

Japanese Civil Engineering Alleviates Traffic Jams in Hanoi

– Construction of Nhat Tan Bridge, Proof of Friendship that Exists between Viet Nam and Japan –



Mr. Kajimura (left) with local manager Mr. Tojiro Nishi (the Nhat Tan Bridge is in the background).
(Photo: Yusuke Kajimura)

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In the ten years between 2000 and 2010, the average economic growth rate of the Southeast Asian country of Viet Nam was 7.3%. Over the same time period, national income per capita increased to over \$1,000, placing it in the company of other Lower Middle Income Countries (LMICs). However, this rapid economic growth has not been without ill effects. Traffic jams have become a chronic problem for the capital city of Hanoi, creating a barrier to further economic development.

The city of Hanoi straddles the Red River. The two sides of the city are connected by five bridges, but they have reached saturation in terms of the amount of traffic they can carry, fueling the desire for a new bridge that could increase the efficiency of logistics and alleviate traffic jams.

Work is currently underway on the construction for that new Nhat Tan Bridge. The bridge is located near the central part of the city in the eastern district. It will be a part of the access road connecting Noi Bai International Airport to the urban area. The total length of the road being constructed is approximately 9 km. The five-pylon cable-stayed bridge* is a massive construction project in itself, comprising 3.08 km of that road. Japan has provided ODA loans for the bridge, and Japanese companies are participating in its construction.

Mr. Yusuke Kajimura is an engineer of CHODAI CO., LTD., one of the corporations working on this project. He has been involved with ODA-related bridge construction projects for approximately 30 years. Mr. Kajimura is in charge of coordinating the Nhat Tan Bridge construction project. He commented on the thoughts of the locals towards the bridge. "The Vietnamese are almost religious in their belief about the high-quality of Japanese products, so there are great expectations for the technology used in the construction of this bridge. The construction of the Nhat Tan Bridge, which is a northern gateway of Hanoi, meets those expectations of the locals. I believe that they can see what we are achieving on a daily basis."



The view of the Nhat Tan Bridge during its construction from downstream of the Red River. (Photo: Yusuke Kajimura)

Part of this project is a technical transfer of civil engineering methods from Japan. The creation of the foundation for the five pylons that support the bridge was done using the steel pipe sheet pile foundation method. This is a technology developed in Japan that possesses the merits of shortening the time needed for construction compared to conventional methods and bolstering the bridge against earthquakes and soft ground. The Government of Viet Nam adopted this method for the first time in the construction of the Nhat Tan Bridge, with expectations high towards its success, efforts are underway to adopt it as a standard construction practice in Viet Nam in the years to come.

The construction has created a lot of jobs for the local area. Over 1,000 people work on the project in a single day. It draws laborers not just from within the city of Hanoi, but also migrant workers from neighboring regions. Mr. Kajimura explained the major significance of having local people build the bridge.

"Although a Japanese corporation has received the order for this bridge, there are really a limited number of Japanese engineers and administrative staff working on this – only about 50 in total, in fact. There are as many as five times more local people working here on engineering and administrative work. The Vietnamese engineers and staff are still young. I expect that the work with the Japanese will provide an opportunity for them to grow a lot."

Mr. Kajimura has worked on ODA projects in developing countries for many years, and he says that he has been dedicating himself to his duty and responsibilities as a civil engineer. "The Japanese who work abroad these days are all ordinary people. Whether or not they are fluent in foreign languages is another matter. Of course, it is necessary to be technically skilled in order to play a big role. These ordinary Japanese people team up with local people and accumulate experience working towards the achievement of goals. That is no different a process than it would be for a domestic project. It's true that life in a developing country is not as easy as life in Japan. But I do not know a single person who is unhappy with this work. Just like a domestic job, you struggle a lot, and you have fun doing your job."

Regardless of whether the work is assistance or not, the Japanese complete their jobs and thoroughly meet the expectations of the local people. The professional mindset of these engineers, along with the high level of perfection achieved in the completion of the bridge, will be leaving a strong impression among the Vietnamese about the Japanese brand.

The Nhat Tan Bridge is scheduled to be finished in December 2014. This bridge is also known as the "Vietnam-Japan Friendship Bridge," and will surely serve as a symbol of that.

* A five-pylon cable-stayed bridge is one in which the main bridge section is made up of five towers, with cables stretching from each of those towers directly to the bridge to serve as a support structure.