

# IAC News (Extra Issue.5)

## 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### What is the role of an academic society?

This is a special year, the centennial of the founding of the Japan Society of Civil Engineers (JSCE). I would like to take this opportunity to reexamine the nature of an academic society.

I have long wondered why the name of JSCE includes the word *gakkai*, which means "academic society." Many of the members of JSCE work in construction companies and consulting firms, together making up approximately half of its membership. A smaller number of our members work in government organizations, and even fewer work in academia, including schools and research institutions. JSCE has only about 4,000 academic members, accounting for just one tenth of its membership. In my view, although only a minority of its members work in academia, the role of JSCE in establishing norms and standards of conduct has been based on its nature as an academic society.

While the organization's name in Japanese literally means "Civil Engineering Academic Society," its title in English is "Japan Society of Civil Engineers." This is analogous to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Meanwhile, the British equivalent is called the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). Neither of these words, "society" or "institution," necessarily refers to an academic organization.

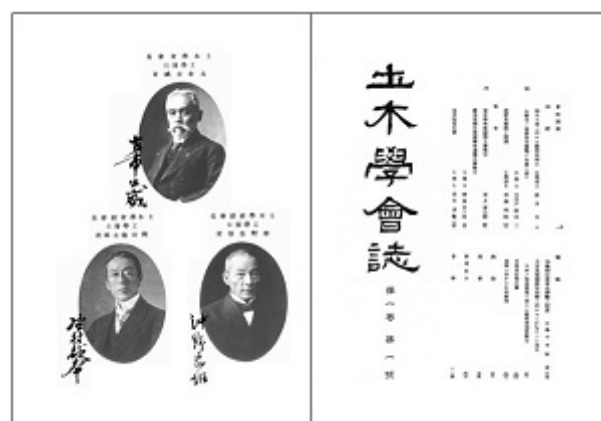
Through my involvement in planning for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of JSCE, I have had many opportunities to learn about academic societies. The first academic society to be established in Japan was the Tokyo Mathematical Company, which was founded in 1877, using the word "company" in its name. A year later, the term *gakkai* (academic society) came into use with the 1878 founding of the Chemical Society of Japan. All of the subsequently formed organizations of this kind called themselves academic societies, including the Japan Federation of Engineering Societies (JFES), which was founded in 1879 and can be considered as the predecessor of JSCE.



**Yozo Fujino**  
Chair, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Planning Committee (Professor  
Emeritus and Adjunct Professor,  
University of Tokyo)

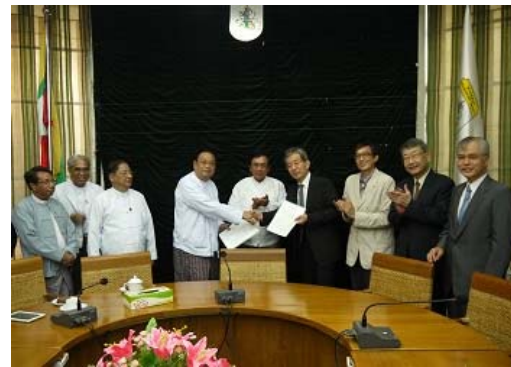


**Baron Koi FURUICHI**  
The 1st JSCE President



First issue of JSCE Magazine

I have also looked into use of the term *gakkai* in Chinese-speaking countries, where the same writing system is used. The names of the China Civil Engineering Society (CCES) and the Chinese Institute of Civil and Hydraulic Engineering (CICHE) both use this term. However, I discovered that the word *gakkai* is not found in Chinese etymological dictionaries. The first modern Chinese scientific associations using *gakkai* in their names were the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge Among the Chinese and the Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China, founded in Shanghai in 1889. Many more academic societies were founded after that. When the current China Civil Engineering Society was founded in 1912, its initial name was the Chinese Institute of Engineers. The name was changed to China Civil Engineering Society [*gakkai*] in 1936. In Taiwan, the name of the Chinese Institute [*gakkai*] of Civil and Hydraulic Engineering was adopted in 1949. In the modern era, the Chinese language has imported a great deal of Japanese vocabulary words in fields such as politics, economics, philosophy, science, and physical education. I realized that the word *gakkai* must also be a loan word from Japanese.



**International Activities**



**International Panel Discussion  
was held at JSCE Annual Meeting**

When JSCE was founded in the early Taisho period, its membership, like that of JFES, consisted of a few elite persons who had received advanced education at the Imperial College of Engineering or the Imperial University. It was founded for the purpose of contributing to society through the advancement of civil engineering based on academic studies. Therefore, it was completely natural and appropriate to call it an academic society. However, JSCE has seen significant changes during the past century. It is now a very open organization in which anyone who is interested in civil engineering and involved in the field of civil engineering may become a member. Academia remains important, but the society is not limited to academic studies. Part of the role of

JSCE today is to be a forum where members can freely debate and investigate matters of civil engineering and make recommendations for society. One of the values of an academic society needs to be the establishment of a flat arena within the vertical structure of Japanese society, where members can step out from their positions, affiliations, and status to share their views on an equal footing.

JSCE has become quite a large organization, and many persons are participating in its centennial activities. I have endeavored to ensure that the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Planning Committee functions as a flat organization. I believe that this attitude should permeate society, and I would like to request the cooperation of all members of the society in working to make this a reality.

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**JSCE's 100th Anniversary Celebration  
Pamphlet**