

2023



# Perspectives of the International Graduate Programs:

*life, activities, and  
supports*

12





# Perspectives of the International Graduate Programs: life, activities, and supports

## Contents

02 Preface

---

### 03 Part 1: Voices from the Department

04 From the Department

Prof. Masahide Horita

06 From the Foreign Student Office

Prof. Kenji Watanabe

---

### 08 Part 2: Voices from the students

09 University Life 01

Ms. Tamima Amin

10 University Life 02

Mr. Santiago Gracia

11 University Life 03

Mr. Somporn Sahachaiseree

---

### 12 Part 3: International Technical Tour, 27th–28th March 2024

13 Report on the International Technical Tour

Mr. Abhishek Regmi

14 Feedback from the Participants

# Preface

The International Student Association in Civil Engineering (ISACE) is an official student organization for international students at the University of Tokyo. For more than ten years, we have been working to unite the international community in our department. We have hosted various events for international students, including welcoming parties for new international students, symposiums, and field trips, with the hope that all international students in our department will feel included and have a wonderful journey throughout their courses.

For this year, we would like to dedicate FSO Update to reflecting on how the life of international students has been in our department and how we can improve it. In this forum, you will find different perspectives on the international program from various points of view: professors, and students from different academic levels. In addition, we end this year's forum with the report of this year's field trip, hoping that more students will be interested in joining us next year.

We would like to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to Professor Masahide Horita and Professor Kenji Watanabe for their support of the international program and for sharing their ideas and perspectives with us. We would also like to thank all the students who contributed to the making of this year's forum. Finally, we would not have this year's or any other year's FSO Updates if not for Ms. Mizue Abeki and Ms. Masumi Tonegawa from FSO. We, the ISACE executive committee, as representatives of all international students in our department, sincerely thank you for your support.

With Sincere Regards,

**Krittanaï Sriwongphanawes**  
**Manazir Hussain**  
**Daniel Qi**  
**Muntazir Abbas**

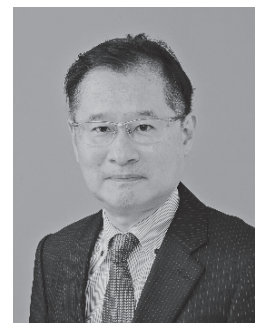


# Part 1: Voices from the Department

# From the Department

## Prof. Masahide Horita

Chair of the Department



I am Masahide Horita, I am the head of department this year and I am working mainly on construction management and project management. My main areas of interest have been in how to organize large scale infrastructure projects and how to coordinate different project activities. My original background is from collective decision making or group decision making and negotiation.

### **Q:** What makes the graduate program at the Department of Civil Engineering special?

**A:** First of all, this university is unique in many ways. This is the oldest national university and the oldest university in Japan. It was established in 1877, and you might notice that modernization in Japan started in 1886. So that means that this university was launched at a very early stage of the modernization or industrialization, started in late 19th century. Earlier, as that is relatively recent compared to other Western countries, we have invited many professionals and professors from overseas when this university was established for the first time in Japan. Then, we spent quite some time to learn the cutting-edge technology and science policies related to infrastructure and started to modernize Japanese infrastructure. Since then, this university has always been with the history of modernization of Japan. The University has had many people who led infrastructure development in modern history. So, that alone is the very unique characteristic which makes this university special, and this department of civil engineering is the oldest among the departments.

When the engineering school was launched, the department established some traditional disciplinary divisions, such as railway engineering, coastal engineering, bridge engineering and sanitary engineering, meaning that it existed from the very beginning and many fields have been active ever since then. Now we have grown to be a much bigger department. We have been competing with international universities. There are also many things that we, our department, started first in Japan or in this region. For example, directly related to this topic, we started the 1st international graduate program in the department in the eighties. That was a big change and quite a challenge at that time. Indeed, it was the 1st international graduate program in all national universities in Japan. Before that, most of the students at the department had been Japanese, and there were relatively small proportion of international students. But then, in the eighties, our department realized that we needed to go internationalized. We need to invite talented students and young researchers from all over the world. We tend to call it the international graduate program, but technically, there's no such international graduate program, because the entire postgraduate program is internationalized. And all the teaching is carried out in English. You can submit your research thesis in either English, or Japanese. So, there are very few linguistic barriers for international students to

complete their degrees and learn. Now, we have a very large proportion of international students. 35% of master's students in this department are international students and 76% of all the Ph.D. students are international students. It is not just the number of international students or the number of countries which are large, but we also try to be competitive for all the research areas in civil engineering disciplines. Each research group is striving to be internationally competent and international students are playing a very big role in our daily activities.

