

REPORT ON A JSPS RESEARCH VISIT TO JAPAN

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I first studied in Japan as a young postdoctoral fellow back in the eighties. At that time I chose to spend a couple of years in Japan (rather than, say, the USA or Europe) in anticipation that Japan would offer me the opportunity to do some frontline science and the chance to learn something about a long-established culture that was in many ways different to my own. Returning to the country on a recent visit as a JSPS Research Fellow I realize that my original assessment was quite correct. My view of Japan as a place where one can broaden in both the old and new has not changed one iota. I'm back in the UK now and, with a kairo pad on my bad kendo knee and a cup of green tea at hand, I find myself once more appreciating this and other aspects of Japan.

My visit gave me the chance to test the accuracy of a new technique I have recently developed to map ocean surface currents at high resolution using satellite data. There is a strong motivation behind this research. Although many oceanic parameters can be measured from space, we cannot as yet determine currents in fine detail, so that our understanding of the way that heat and nutrients are transported remains limited and our ability to unravel the complexities of the climate system restricted. The idea of the JSPS collaboration was to compare my satellite-based ocean surface currents with those determined by an extensive network of fixed coastal radars operated by Kyushu University in the Tsushima Strait, which separates Japan from the Korean peninsula. In this way we aimed to evaluate the performance of the new technique.

I am very grateful to Kyushu University for supporting my project by purchasing the satellite data I required to map the surface currents in the region covered by their radar system. Fortunately, these satellite images were of excellent quality and we performed the comparison exercise in good time and without any major glitches. My new technique performed satisfactorily, as it measured currents that agree well with the radar determinations, albeit at slightly larger speed. Further debate and interpretation will be required to fully understand this small difference, but that's for another day. Overall, I was happy with the performance of the method and have just finished a first paper summarizing the results of this collaborative study. I would like to sincerely thank my host, Associate Professor Y. Yoshikawa, and all of the staff of RIAM for making my visit both pleasurable and fruitful.

On a wider front, I would encourage any young researcher with an interest in cultural matters to spend time in the Far East and to visit Japan in particular. For the well-known Hakuin koan, one is asked to seek the sound of a single hand. Will you ever face a question like that that in the West? Will you drink that cup of Uji tea in a cooling summer breeze? On the other hand, bear in mind that you also take something with you - I remember teaching a young Japanese kid how to play a tune on the penny whistle. For a practical tip, I always take a box of good (black) tea bags, as it is nice to have a cup of our tea every now and then. I also prefer to take a large strengthened umbrella from the UK, as I hate getting wet when I'm on my bike.



FIGURE CAPTION
Taken from the morning ferry to Tsushima