I arrived in Kyoto on 31st March 2007 and started working as a guest professor from 1st of April, attached to the Laboratory of Comparative Agricultural Science in the Division of Environmental Science and Technology of the Graduate School of Agriculture. I wish to pay a special tribute to Dr. Ueru Tanaka who functioned as my contact Professor, and Dr. Rajib Shaw of the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, for being instrumental in inviting me to this great university. I consider the past year I spent at Kyoto University as one of the most productive times I had in my long academic career. One reason for this high productivity was undoubtedly the generous freedom afforded to me to pursue any line of academic interest as I wished. With my background training in interdisciplinary research, I found this new found autonomy as extremely beneficial and enriching.

Getting Established

At the very first welcome reception, I was made to understand (by Prof. Junichi Mori) that, life in Kyoto would be quite rewarding if some skill in using the Japanese language is achieved. This made me to follow Japanese language classes that subsequently enabled me to pass through the elementary II level with a ‘B’ Grade!. For me, it had been a fascinating experience to sit with the same international students in the afternoon classes, who followed my lectures in the morning hours! In this regard, I thank my language teachers and in particular Mari Watanbe-sensei, who dispelled my fears in taking the faltering steps in speaking Japanese language and appreciating its everlasting beauty and unfathomable depth. I was also fortunate to meet another fellow visiting professor, (Cho-sensei from Korea) who occupied the room next to my office, but could speak only Korean and Japanese. We turned this difficult situation to our mutual advantage, where I taught him some English and he taught me some basic Japanese! Finally, when we departed he lost his fear to speak English and I lost my own shyness to speak Japanese!

With a rudimentary understanding of the Japanese language, I began to explore the wonderful city of Kyoto, which I began to realize as forming the cultural heart of Japan. It is indeed a veritable gold mine for ancient Buddhist and Shinto cultures. So I started visiting at least one World Heritage Site every month and finally managed to see some 12 of them out of the total of 18 sites – a record for any city in the world!. In addition, I have visited two World Heritage Sites at Nara a former capital city of Japan.

In my own country - a small Island in the tropics, there is hardly visible march of seasons. I came here in the spring and my first visit was to Ginkakuji along the cherry blossom lined ‘Philosophers Walk’. When I began to observe that the faces of Japanese people who were gazing at sakura blossoms, were more beautiful than the flowers, my dormant poetic instincts began to get stimulated. So I began to try my hand at haiku though in English but without getting entrapped in the hard poetic traditions. Similarly, I enjoyed the snow in February despite the cold, since there is no snow in my own country. In particular, the snow on Ume Flowers at Kitano Tenmangu was a sight that would gladden my heart for many more years to come.

The above narration of my short experience in Kyoto may give the impression that I was more preoccupied with the flowers and fruits of the Japanese culture in Kyoto, than with the obligatory academic functions for which I was invited to this great seat of learning. This was not so, because I could venture into above aesthetic indulgences only during my free days and times of leisure. On the average, my normal working day was 9-11 hours running often into the late evening. I would never have had such a large chunk of time in my hands to engage in academic work, back in my own country. So I utilized this rare opportunity to engage in research, academic interactions and in teaching.

Research and Publications

I could complete 4 major research papers during my stay here and two of them have been published while the other two are awaiting publication, as listed below:


The Special Lecture delivered by me on 15th February 2008, at the Graduate School of Agriculture was also produced as a pamphlet titled, “Towards New Direction in Environmental Assessment”. 1-28pp. I have also contributed a short paper to the News letter of the International Office on the theme “Hokos and Elephants - Kyoto and Kandy, Sri Lanka, Some Fascinating Culture Parallels”, based on my experience of observing the Gion Matsuri Festival of 2007. Copies of all above papers in electronic form are available at the International office of the Graduate School.

With regard to future research I would have been happy to continue my work on the “nature-culture interface in East Asia”, particularly related to Japan, if a proper opportunity emerged.

Academic Interactions with Staff

I have immensely benefited from the academic environment of the Kyoto University where there is a multiplicity of institutions which have emerged in recent times. In addition to my affiliation to the laboratory of Comparative Agricultural Sciences, I enjoyed my continued interaction with the Graduate School of Environmental Studies where I came into contact with a variety of international scholars. My occasional forays into the Main Campus to visit the Library and to get in touch with the activities of the family of institutions dealing with Integrated Area Studies (including the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Research Institute for Sustainable Humanoshere; Center for Integrated Area Studies among a few others) was exceptionally rewarding. In terms of the number and variety of scholars drawn from different countries, I presume Kyoto University now stands en par with the leading renowned universities in West (such as Cambridge, Oxford, Sorbonne, Harvard, Yale and Princeton). I noted with great satisfaction that scholars from some 11 countries were present at the Special Lecture I delivered on 15th February 2008 at the Graduate School of Agriculture.