### **Q:** What type of support does the department provide for international students at the University of Tokyo?

**A:** There are a number of ways that international students can benefit from in terms of funding scholarships and more. For example, there are scholarship programs from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology or MEXT, which is government-supported scholarship. This is the largest source of financial support for international students. Also, we have formal scholarships program from Asian Development Bank and there is also the funding from private organizations, such as Ueda Memorial Foundation scholarships that provides financial assistance for postgraduate international students regularly or every year. We also have JICA, Japan International Cooperation Agency. There are quite a few organizations apart from those who provide fellowships or scholarships and some other opportunities. That is the kind of financial or kind of institutional arrangements that facilitate the life and work for international students here.

Moreover, we have resources for academic research exchanges. We have some MOUs with many students outside Japan. For example, if the students here are involved in this department, that means there are opportunities for them to study abroad for a few months to even a year for attending the teaching program or to carry out some collaborative research projects. All the faculty members are keen to help them to engage in those international activities. These are the kind of main sources of support that we can provide.

**Q:** Are there any current initiatives or plans in progress to enhance the experience of international students at the University of Tokyo?

**A:** There are a number of ways that the department are coordinating many initiatives or programs and special activities for international students. For example, diversity and inclusion is the priority initiative for the entire university to create opportunities for those students with various backgrounds. There are a number of programs, such as exchange programs, or student festivals like May Festival, where many student groups from many countries present their cultures or activities and get to communicate with others. We also organize some field trips to learn Japanese cultures and many international students are willing to participate in it.

We are aware that an increasing number of international students are now interested in pursuing their careers in Japan after completing their degrees. And we are trying to bridge the students with those in the industry or in other sectors. Now, there are a lot of international students working in Japan for Japanese companies or organizations. These alumna seem to be very active in bridging those graduates and the current students. There are also department activities that introduce these business opportunities to the current students and similar activities are ongoing all over the infrastructure and construction sector. For example, JSCE, Japan Society of Civil Engineers are organizing similar activities, and we are part of it. We have a very strong office, the Foreign Student Office, FSO, who do everything to help international students. We have been working very closely with all members of FSO on how to improve their daily life. FSO proposes many new programs as well, such as systematizing the procedure for applying to the department to help with the prospective students.

### Concluding remark

The most obvious thing that I would like to emphasize is that we are very eager to welcome students from all over the world and we are very keen on that. We know that all the competitive universities in the engineering field and elsewhere cannot fulfill our engagement and objectives without being globalized. That is what we are continuously trying to realize and we are really keen to disseminate what we have been doing. We welcome international students.



# From the Foreign Student Office

## Prof. Kenji Watanabe

Head of Foreign Student Office



I am Kenji Watanabe, a professor in the Soil mechanics and Geotechnical engineering laboratory. One of our main focuses is natural disaster in the soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering field. As you know, in Japan, we have a lot of natural disasters, such as earthquakes and heavy rainfall. When they happen, many landslides, embankment collapse and earthquake induced liquefaction happen. All of these issues were related to soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering. However, we still don't understand them well, which is one of the main research topics here in the University of Tokyo.

### **Q:** Could you please tell us about the international graduate program of the Department of Civil Engineering?

**A:** The international graduate program or (IGP) have a very long history starting from 1982. This is because in the civil engineering field the professor at the time strongly wished that foreign students come to learn here at the University of Tokyo's civil engineering department and making some human networking and friendship. Nowadays, such an idea is not a new thing, but it was more than 40 years ago. The most special thing is they didn't require students to speak Japanese. That was a very new idea at that time so all classes in our department (graduate school) were provided in English. When I was a student here, I was very surprised to hear that, because all other classes in the faculty of engineering were mostly provide in Japanese. Not only the classes but the common standard language in the laboratory, such as the weekly lab. seminar was also English. I think we are the pioneers for welcoming many international students. That is why many foreign students continue their friendships and networking even after graduation because they had a very good experience here not only doing the studying but many other activities.

