

Professor Tsuyoshi Sasada 1941-2005

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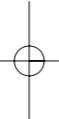


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Tsuyoshi Sasada, known as Tee to so many of us, died on 30 September 2005 at the age of 64 after a long illness. Tee retired from Osaka University in 2004 upon reaching the mandatory retirement age but retained his association as Emeritus Professor. At the time of his death he held appointments as Honorary Professor, National Chiao Tung University (Taiwan) and Expert Researcher, National Institute of Information and Communications Technology. He had been with Osaka University since 1970, having earned his bachelor, master and doctoral degrees at Kyoto University. In 1988 he was appointed Professor in Osaka and established his laboratory, known as the Sasada Lab, from which over 200 students have graduated.



The work produced in his lab was highly focused on its relevance to practice, yet remaining at the leading edge of research. Tee's goal was to bring digital media to the point where it directly informs both the designer and the design. This research focus grew out of his doctoral studies at Kyoto University where he worked on the design of Expo'70 in a team headed by Kenzo Tange. His interest developed as he worked with Professors in other labs in Kyoto and Osaka and also during his appointment as Visiting Fellow at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in the mid 70s.

The focal point of Tee's work was on computer graphics as collaborative media, addressing collaboration within teams and beyond to clients and stakeholders. Engaging research in immediate practice, the Sasada lab received commissions to participate in design teams or design reviews for government and local agencies, including long-term real design projects. As these progressed, Tee identified research problems for which solutions were found and applied to these real projects for evaluation. The impact of this work was extensive; the lab worked on more than one hundred design projects over the past decades, including Kansai International Airport, Shanghai Waitan City Renewal (China), Taejon Expo (Korea), JR Kyoto Station; Akashi Ohkura Coastal Community Zone, Hiroshima Ball Park and Qingdao Jiaonan (China). Tee's ability to convey the immediate importance of his research was a great strength and can be illustrated by a memory from John Gero:

"In 1985 the Chinese government invited me to put together a 'road show' to present latest developments in CAD to a Chinese audience. To accompany me I selected the leaders in the field: Bill Mitchell for design, Tom Maver for evaluation and, of course, Tee Sasada for graphics. Some idea of the level of contact we had can be gleaned from the fact that our host was the Minister who arranged to have one of the pavilions of the Summer Palace turned into a private dining room for us. The dinner guests included the Science and Housing Advisors to Deng Xiaoping.

"Tee was a hit with the Chinese for a number of reasons. His images and movies were mind-blowing in their quality and scope. His focus on the urban scale and well as individual buildings resonated well with the audience that included urban policy planners. In personal conversation Tee engaged our hosts with his understanding of urban development. In his professional contact he impressed with his ability to understand the issues that faced the planners of Beijing and Shanghai and this resulted in a series of consulting jobs modelling the impact of various kinds of planning legislation. This consultancy contact lasted many years. Tee's contribution to the development of Shanghai is not well known but can be traced to this visit."

Tom Maver remembers that at one of the stops along the way, the group had to lecture on digital design techniques and outcomes using only chalk and a blackboard.



As John Gero remarks, Tee's digital animation of Shanghai in the early 1980s had a profound impact on the authorities' understanding of the city and was therefore influential in guiding planning decisions over the recent period of

rapid growth. In more recent years, working closely with Aleppo Y T Liu, he assumed substantial duties in Taiwan as a government consultant to Hsinchu and as a consultant on national culture to the Ministry of Culture, developing the use of digital modelling for archival and explorative purposes. At the time of his death, he was actively working with Tadao Ando on the design of a museum and architecture school in National Chiao Tung University. Aleppo Y T Liu remembered how this came to be: "The president of our university, NCTU, hoped to invite Tadao Ando to design our university museum and architecture building in 2003, we asked for the help from him who had known Ando-san for 40 years. He brought us to Ando's office and asked him to do the design for us at a very low design fee we could afford. He came with Ando to see the site and joined our discussions many times in Osaka and Hsinchu. He knew that we, NCTU and all Taiwanese people, adore Ando's designs and were eager to have the first Ando building in non-Japan Asian countries."

Tee observed that as the lab completed more and more projects, the outcomes improved. This was a result of refining the tools, developing more skilled application, increased data to work with and consequently a greater knowledge of the process. For example, the lab built up a large and detailed data set of the Kansai region of Japan; as new projects came along in the region, they were able to create an animation or model very quickly with a high degree of accuracy and advanced their ability to contribute to understanding the impact of a design. This in turn led to more commissions for future projects. Tee was not adverse to developing hardware as well as software when the situation demanded it since he was often working ahead of the capabilities of commercial systems. He appeared at one CAADRIA conference with a laptop reengineered with a larger (protruding) disk and cooling system because nothing commercially available would accommodate his animation.