I had the occasion to present the following Seminars and Lectures during the period of my sojourn at Kyoto University:

(1) 18-05-2007 : Culture-biodiversity Interface · A Study in Sri Lanka at the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Yoshida Campus.
(2) 07-06-2007 : Village Tank Cascade Systems in Sri Lanka A Traditional Technology of Water and Drought Management: Laboratory of Comparative Agricultural Science, Graduate School of Agriculture.
(3) 25-06-2007 : An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Experience from Sri Lanka; Gradual School of Global Environmental Studies; Yoshida Campus
(5) 11-10-2007 : Environmental Impact Assessment of the Kalu Ganga Agricultural Extension Project: Laboratory of Comparative Agricultural Sciences, Graduate School of Agriculture.
(7) 15-02-2008 : New Directions in Environmental Assessment: Special Lecture Delivered at the Graduate School of Agriculture, Kyoto University.

With regard to future academic developments in the Graduate School, I have indicated in my special lecture to consider the establishment of some ‘unit’ or ‘cell’ at the Division of Environmental Science and Technology, dedicated to Environmental Impact Assessment. In view of the growing demand for Environmental Assessments particularly related large agricultural projects, this would not only provide opportunities for staff to interact closely in dealing with truly interdisciplinary issues, but also for highly attractive consultancy engagements for them in the future.

Apart from presenting a series of seminars to different groups of scholars, I have also participated in a variety of conferences, Symposia and workshops that were held within the University and elsewhere. Some of the more prominent among them are given below:

1. 9th Kyoto University International Symposium on Integrating Global Environmental Studies Towards Human Security, 22-23 June 2007: As a Panelist at Plenary Sessions.
2. The 2nd National Forum on Plan-Related Environmental Impact Assessment Technology and Management, Beijing, China, 5-10 November 2007: As a participant and Chairman of a Plenary Session.
3. Interactive Learning Session with the Indian Institute of Planning and Management, 23rd December 2007; As a Resource Person; Clock Tower Hall, Kyoto University.


5. The Third International Symposium on “Resources Under Stress: Sustainability of the Local Community in Asia and Africa, 23-24 February 2008 at Sewa-kan Hall, Omiya Campus, Ryukoku University, Kyoto.

6. Visit to Vietnam JICA Project study sites with Prof. Uru Tanaka from 28th February to 5th March 2008


Teaching and Supervision of Graduate Students

In the First Semester of 2007, I have conducted a series of 14 weekly Lectures to Graduate Students at the Graduate School of Agriculture. The theme of the Lecture Series was “Agricultural Systems of Monsoon Asia”. This course was attended by some 12 students from both Japan as well as from Indonesia, China and Bangladesh. This course, although optional, provided in fact an interesting forum for students from different parts of Asia. A full Report on the course and its future continuity was presented earlier to the International Office of the Graduate School.

In addition to teaching, I also had the opportunity to help several graduate students both at the Graduate School of Agriculture as well at the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, in their post-graduate research. I had the occasion to read through several theses they have produced.

Some General Observations

I often enjoyed the academic interactions with other Institutions within the University than within the Graduate School of Agriculture. Only academic interaction I had within the Graduate School was with the Laboratory of Comparative Agricultural Science. I came across other members of the Graduate School only on the day of my introduction to the Faculty, and on the day of my Special Lecture. The opportunity of interacting with academic staff from other Divisions within the School had been necessarily limited. However, I have made many friends at personal level, including Futai-sensei (Head of the Division) and Miyasaka-sensei of the same Division. In fact, I felt that I had more intellectual interaction with Visiting Professors who came to this School from time to time. I must make special mention of following Professors, namely, Cho-sensei (from Korea), Prof. Salokhe (from Bangkok), Prof. Malcom Fitz Earle (from Canada) and Dr. Zaki Siddiqui who came here during my time. I often felt that more opportunities may have been be created to have the benefit of interaction between local and visiting professors. In this regard, I have submitted a brief memorandum to Division last year.

With regard to teaching, I had some mixed experiences. In particular, the Japanese students may have found it difficult to follow classes in English and this language disability made them quite shy to interact more readily in the class. However, I found that many of them have improved their English language skills towards the end of the lecture series. The opportunity provided by the class to sit with international students would have enriched their learning experience, for some of them for the first time in life. I also noted that that there were some exceptionally bright students in the class. The Japanese students who have been exposed to other countries and cultures have been obviously more progressive.

Those visiting professor who come to Japan for the first time, often have to go through some trying circumstances at the initial stages. In this regard, my experience of working earlier at Tsukuba and Tokyo Universities proved quite helpful. There were several occasions when I had help a visiting professor to establish himself in the socio-cultural environment of the Kyoto City and it was with much pleasure, I discharged that pleasant responsibility. For me personally, the help and cooperation extended at all times by the International Office of the Graduate School (by Morita-san in particular) is very highly appreciated.