

# Marvellous self-consistency inherent in wind waves — Its origin and some items related to air–sea transfers

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**Abstract.** There exists conspicuous self-consistency inherent in wind waves which are in local equilibrium with the wind, or in the wind–windsea equilibrium. From my long-term concern, I will review such aspects based on my present ideas. Aspects of the self-consistency are: (1) the 3/2-power law for significant waves, (2) the wave spectral form proportional to the friction velocity and the frequency to the minus fourth power, (3) proportionality of the Stokes drift with the friction velocity, and (4) the existence of the downward bursting boundary layer (DBBL), where turbulent intensities are proportional to the friction velocity. These aspects have very simple forms, and are mutually convertible, to form a holistic nature. The origin of these characteristics is discussed with the concept of the *wave breaking adjustment*. In relation to the air–sea transfers of momentum and gas, importance of the windsea Reynolds number is stated, and direction of further researches is recommended.

Key words: 3/2-power law, wave spectrum, Stokes drift, friction velocity, DBBL, wave breaking adjustment, windsea Reynolds number

## 1. Aspects of self-consistency in wind waves

### 1.1 The 3/2-power law

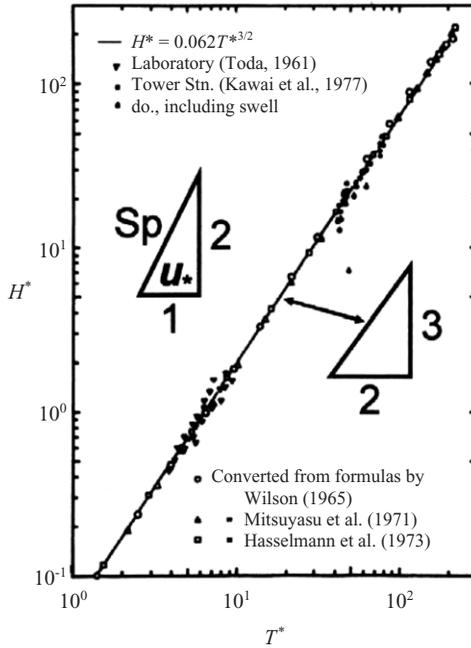
The 3/2-power law is expressed as:

$$H^* = BT^{*3/2}, \quad B = 0.062, \quad (1)$$

where  $H^* = gH_s/u_*^2$ , and  $T^* = gT_s/u_*$ , with  $H_s$ , the significant wave height,  $T_s$ , the significant wave period,  $u_*$  the air friction velocity, and  $B$  is a constant. (1) was found (Toba 1972), by eliminating nondimensional fetch from empirical fetch graph formulas by Wilson (1965), Mitsuyasu *et al.* (1971) and Hasselmann *et al.* (1973), together with dimensional considerations.

Equation (1) may alternatively be expressed by a dimensional form:

$$H_s = B(gu_*^2)^{1/2} T_s^{3/2}, \quad B = 0.062, \quad (2)$$



**Figure 1** The 3/2-power law for windsea in local equilibrium with the wind in the form of (1), cited from Toba, Suzuki and Komori (2008). The data was originally taken from Kawai, Okada and Toba (1977), and the spurious triangle for  $u_*$  and a triangle for the slope of data-point distribution are added. Closed symbols indicate observation data, and open symbols are used to show three continuous lines, which are very close to one another, converted from three empirical formulas.

or, by using total energy  $E$  and the spectral peak angular frequency  $\sigma_p$ ,

$$E^* = B \sigma_p^{*-3}, \quad B_\sigma = 0.051, \tag{3}$$

where  $E^* = g^2 E / u_*^4$ ,  $\sigma_p^* = u_* \sigma_p / g$  (Toba 1978). Also, Bailey, Jones and Toba (1991) converted (1) to a relation between significant wave steepness and the wave age.

In the actual sea, variability of the wind, and more or less swell exist. In the observation data, the above coefficient  $B$  in (1) or (2) actually has deviation within 20% or so (Toba *et al* 1990). Also, Ebuchi *et al.* (1992) investigated the effect of swells and changing winds, by using data from ocean data buoy stations. This variation of  $B$  may also be caused in the estimation of  $u_*$ , since it includes the sea surface drag coefficient  $C_D$  in many cases in course of the estimation.

As seen in Figure 1, this law (1) was also applicable to laboratory data by Toba

(1961) and to tower station data compiled by Kawai *et al.* (1977). More recently, e.g., Lamont-Smith and Waseda (2008) reported, by using observation data, that this law is satisfied effectively, throughout from a wind wave tunnel and to the ocean, though the wave height and the frequency develop by their respective laws.