We also have a host family program started in 1985. At that time, we did not have Internet, e-mail nor smartphone. Foreign students who could not speak Japanese sometimes faced with some difficulties to continue their lives in Japan. For example, many foreign students took their families to live in Japan together. Sometimes their kids catch a cold and have a fever, and they need support. Now we can translate everything and find information via Google but at that time there was no such useful tools. So, we started host family program for the foreign students who wish to be supported by someone, not by professor nor Japanese friends, but other Japanese around the University of Tokyo. There are many host families registered to our civil engineering department. Usually, they were high level engineers, they wish to do something to contribute to the activities in civil engineering department. We match a student to a family, and the students often go to their house, not living there but sometime visiting there. That is a very special activity in Japan. Nevertheless, nowadays it has become very easy to find useful information using the internet, so the students who are interested in the host

family program are becoming less. This year we are going to close the host family program because it has become an outdated way to support foreign students. Instead of such classical way, we are looking for more flexible and modern ways to support the foreign students, so this year, we are going to do some large ceremony of the host family program, gathering not only the current hosts but the old host families and many graduated students who are still living in Japan for the closing of the program.

Another special thing is the Japanese Language Class (JLC). Even though we do not require Japanese language for the foreign student, we wish foreign students to learn Japanese not only for survival but for understanding Japanese culture and smooth (and slight) communication with other Japanese students. The Japanese students here in the University of Tokyo can speak English, but usually Japanese are not good at speaking English so if foreign students can speak very easy or just slight Japanese, they can communicate better.

We have a long history and more than 1400 students from 70 different countries graduated from this IGP program and everyone belongs to the Alumni network of our department. I think it is a very great thing and we have to continue enhancing these activities. In addition, the IGP is very important not only for the foreign student but also the Japanese students. Usually, Japanese students here in the University of Tokyo graduate from the Japanese elementary schools, Japanese junior high schools, and then Japanese high schools. As you know, in Japan, there is less opportunity to talk with or communicate with the foreigners. When we accept many foreign students in our department, we have to share our lives or research activities in our laboratory, so I think it is a very good opportunity for the Japanese students not only for speaking in English, but for trying to understand the different cultures from the foreign students outside of Japan. When I was an undergraduate student, there were many foreign students in my lab. who could not speak Japanese at all, so it was my first time to use the real English for communication. I still want to accept and welcome many foreign students in my lab. and hopefully from various countries. I feel that IGP is originally for the foreign student, but it also provides very good chances and opportunities to Japanese students.

**Q:** What do you plan to achieve as the head of the international program?

**A:** I want to promote many student activities. I think the ISACE is a core member but there are many foreign students, and more new foreign students are coming, so I want to promote such social events or activities. Last year, we had a field trip and this year also we are planning to do it in the same manner. We are also planning to do the foreign student symposium. The symposium in the past was a very formal one, inviting some foreign professors from abroad or some people from MEXT but what I want to do is have some discussion among the foreign students. Of course, foreign students belong to different laboratories and came from different countries, but we are in the same department of civil engineering so I think we can find some good common topics for discussions. Study and research activities are the most important for the students, but such student activities or social events are as important as those research activities. They allow us to know and understand each other. Mutual understanding is very important, so I wanted to promote such things. That is the one thing I want to do as a head of the international program.

### Concluding remark

I think almost all foreign students are supported by some scholarships, like MEXT, ADB, JICA, or UEDA, so without such scholarships, many foreign students cannot come to live in Japan, and we cannot continue this IGP program. We always have to appreciate such scholarships who give us such great opportunities to stay in UTokyo.

New foreign students are coming this October. We are now free of COVID restrictions so let's have a very warm welcoming party like last year. Some foreign students are going to graduate this September, so we have to celebrate their graduation as well.