The Sasada lab did not only produce important research, it operated in a distinctive manner. Tee was a constant humble presence and the lab became a focus of social and intellectual life for the students, equipped with a kitchen and a mattress for the long days and nights that typified the dedicated approach in Tee's work. Members of the lab were at different phases in their careers, including final year undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students. Tee would ensure his students were given opportunities to be exposed to clients, to travel and attend conferences gaining broad exposure and understanding. As Aleppo Liu wrote "I first knew him more closely in CAADRIA 1997 in Hsinchu, Taiwan. He impressed me because he, as a full professor from Japan, didn't stay in the nice conference hotel but in the cheap guest house in order to be with his students. And, before the conference, I invited professors to join a welcome party in my tiny

apartment. He declined to join just because he wanted to be with his students. This is Tee.”

Learning in his lab was hands-on, mixing theoretical and practical enquiry and much of the learning was peer based. Knowledge developed in the group was therefore accumulated as cohorts progressed; this process continues today under the guidance of Associate Professors Atsuko Kaga and Tomohiro Fukuda who have taken over leadership in the lab. As Tom Maver has recalled, a singular characteristic of Tee’s lab was that it was monitored by cats; he commented that the cats acted as feline social sensors. If the cats were calm, he knew everything was proceeding well but if they showed signs of disquiet he knew there was unrest among the students.

Research from this lab was transferred into practice in several ways. Tee was an active lecturer around Japan and beyond, talking to professional associations, companies or agencies. The substantial list of publications recorded in CUMINCAD attest to the consistent focus on collaboration and design communication; his modesty is attested by the prominence of students as lead authors in so many of these papers. After graduation many of his students entered key organizations in Japan and maintained close contact with him, inviting him to lecture in their companies and consulting him on development and applications in design. The tight bond between alumni and the lab was a distinctive feature of the Sasada lab and acted as an effective conduit for moving current research into practice and bringing research questions in the other direction. Scott Howe recalled the impact:

“In the early nineties I was a young man working for Kajima Corporation in Tokyo, Japan when I found myself caught in digital limbo — I was a designer who used computer tools. We struggled with rudimentary CATIA modeling tools and text-line input for adjusting the attributes the computer would follow to render our buildings. Everything was new and exciting, but few had the patience to fight with the text-based interfaces. I recall the first time I met Tsuyoshi Sasada — he had been invited by Kajima to give a lecture sometime in 1992 or 1993, and our group went out to dinner with him. Sasada’s work with realistic rendering sparked a frenzy that would last for months as our programmers tried to follow suit and create similar realistic scenes with our inhouse software (there was nothing yet on the market in those days). As Sasada came several times a year to lecture and visit, Kajima forged a relationship with his lab. We began to welcome his graduates as Kajima interns, and they ended up being our mentors, who came in keep us up-to-date on the latest technologies. I recall the excitement as Sasada introduced bluescreen video as a means of putting people into computer animations of buildings. In 1995 Sasada also introduced the World Wide

Web to us as a means for showing architectural imagery to the world, in an open publishing environment. In that year, Sasada had delved into VRML before Mark Pesce even published the first book on it. We were astounded that three-dimensional worlds could be so easily navigated and integrated with html on the Internet.”



This attitude of collaboration and mentoring characterized Tee's work, sharing his knowledge, expertise and resources not only to those in his lab. He was well known world wide for his contributions, a frequent invited speaker at the CAAD conferences, his smiling eyes and cheerful presence were a common sight at conferences throughout the world. Recognising the importance of the various research conferences to which he was regularly invited, he was instrumental in establishing CAADRIA in 1996 as he wished to provide a forum for research discussion in Asia and a mechanism to foster young researchers across the world. He remained active in CAADRIA even as his illness limited travel; he told friends that he enjoyed the uninterrupted time in his hospital bed editing and producing a substantial video history of the first decade of the association that was shown at the 2005 conference. In recognition of this vision and inspiration, Tee was recognised as the first CAADRIA Fellow and was awarded a

symbolic elephant at the conference. It was unfortunate that health problems prevented him from being present when the award was made and sharing in the pleasure that the community manifested in his recognition.

In the days following the news of his passing, messages were received from all over the world; from those who knew him well and recounted happy times in his company or the many ways in which he influenced their lives, as well as from those who had never met him but knew of his reputation and contributions to CAAD. A vigil was held in Osaka on 1st October and the funeral the following day; hundreds attended these occasions that were marked by sorrow in his passing and joy for his memories. At the funeral, short addresses were delivered by Shigeyuki Yamaguchi who spoke as a laboratory alumnus of architecture department, Kyoto University; Masuro Gion, speaking as a classmate of Tee's in his time at Kyoto University; Yoshiro Ono, a former student in Osaka University; Aleppo Y T Liu, a close collaborator on recent projects; and Tom Kvan who spoke on behalf of the international CAAD community from whom many messages of condolences have been received. Tsuyoshi Sasada leaves behind a wife and two sons as well as a wide circle of friends. His contributions to our field of digital design have been profound and will be long lasting. We all join in saying farewell to a great friend.