cooperative researches at the beginning of the Program, but they had just encouraged the establishment of the links between Tokyo Tech and KR4U.

Dr. Taki also doubted that this might be the personal opinion of Ms. Morikawa. She was the JSPS officer in charge of the Program at the time, but she had been working in the International Division of Tokyo Tech before. During her period in Tokyo Tech, she had got into some serious trouble about the Program. She might have felt confident that INCOCSAT had not been properly running the Program.

Dr. Taki felt another difficulty for the implementation of the cooperative research. The case for Dr. Manop and him was quite special, in the sense that they had the common research interests. It was very often the case that the focuses and the interests of the research topics were very different in both sides. Or, the levels of the research achievements were very different. If they could not share the same research interests, they could not be the good research partners. He had had a great difficulty to find the researchers in Tokyo Tech to join the program, as far as they could not get any benefit by participating to the Program.

Prof. Nitta, who was the successor of Prof. Morinaga, always insisted that the biggest benefit of Tokyo Tech was not the publication but the network. In his opinion, the cooperative research was the co-supervision of the graduate students. The research cooperation could be best operated between advisors and graduates, as was found between KR4U and Meizan. Although JSPS was not at all satisfied with his opinion, Dr. Taki felt that this was another important aspect.

Dr. Taki was puzzled what to do next as a coordinator. He looked for the way to satisfy JSPS as well as all the participants.