

International Affairs Department

Dear friends,

How are you?

I will report TOR development and a visit to Trang An Landscape Complex in my fifth Vietnam Journal as a JICA expert.

1. TOR DEVELOPMENT

Have you heard of "TOR"? TOR stands for "Terms of Reference," meaning "terms and conditions" or "business specifications." In our project, TOR is an agreement for the objectives and the scope with consultants who entrust the project.

This year, the Project Implementation Support (PIS) Department, which I work for, deals with the plan development for sewage works in Nam Dinh City. Recently, we made TOR used for the contract with a Vietnamese consultant who entrusts the Nam Dinh Project.

The TOR includes seven items: background, operation contents; schedule; report; required capability for persons in charge; conditions of the organization or individual implementing the project, and attached documents. Out of the above, the operation contents are the most important with the most significant volumes. This part contains eleven sections: for example, the current conditions of the existing sewerage service in Nam Dinh and its planning and assessment of sewage works (2.1), the Basic design of WWTPs and interceptors*¹ (2.11.), etc.

This TOR is a modified version of the existing TOR that a Japanese consultant involved in this project had used for a similar sewage works project in Vietnam before.

We made the first draft by the end of July. We sent it to related organizations, including the Ministry of Construction (MOC) of Vietnam, the Construction Bureau of Nam Dinh Province, and the Vietnam office of JICA, to ask for opinions.

When asking people for their opinions, some become "procrastinators," and others give no response. But this time, we had a "good" problem getting a

flood of comments, mainly from MOC. Such many feedbacks prove the weakness of our TOR, but on the other hand, they mean many concerned parties reviewed it with much interest. I also had a positive impression.

From now, the plan development will go on based on the TOR. Since a change of the plan is difficult after the operation starts, discussions in the early phase are essential to everyone's satisfaction. Though we could not reflect all comments to TOR because of budget limitations, we revised the draft with internal adjustments depending on the opinions. After many modifications, the tenth version became the satisfying final TOR.

The project will proceed with bidding and an agreement with a consultant.

2. A VISIT TO TRANG AN LANDSCAPE COMPLEX

The other day, I visited Trang An.

Trang An is a famous scenic site for cruising limestone karst cliffs on a boat. The spectacular landscape listed on UNESCO World Heritage as Trang An Landscape Complex is often called "Inland Ha Long Bay^{*2}" or "Vietnamese Guilin^{*3}."

Trang An Landscape Complex is about 100 km south of Hanoi, in Ninh Binh city, the capital of Ninh Binh Province. It was about two hours travel by bus from Hanoi.

When I arrived at the boat pier (Photo 1), it was crowded with many local and foreign tourists. Trang An Landscape Complex is famous not only for foreigners but also in Vietnam. Three or four passengers get on a boat, put on life jackets, and leave the pier for a tour.



Photo 1: Boat pier



Photo 2: Landscape like an ink brush painting

The boat cruised along the river and lake for two and a half hours. We enjoyed the spectacular landscape, like ink brush paintings, and an exciting low-ceiling cave tour (Photo 2 & 3). The beautiful weather and incredible scenic beauty healed me even though it was a hot day.

*¹ interceptor: pipe/conduit that collects sewage from sewer laid over public waters and sends sewage to WWTP

*² Ha Long Bay: One of the UNESCO World Heritage in Vietnam

*³ Guilin: One of the UNESCO World Heritage in China



Photo 3: Exciting cave tour