# Part 2: Voices from the Students



# University Life 01

## Ms. Tamima Amin

Indonesia

1<sup>st</sup> year Master student, Yoshimura Lab



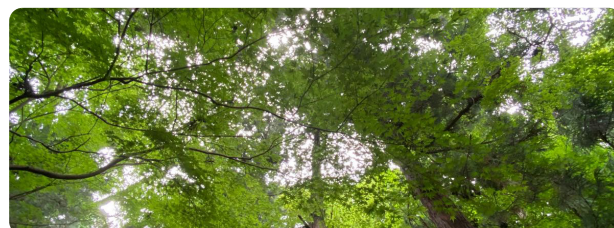
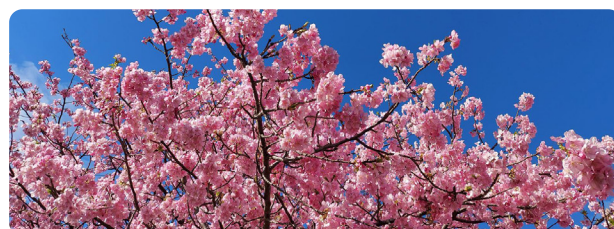
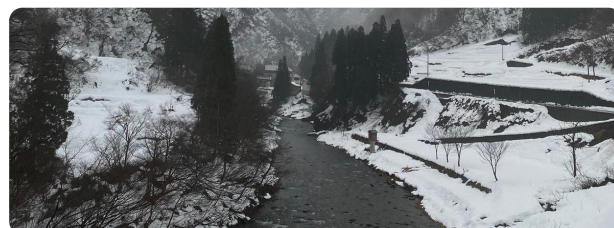
Hello everyone! I'm Tamima, a first-year master's student from Yoshimura Lab at the Institute of Industrial Science, The University of Tokyo.

Talking about my study in Japan, this country has been my long-dream destination to continue my study. Even I still find it hard to believe that I was accepted at The University of Tokyo and will be living here for couple years. My time in Japan has been an exciting journey of learning and discovering new experiences. One of the highlights is witnessing all four seasons, something I've never experienced before. Seeing snow for the first time and the beautiful transitions when spring and autumn is truly magical. Spring, in particular, is my favorite, with flowers start blooming all around, bringing a sense and positive energy to start each day (because I like seeing flowers ^^).

Let's start talking about my university life, it has always been challenging. My first year has been packed with classes and some progress on my research. As I move into my second-year next semester, I have to work harder to advance and complete my research. My research focus is on studying the predictability of global river discharge forecasts on sub-seasonal to seasonal scales. Using the Integrated Land Simulator model developed by my laboratory, I simulate river discharge, which plays a crucial role in flood assessment. I'm incredibly grateful for the excellent facilities provided by the laboratory, which greatly support the research. The lab environment is also really nice, sensei and lab seniors are always helpful, and we can always learn a lot from them.

During my time studying in Japan, I'm also glad that I had the opportunity to learn the Japanese language. In my first year, I enrolled in a Japanese Language Course offered by the Civil Engineering Department. Although I know that Japanese is quite challenging, learning the language will help a lot to communicate in daily basis, even I had super broken-Japanese. It's also been a great way to connect with other international students, and practice Japanese together, making learning more enjoyable and helping us build friendships.

Aside from academic life, let's talk about daily life here in Japan. On days when I had schedules at the university, I would head to the nearest train station and take the metro to campus. I really appreciate Japan's public transportation system; it's incredibly convenient, and the punctuality is top notch. When it comes to food, I often cook at home due to my halal dietary restrictions. When it comes to the



university, thankfully, halal options are available in the campus cafeteria. There is even a designated prayer room in some locations, which is a great help. Surprisingly, halal restaurants are also becoming more common across Japan, so finding food outside is also becoming much easier.

I believe that my studies and daily life here in Japan have truly become an unforgettable chapter in my life.

## University Life 02

### Mr. Santiago Gracia

Mexico

1<sup>st</sup> year Ph.D. student, Sekimoto Lab



My enrollment in the University of Tokyo was a bit unconventional. I enrolled during the Covid 19 pandemic, which meant that I had to start my master's degree remotely, so initially my involvement was completely oriented towards coursework and research. But the latter part of my master's degree and my current studies as a doctoral degree student, I have been able to also enjoy the full experience of living and studying in Japan.

When I started my studies, I was surprised by the degree of freedom I had to tailor my own learning experience, and how many tools and resources we had available both at the University and at the lab level to pursue our research interests. I could sign up for as many courses as I wanted, and I was not only limited to those imparted in my own field of study. This led me to enroll into a variety of courses in the Civil Engineering, Urban Engineering, Architecture, and Public Policy departments. During my first year as a master's course student, I completed most of the required coursework, as well as enrolling in as many intensive Japanese language courses as I could in dire expectation to finally be able to arrive in Japan.

