

Monitoring of the rapid weathering in a badland of Plio-Pleistocene mudstone area, southwest Taiwan

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We monitored water contents and electric conductivities beneath a slope surface in a badland, southwest Taiwan, where highly incised topography is formed by rapid erosion of about 10 cm/year on Plio-Pleistocene mudstone. Badland is characterized by dissected bold landscape with gullies and ridges. It is widely distributed in arid to semi-arid areas in the world (ex. South Dakota in America, Loess area in China, south Italy and southeast Spain). Slope surface in badland of weak mudstone is markedly characterized by surface crusting and desiccation cracks, which reach 10 to 20 cm depths. Erosion in such badlands is assumed to be related to high saline contents. We set sensors for temperature, water content, and electric conductivity at 0 to 40 cm depths beneath a slope surface and measured them at 10 minutes intervals from 2009 to 2011. A rain gauge was set 1 m above the ground in front of the monitoring slope and hygro-thermo meters were set 10 cm above the slope surface and with the rain gauge. About 1900 mm of precipitation occurred during the monitoring interval and over 96% of the rainfall was in the rainy season from May to September. Air temperatures and relative humidities gradually increased to rainy seasons from dry season. Water contents near the slope surface were lowest in the dry season and increased by infrequent rainfall events, and became quite high in rainy seasons. Salinity, which is estimated from electric conductivities and water contents, near slope surface was lowest in dry seasons and increased in early rain seasons. The increased salinity was diluted by heavy rainfall events in rainy seasons and intensive erosion occurred by the grain dispersion by the dilution. Water penetration depths were 30 to 40 cm in dry seasons and became much shallower to a depth of about 10 cm in rainy seasons. The decrease in the water penetration depths may be attributable to the self sealing of cracks by rock expansion when wet.

Keywords: badland, Plio-Pleistocene mudstone, rapid erosion, weathering, salt movement, monitoring