シリーズ「若手のページ」

From Borneo to Japan: through my eyes

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My name is Anand Nainar and I come from Sabah (North Borneo) of Malaysia. I completed my doctoral degree in environmental science majoring in catchment hydrology at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) last year. At present, I serve in the Ecohydrology Research Institute of the University of Tokyo Forests as a post-doctoral researcher.

My present research sites are mainly in headwater catchments of Japanese temperate forests (0.01-0.80 km², natural and planted, mixed and coniferous) whereas previously, I had been investigating the hydrological, erosional, and morphological dynamics over ten tropical headwater catchments (0.5-4.6 km², primary forests, varying degree of logged forests, and oil palm plantations). Although some field skills do overlap, I realised there exist some profound differences that stems mainly from the contrasting climate.

Having changed from the tropics to temperate forests, the difference in rainfall was immediately discernible. Following this, I have had the opportunity to witness hydrological processes such as infiltration and spring-outflow, which to me, have always been a theoretical concept in the ever-saturated tropical soils.

A surprising observation in my present study site is that field recording-equipment is always in good working order. In my previous study area in Borneo, field-measuring equipment such as sensors, dataloggers, raingauges, weirs and plots were constantly being damaged by wildlife (boars and elephants) and extreme floods (especially in highly disturbed catchments - oil palm plantation and multiple logged-forests). With high rainfall (2,700 mm y⁻¹), hot and fluctuating temperatures (daily range: 18-36 °C), and bi-yearly monsoons, wear-and-tear of equipment is also accelerated. On average, some form of damage (sensors, batteries, dataloggers, total destruction) occurred every 2 months in each

catchment.

Another contrasting feature in Japan is the ease-of-access to the study sites. My research in Borneo took place in abandoned logged forests where roads are almost non-existent. The high rainfall quickly erodes unpaved road surfaces and expose underlying uneven rocks, resulting in very high cost on travel time and vehicle maintenance. Some sites required hiking for up to three hours from where the off-road vehicles must stop. Being in mountainous terrain, the hikes are usually up-and-down hills under the merciless tropical heat.

My experience in Japan is not limited to the sciences and fieldwork. Malaysians do have some exposure regarding Japanese culture and just like the rest of the world, we hold Japan in very high regard. However, my first real encounter with Japan was only two years ago when I travelled to Kyoto for a conference. That was the time when I was first exposed to the superior scientific excellence in this country. I discovered many esteemed findings and long-term recorded data from both new studies and those dating back hundreds of years. Since then, it has been my aspiration to serve in, and learn from Japan. Being part of the workforce here now, I realise that this excellence is highly linked to the Japanese culture - determination, conscientiousness, kindness, and ultimately, the pride in and respect for one's own profession. In my personal impression, this is the most valuable lesson that Malaysians (or anyone) can learn from Japan - an important component of the "look-east policy" advocated by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamed.

As I (regretfully) did not have the opportunity to learn Japanese language during my university days, this has been one of my personal aims since I came here. For a year now, I have been taking Japanese classes which I find very enjoyable. Fortunately, being raised in a Malaysian-Chinese background, there are no problems blending in as we share many things in terms of culture, values, language, and of course, we are always united by our love for good food and alcohol (Japanese single malts are a personal favourite). I am grateful for this opportunity to serve in Japan especially in the Ecohydrology Research Institute and will do my best.