On the second year of the program, I was finally able to come to Tokyo, where my lab had prepared a welcome party for me. I was finally able to meet face-to-face the members of my lab. I must confess that during my first day at the lab I was intimidated by how silent it was during working hours, but that feeling vanished as soon as dinner time came, and we all went out for dinner. It was by daily sharing our plans, hopes, and complaints that I was able to call other lab members my close friends. It was due to my experiences during this latter part of the master's program, where I was able to truly be part of the student community, that I was convinced to continue my studies as a doctoral student.

## University Life 03

### Mr. Somporn Sahachaiseree

Thailand

3<sup>rd</sup> year Ph.D. student, Oguchi Lab



As an engineering student passionate about transport research, I can confidently say that the past three years at UTokyo have been an invaluable chapter of my life. I have received tremendous support from my supervisor, Prof. Takashi Oguchi. In my view, the UTokyo teaching staff not only excel in their innovative research but are also consistently eager to support students' research, helping us develop the confidence and skills needed to tackle independent research.

Beyond academics, I have thoroughly enjoyed campus life as a graduate student. My lab is part of the Institute of Industrial Science, located on Komaba Campus II. I am particularly fond of the calm campus environment, which has greatly enhanced my ability to concentrate. I have had the pleasure of getting to know very friendly lab mates, including senseis, secretaries, and fellow students. In addition to weekly seminars and academic meetings, we regularly hold lab parties and go on an annual lab trip. Last semester, my lab mates and I participated in the Ekiden relay race. I was part of the runner team, and our non-running lab mates made cheering signs for us. How heartwarming!

In summary, I have had a truly fulfilling student life at UTokyo, and I highly recommend prospective students to consider UTokyo as their top choice. As of September 2024, I am graduating with a Ph.D. and will begin working as a post-doctoral researcher at the same lab in October.





# Part 3: International Technical Tour, 27th–28th March 2024

# Report on the International Technical Tour

## Mr. Abhishek Regmi

Nepal

1<sup>st</sup> year Ph.D. student, Mizutani Lab



Technical knowledge comes to life when combined with real-world experience, a lesson we learned firsthand during a technical tour to Yamanashi Prefecture, organized by the International Student Association for Civil Engineering (ISACE) and the Foreign Student Office (FSO). This trip offered a perfect blend of education and social interaction. It provided us with the opportunity to connect with fellow students from around the globe while introducing us to the stunning landscapes of Japan.

Our main stop was the Katsuradai tunnel, currently under construction, where we saw advanced technology and strong work ethics in action. It was an enriching experience to visit the construction site, where the Japan's largest shield machine is being used for the excavation. Such experiences are why many of us chose to study in Japan. Engaging with the engineers, we gained insights into the practical challenges they face, such as reducing noise to minimize community disruption during tunnel construction. These discussions were invaluable, giving us a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in large-scale engineering projects.

The tour also provided much-needed relaxation, providing an escape from our busy campus routines and often solitary personal lives. The bus trip to Yamanaka dormitory was blissful with the mesmerizing view of mountains and sea. Activities like cycling near the beautiful Yamanaka Lake and staying at the Yamanaka dormitory

allowed us to unwind and connect with each other. We also had fun playing games and interacting with each other, making our learning experience even more memorable.

Our visit to Gora Park the next day, with its stunning floral landscapes, offered us a serene and joyful space. Another highlight was the scenic ride on the Hakone Tozan Train. Traveling through the mountains with panoramic views made us immerse ourselves in the breathtaking natural beauty of the area. Additionally, sharing songs from different countries on the bus ride added an element of fun cultural exchange. Last but not least, Daniel Sensei, who guided us, made the trip even more memorable with his engaging humor.

Summing up, this tour was a great mix of learning and leisure. We not only expanded our technical knowledge but also refreshed our spirits, returning to our studies with new energy and perspectives.