The empirical formulas of the wind sea growth by Wilson (1965) had complex forms as functions of the nondimensional fetch, where wind sea approaches the fully developed state. Nevertheless such a complicated form was converted to be a straight line as shown in Figure 1. This led us to a concept of the *wind sea in local equilibrium with the wind* or the *wind–windsea equilibrium*, as described in Section 2.

### 1.2 The $gu_*\sigma^{-4}$ -type power spectrum

The high frequency side of self-similarity one-dimensional spectral form of wind waves is expressed by the following form, including  $u_*$ -proportionality:

$$\varphi(\sigma) = \alpha_s g_* u_* \sigma^{-4}, \quad \sigma > \sigma_p, \quad \alpha_s = 0.062 \pm 0.010 \quad (4)$$

where  $\alpha_s$  is a constant,  $\sigma_p$  the peak angular frequency,  $g_* = g(1 + S\kappa^2/\rho_w)$  is the acceleration of gravity extended to include the effect of surface tension  $S$  for high frequency part, with  $\kappa$  the wave number and  $\rho_w$  is the water density (Toba 1973). This spectral form was derived in order for the integral of (4) to correspond to (1), and at the same time in accordance with observations by Toba (1961) and Kawai *et al.* (1977).

Kitaigorodskii (1983) and Phillips (1985) re-proposed this spectral form theoretically, and (4) was widely accepted by many observations by Mitsuyasu *et al.* (1980), Kahma (1981), and others, as reviewed by Janssen (2004). Phillips (1985) named  $\alpha_s$  Toba's constant, and stated that the observed values were ranged from 0.06 to 0.11. Janssen (2004) reported a value of 0.127 based on many observations. More recently Romero and Melville (2010) have presented observational data showing an increasing trend from 0.06 to 0.11 with the increasing wave age.

It should be noted, however, that as was clearly shown in Toba, Okada and Jones (1988),  $\alpha_s$  has fluctuating values caused by unsteadiness of the wind, showing undersaturation and oversaturation of the spectral level, since it takes some time for wind waves to reach the wind–windsea equilibrium to the new wind. Consequently,  $\alpha_s$  varies inversely to the fluctuation of  $u_*$ . Also, for decreasing wind speed, the spectral peak shifts to a little lower frequency side with higher values. For increasing wind, it shifts to a little higher frequency side to have a little lower value, as we reported in the same paper. Hanson and Phillips (1999) supported this by new observation data.

Zakharov and Filonenko (1966) had predicted theoretically that the one-

dimensional spectral form of wind waves should be proportional to  $\sigma^{-4}$ , for surface gravity wave interactions, and (4) is in accordance with this theory. However, present day importance of the spectral form (4), which includes the  $u_*$  - proportionality, is that it has become the basis of satellite observations of the sea surface wind (see, e.g., Kawamura, 2003).

### 1.3 Stokes drift–friction velocity proportionality

The Stokes drift of wind waves as the water waves,  $u_0$ , is expressed by

$$u_0 = \pi^3 H_s^2 / g T_s^3 . \quad (5)$$

Combining (5) with (2), we get immediately its  $u_*$ -proportionality (Toba 1972):

$$u_0 = \pi^3 B^2 u_* = 0.12 u_* . \quad (6)$$

This  $u_*$ -proportionality should be applicable from laboratory to ocean waves, and by the self-similar spectral form of (4), for all the stages of developing wind waves, and also to the individual waves in a sense shown by Tokuda and Toba (1981).

Bye (1988) also reported that  $u_0$  is proportional to  $u_*$  for the spectral form (4), and predicted theoretically with observation that the wind drift surface current  $u_s$  is approximately twice  $u_0$ .