### 1st Day

- 1 Construction site visit: Katsuradai tunnel for the "Urban Expressway of Yokohama South Loop Line"
- 2 The University of Tokyo YAMANAKA RYO dormitory

### 2nd Day

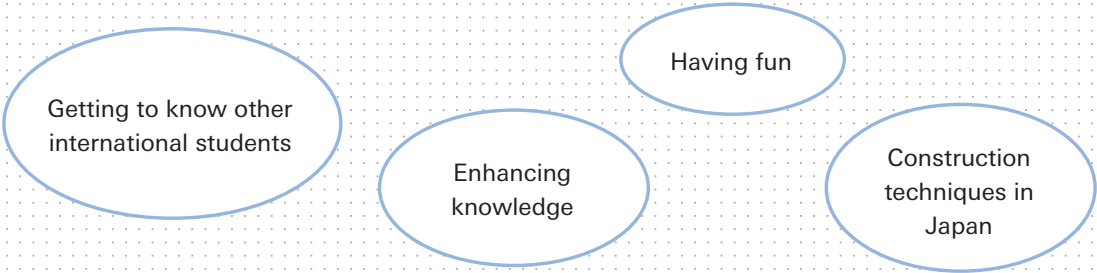
- 3 Hakone Gora Park  
(Hakone Tozan Railway)
- 4 Odawara Station
- 5 The University of Tokyo

27th–28th March 2024  
[TOKYO]–[KANAGAWA]–[YAMANASHI]

# FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

“Was the trip successful?” is the question we, ISACE committees, always ask ourselves after the trip every year and who are the best people to answer this question if not the participants themselves. This year, we have conducted a questionnaire to learn how the participants think of our technical tour. Let’s hear what they think!

## 01 | Why did you decide to join the Technical Tour arranged by ISACE and the Department of Civil Engineering?



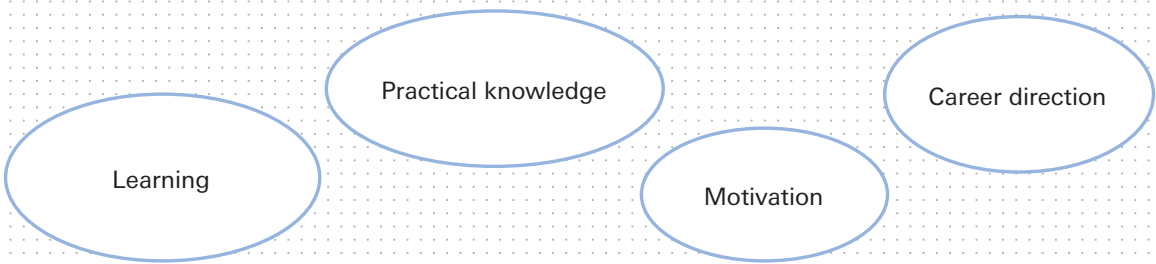
“I decided to join this tour with the hope of getting the knowledge about the on-site construction procedures of infrastructure facility in Japan. Furthermore, I thought that the tour would be a great opportunity to be introduced and develop network with friends from different laboratories in the university.”

Bibek Tiwari, Nepal

“I have always been interested in infrastructure development, and there is no better way to understand the complexity of the implementation as directly visiting a construction site.”

Santiago Garcia, Mexico

## 02 | How did the visits to the various sites contribute to your understanding of engineering and construction?



“It was practical exposure where we witnessed construction of a tunnel. It helped us visualize construction practices and methods.”

Shubham Kumar Dwivedi, India

“A visit to the Yokohama Expressway Construction piqued my interest. Even I am not focused on construction field, seeing the process how to build the underground tunnel using the big drill machine and the structure were very impressive.”

Tamima Amin, Indonesia



27th–28th March 2024  
[TOKYO]–[KANAGAWA]–[YAMANASHI]

### 03 | What were the most valuable things you learned during the tour?

Cultural exchange

Networking

Insights on  
infrastructure  
projects

Sharing  
knowledge

“First and foremost, the most important insight gained from the trip was an understanding of Japanese construction practices. Along with the beautiful view at Yamanaka Dormitory and Park, it was a mind-refreshing experience.”

Arpan Singh, India

### 04 | Trip rating



FSO UPDATE — Perspectives of the International Graduate Programs: life, activities, and supports

発行日 2024年12月25日

発行 東京大学工学系研究科／社会基盤学専攻  
©2024 Foreign Student Office (FSO)  
Department of Civil Engineering, The University of Tokyo

ISSN 2187-9249

編集 Krittanai Sriwongphanawes + Manazir Hussain + Daniel Qi + Muntazir Abbas

デザイン 新目 忍