### 1.4 Friction velocity–turbulence intensity proportionality within DBBL

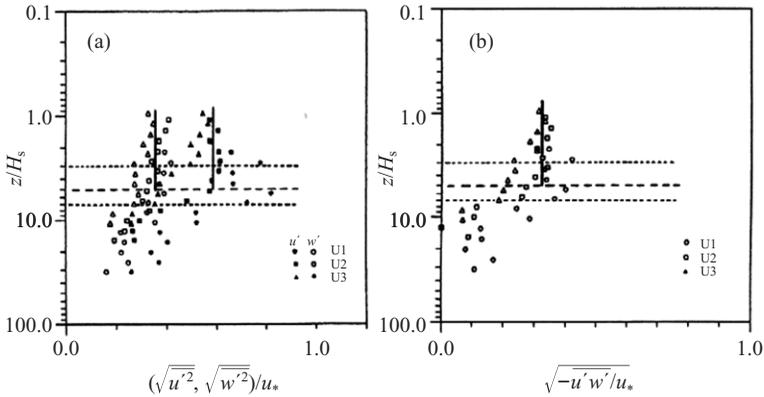
Turbulence characteristics also have proportionalities with  $u_*$ . From our laboratory experiment data (Yoshikawa *et al.* 1988), Toba and Kawamura (1995) found a special boundary layer below the wind waves: the *downward-bursting boundary layer (DBBL)*, where (7) holds:

$$\overline{(u'_a)^2}^{1/2} \propto \overline{(u'_w)^2}^{1/2} \propto u_{*w} \propto u_* \propto u_0 , \quad (7)$$

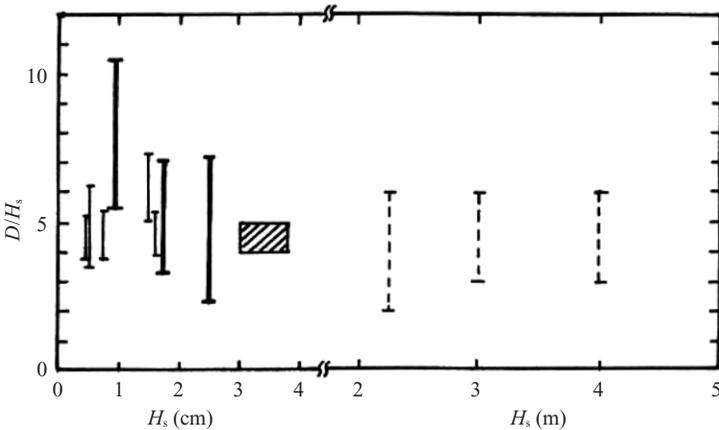
where  $\overline{(u'_a)^2}^{1/2}$  is the intensity of air turbulence,  $\overline{(u'_w)^2}^{1/2}$  that of water turbulence, and  $u_{*w}$  is the water friction velocity. DBBL has observationally a thickness of about 5 times  $H_s$ , and in DBBL the  $u_*$ -proportionality of turbulence intensities and Reynolds stress holds.

Figure 2 shows, cited from Toba and Kawamura (1995), the depth distribution in  $z/H_s$ , of turbulence intensities (a) and Reynolds stress (b) in water, showing the existence of this DBBL. In (b), the value of 0.33 of the abscissa, shown by the vertical line, almost exactly corresponds to (6), since  $u_{*w}/u_0 = 0.33$  of the Figure correspond to  $u_0/u_* = 0.12$ .

Figure 3 shows, cited also from the same paper, four data sets of the depth of the DBBL. Five thin segments of the Figure were taken from Toba *et al.* (1975)



**Figure 2** The depth distribution, in  $z/H_s$ , of turbulence intensities (a) and Reynolds stress (b) in water, showing the existence of this DBBL. Cited from Toba and Kawamura (1995), which reanalyzed Yoshikawa *et al.* (1988) data.



**Figure 3** Four data sets of the depth of the DBBL,  $D$ , normalized by  $H_s$ , cited from Toba and Kawamura (1995). The data set includes, from the left to the right, a laboratory no bubble entrainment case by Toba *et al.* (1975), the turbulence measurement data by Yoshikawa *et al.* (1988), the air–water  $\text{CO}_2$  exchange data by Komori *et al.* (1995) in a laboratory, and observations of bubble clouds in the sea cited from Thorpe (1986; 1992).

of a wind-wave tank, where DBBL developed as soon as wind waves were generated, in spite that no air-entrainment occurred yet, as seen from their Photos 1 to 3. A rectangle in the middle part is from an experiment of air–water  $\text{CO}_2$  exchange in a wind wave tank by Komori *et al.* (1995). The three broken segments show observations of bubble clouds in the sea cited from Thorpe (1986; 1992).

Kitaigorodskii *et al.* (1983), using Donelan’s data in Lake Ontario, reported

the two-layer structure, with the upper layer of the order of ten times the rms. wave amplitude, having intense turbulence generation by wind waves. This should just correspond to the DBBL. More recently, Yoshioka *et al.* (2003) made detailed observations of wind sea, breaking waves, swell, together with bubble entrainment depth, and reported a similar structure with our DBBL.

## 2. Origin of the self-consistent aspects – *Wave-breaking adjustment*

The above described four aspects of wind sea are all in very simple forms, and yet they are mutually consistent or convertible. Thus the wind sea seems to have a holistic structure. Now what is the origin of this marvellous self-consistent nature. Toba (1988; 1996) gave some comprehensive discussion at that time, and Csanady (1997), Badulin *et al.* (2005; 2007), Kukulka and Hara (2008a; 2008b), for example, seem to have pursued their own approaches.

From my present time idea, the simplest form among the above characteristics will be (6) and (7). The water surface is driven by the wind stress, represented here by  $u_*$ , and the water surface elements of individual waves must always adjust themselves to move with the same speed  $u_0$ . This should be performed by the *wave breaking*, whether or not bubble entrainment is taking place. Here  $u_0$  should be taken relative to the water layer below the DBBL.

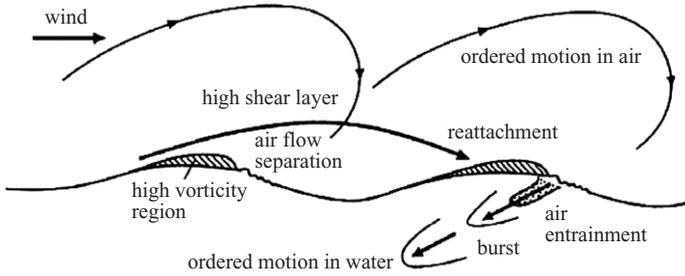
In the *wind-windsea equilibrium* or in *wind waves in local equilibrium with the wind*, waves and turbulence are coupled by strongly nonlinear processes, including the skin friction distribution along the phase of waves (Okuda *et al.* 1977; Banner and Peierston, 1998), local shear flows caused by it, wave breaking (with or without bubble entrainment), ordered motions in the air and water (Kawamura and Toba 1988), bursting and turbulence (Ebuchi *et al.* 1993). If the velocity of some wave element exceeds the above speed  $u_0$ , it breaks to satisfy this requirement. This situation may be expressed as the *wave-breaking adjustment*.

The above characteristics of wind waves were also derived in a quite different manner (Toba 1974). Dimensionally obtained Kolmogoroff and Obukhov's law in turbulence was expressed by

$$V^3/\Lambda = \text{constant}, \quad (8)$$

where  $V$  is the velocity difference over a distance  $\Lambda$  of the size of an eddy. When this was applied to wind waves as  $\Lambda: 2a=H$ ,  $V: 2u=2\sigma a=H\sigma$ , where  $a$  is the wave amplitude, and using a dimensional supposition of  $H^2\sigma^3 = u_* g$ , we immediately arrive at

$$H^* = (T^*/2\pi)^{3/2}. \quad (9)$$



**Figure 4** Schematic picture of the microphysical processes at the air–water interface. (Cited from Toba 1996).

This is equivalent to the 3/2-power law with

$$B = (2\pi)^{-3/2} = 0.0635 (\approx 0.062) \text{ and } u_0 = \pi^3 B^2 u_* = (2)^{-3} u_* = 0.125 u_* . \quad (10)$$

Wind waves thus seem to have *duality of wave and turbulence*.

It should be noted that Tulin (1996) suggested that the 3/2-power law can be explained by a simultaneous consideration of wave energy and wave momentum change rates resulting from wave breaking, keeping the water-wave relation:  $M = E / C$ , where  $M$  is the wave momentum,  $E$  the wave energy, and  $C$  is the phase speed. This leads to the necessary *downshifting of wave frequency*, to satisfy the 3/2-power law, keeping a balance between the wind input and dissipation by wave breaking.

Observationally, the part of momentum, that is retained as the wave momentum, is 6% in short fetch wind-wave tanks, and it decreases with the wave age by an error functional way down to zero value for the fully developed sea (Toba 1978). However, a purely theoretical approach from these elementary processes, including the wind, wave breaking and turbulence, may not be easy, because of their strongly nonlinear holistic nature. Elucidation of how the stress or works by the wind remains in waves and goes through the DBBL to the lower layer, would be future works.

### 3. Windsea Reynolds number $R_B$ and air–sea transfers

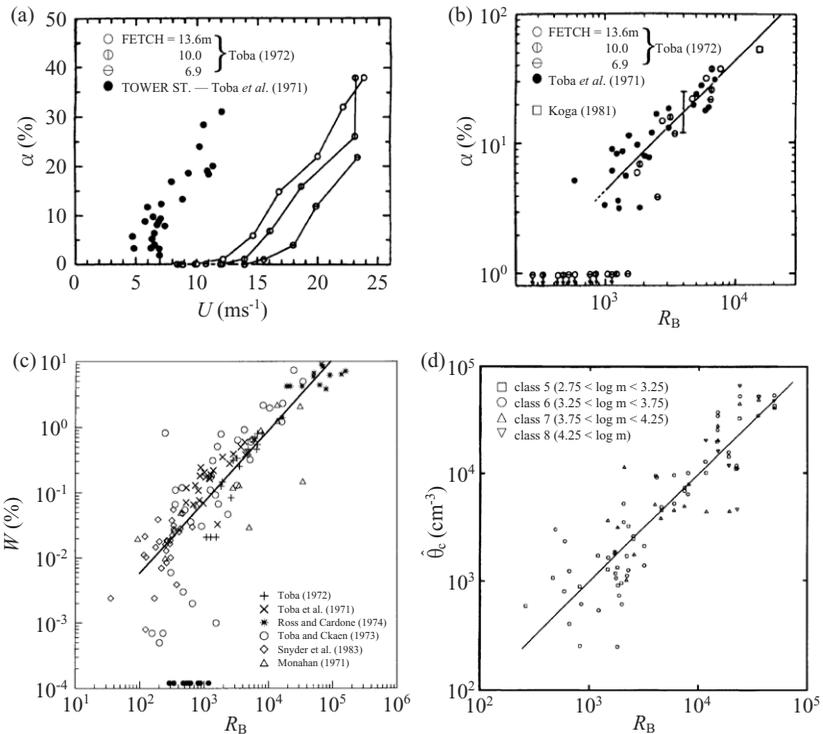
By the above story of consistency,  $H^*$ ,  $T^*$ , or the wave age,  $\sigma_p^* = u_* \sigma_p / g$ , are unified one nondimensional quantity describing the state of wind sea for given  $u_*$ . There is the other quantity that should describe the fluid dynamical state of wind-sea surfaces. It is the *windsea Reynolds number*:

$$R_B = u_*^2 / \nu \sigma_p , \quad (11)$$

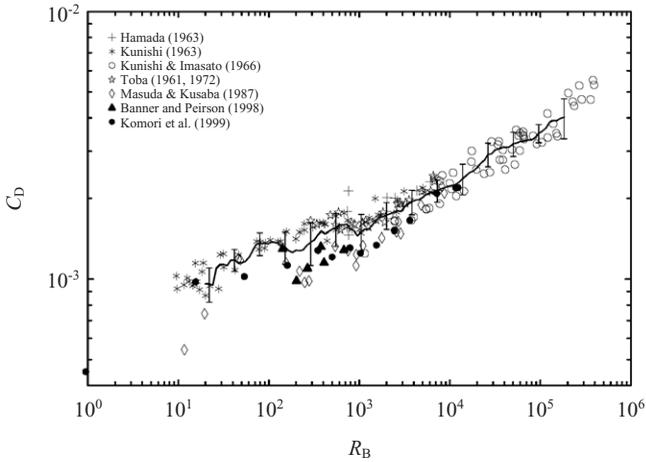
where  $\nu$  is the kinematic viscosity of air.

The  $R_B$  was originally introduced by Toba and Koga (1986) as a nondimensional parameter describing the overall conditions of air-sea boundary processes, including the percentage of the breaking wave crests, the whitecap coverage, and the concentration of sea-salt particles on the sea surface. Iida, Toba and Chaen (1992) presented further data showing that the production rate of sea water droplets on the sea surface can be expressed well by using this. Toba, Suzuki and Iida (1999) used  $R_B$  in the estimates of global distribution of whitecap coverage and sea-salt production on the sea surface, using the terminology of the *breaking wave parameter* for  $R_B$ .

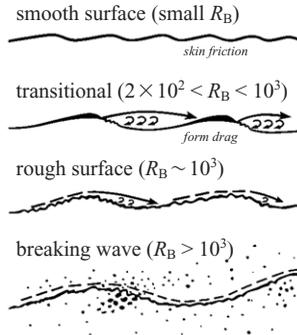
Synthesizing these studies, Figure 5 clearly shows that the percentage  $\alpha$  of breaking crests among individual waves of windsea passing a fixed point on the water surface are widely distributed when plotted against  $U_{10}$ , and it collapses



**Figure 5** Cited from Toba *et al.* (2006), (a) Percentage  $\alpha$  of breaking crests among individual waves of wind sea passing a fixed point on the water surface, plotted against  $U_{10}$ , and (b) plotted against  $R_B$  (from Toba and Koga 1986). (c) Whitecap coverage percent,  $W$ , plotted against  $R_B$  (from Zhao and Toba 2001). (d) Sea-water droplet concentration observed near the sea surface, plotted against  $R_B$  (from Iida *et al.* 1992).



**Figure 6** Data set of the drag coefficient  $C_D$ , measured by wind-wave tank experiments in fetch-limited conditions, plotted against the *windsea Reynolds number*  $R_B$ . (Cited from Toba *et al.* 2006.)



**Figure 7** Schematic representation of the regime shift of the windsea boundary layer conditions as a function of  $R_B$ , cited from Toba *et al.* (2006).

when plotted against  $R_B$ . At the same time it is seen that there is a clear critical value of  $R_B$  at  $10^3$ , where breaking wave and drop production begin to take place. Further, Zhao and Toba (2001) showed the clear advantage of  $R_B$  over  $U_{10}$ ,  $u_*$  and the wave age, in describing observed data sets of whitecap coverage. Toba *et al.* (2006) presented synthesizing review of the derivation and physical interpretation of  $R_B$ , and gave the new terminology of the *windsea Reynolds number*. As a matter of fact,  $R_B$  may be interpreted as a Reynolds number, since it contains  $u_*$  as a representative scale of speed, and  $L_s = u_* T_s (= 2\pi u_* / \sigma_p)$  as a representative length scale of the phenomenon under consideration, and  $\nu$ .

This is an appropriate quantity also to study and describe air–water momentum or gas transfers. Zhao *et al.* (2003) effectively expressed the CO<sub>2</sub> transfer velocity as a function of  $R_B$ , and Suzuki *et al.* (2001) attempted a global mapping of the air–sea CO<sub>2</sub> exchange by using this kind of formula. Zhao *et al.* (2006) presented a new sea-spray generation function for spume droplets as a function of  $R_B$ . Soloviev *et al.* (2007) reported further researches using  $R_B$ .

Figure 6 shows measured values of  $C_D$  in laboratory tanks by many authors (cited from Toba *et al.* 2006). We can see two critical points in the distribution of  $C_D$ , at  $R_B=2 \times 10^2$  and at  $R_B=10^3$ , where the data indicates two downward points, which bracket a bulge region. Beyond  $R_B=10^3$ ,  $C_D$  values become large. The latter point corresponds well to the critical point of wave breaking shown in Figure 5.

Figure 7 shows, from Toba *et al.* (2006), schematic representation of the regime shift of the windsea boundary layer conditions as a function of  $R_B$ . The transitional regime between  $2 \times 10^2$  and  $10^3$  in  $R_B$  corresponds to the regime where flow separation is large with the form drag leading over the skin friction, in accordance with data by Banner and Peirson (1998).

When we add data observed in the sea where some swells usually exist, point distribution in Figure 6 becomes less sharp, as Toba *et al.* (2006) had shown. Nevertheless  $C_D$  vs.  $R_B$  expression seems much better than, e.g., the nondimensional roughness parameter v.s. wave age expression proposed in Jones and Toba (Eds.) (2001) book. Suzuki *et al.* (2010) has further investigated the effect of swell, using observation tower data including two-dimensional wave spectra. In this sense, well-designated studies of gas transfer as well as momentum transfer should be necessary in the future, especially for cases where various swells coexist.

## 4. Concluding remarks

Throughout the whole stages of wind sea development, the strokes drift of individual waves adjust themselves to go with the same velocity,  $u_0 = \pi^3 B^2 u_*$  in the mass, performed by the *wave-breaking adjustment*. This results in the 3/2-power law, the  $g u_* \sigma^{-4}$ -type power spectrum, and the DBBL below wind sea having a special turbulence structure. These altogether constitute the self consistent, holistic nature of the wind sea.

The *windsea Reynolds number*  $R_B$  acts as a good parameter to describe the hydrodynamic regime of the surface of the wind sea, and can serve to describe characteristics of variation of air–water transfer coefficients of momentum and gasses. However, where there are prevailing swells, they affect largely the exchange coefficients. Therefore we should accumulate more data of air–sea fluxes by further intentional experiments and observations, in which two-

dimensional wave spectra are included.

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