



1 **Large Scale Physical Modelling Study of a Flexible Barrier under the**  
2 **Impact of Granular Flows**

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by

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41 **Abstract:**

42 Flexible barriers are being increasingly applied to mitigate the danger of debris flows.  
43 However, how barriers can be better designed to withstand the impact loads of debris  
44 flows is still an open question in natural hazard engineering. Here we report an  
45 improved large-scale physical modelling device and the results of two consecutive  
46 large-scale granular flow tests using this device to study how flexible barriers react  
47 under impact from granular flows. In the study, the impact force directly on the flexible  
48 barrier and the impact force transferred to the supporting structures are measured,  
49 calculated and compared. Based on the comparison, the impact loading attenuated by  
50 the flexible barrier is quantified. The hydro-dynamic and hydro-static approaches are  
51 also validated using the calculated impact forces.

52 **KEYWORDS:** Large-scale tests; granular flow; flexible barrier; impact loading

53



54 **1. Introduction**

55 Debris flows, as one of the most disastrous natural geohazards, have caused destructive  
56 damage to human lives and their habitations in many countries such as USA, Japan,  
57 and China (Takahashi 2014; Hungr 1995; Ishikawa *et al.* 2008; Su *et al.* 2017). In a  
58 mountainous area where a large amount of loose sediment is present, multiple debris  
59 flows can occur under intensive heavy rains (Xu *et al.* 2012; Yagi *et al.* 2009; Chen *et*  
60 *al.* 2017). Protective systems such as concrete check dams are usually installed in areas  
61 threatened by debris flows to prevent the damage (Santi *et al.* 2011). Nowadays,  
62 researchers have found that flexible barriers, which were firstly used in rockfall  
63 prevention, are effective to trap debris flows (Canelli *et al.* 2012; Wendeler *et al.* 2007;  
64 Cui *et al.* 2015; Hu *et al.* 2006; Kwan *et al.* 2014). Compared to conventional rigid  
65 concrete check dams, flexible barriers have a few obvious advantages: economical,  
66 efficient in impact energy absorption, easy to be installed and adaptable to various  
67 terrains (Ashwood and Hungr 2016; Wendeler and Volkwein 2015). However, the  
68 performance of a flexible barrier subjected to the impact of debris flows has not been  
69 fully understood. The efficiency of loading reduction by flexible barriers has not been  
70 quantified yet. Therefore, further research on the interaction between debris flows and  
71 a flexible barrier is urgently required.

72

73 Physical modelling has been widely used in geotechnical engineering research because  
74 of its excellent controllability in testing conditions and good reliability of testing results  
75 (Paik *et al.* 2012; Wendeler *et al.* 2006; Bugnion *et al.* 2012; DeNatale *et al.* 1999).  
76 Scaling is a key parameter in experiment design for studying debris flows because it  
77 can affect the interaction between particles in a granular flow. In miniaturized debris  
78 flows generated in small-scale tests, the effects of viscous shear resistance, friction, and



79 cohesion are over-represented, whereas the effects of excess pore-fluid pressure, which  
80 are generated by debris dilation or contraction, are under-represented (Iverson 2015).  
81 Considering the scale effects, some researchers use large-scale physical models or field-  
82 scale experimental sites to study debris flows (DeNatale *et al.* 1999; Paik *et al.* 2012;  
83 Bugnion *et al.* 2012; Iverson 2015). WSL (2010) conducted a series of full-scale tests  
84 to study the interaction between multiple debris flows and a prototype flexible barrier.  
85 Large-scale physical modelling tests are also selected by the authors to investigate the  
86 interaction between a flexible barrier and dry granular flows.

87

88 A typical flexible barrier usually consists of two main components: a flexible ring net  
89 and supporting structures (supporting posts holding the ring net, strand cables and  
90 foundations supporting the posts). The impact loading from a debris flow is firstly  
91 attenuated by the flexible ring net with large deformation, then transfers to the cross-  
92 tension cables, which form the outline frame and stretch the ring net, and finally to the  
93 posts and the supporting cables. Generally, break elements are installed on the  
94 supporting cables to reduce load peaks transferred to the foundations (Volkwein 2014).  
95 In this study, break elements are replaced by large capacity tension link transducers to  
96 measure the impact loading transferred to the supporting structures.

97

98 Impact loading estimation is key to the design of a flexible barrier for debris flow  
99 mitigation (Volkwein *et al.* 2011). Simple approaches are commonly used by designers  
100 in impact loading estimation because they require only a few parameters in the  
101 calculation. There are two widely accepted simple approaches: the hydro-dynamic  
102 approach and the hydro-static approach. The hydro-dynamic approach is based on  
103 momentum conservation. In this approach, the impact period is taking as an ideal flow



104 with a uniform velocity impacting the barrier and deviating along the vertical direction.  
105 The impact loading is calculated from the momentum change of the decelerated debris  
106 flow during the impact (Hungri *et al.* 1984; Armanini 1997). The hydro-static approach,  
107 on the other hand, is calculated from the earth pressure of deposited debris (Kwan and  
108 Cheung 2012). Both approaches adopt empirical coefficients to reach a good accuracy  
109 in predicting real cases.

110

111 The estimation of impact force with the hydro-dynamic approach (Hungri *et al.* 1984)  
112 is expressed as follows:

$$113 \quad F_{calculated} = \alpha \rho_{bulk} v_0^2 h w \quad (1)$$

114 where  $\rho_{bulk}$  is the bulk density of a debris flow,  $v_0$  is the velocity of the debris flow,  $h$  is  
115 the height of the debris flow,  $w$  is the width of the debris flow, which is normally  
116 represented by the width of the flowing channel, and  $\alpha$  is the dynamic coefficient.  
117 Hungri *et al.* (1984) proposed a value of 1.5. Kwan and Cheung (2012) suggested a  
118 value of 2.0 considering the flexibility of flexible barriers. A range between 1.5 and 5  
119 was given by Canelli *et al.* (2012).

120

121 The hydro-static approach (Lichtenhahn 1973; Armanini 1997) is given as follows:

$$122 \quad F_{calculated} = \kappa \rho_{bulk} g h_{deposit}^2 w \quad (2)$$

123 where  $\kappa$  is the static coefficient, which is suggested as 1.0 in the calculation (Kwan and  
124 Cheung 2012).  $g$  is gravitational acceleration, and  $h_{deposit}$  is the deposition height of the  
125 debris flow.

126

127 This paper aims to study the motions of multiple granular flows and the performance  
128 of a flexible barrier under the impact of granular flows. The data from well-arranged



129 transducers and high-speed cameras in the debris flow impact tests are presented and  
130 analyzed in this paper. The motions of two consecutive granular flows are described.  
131 The impact forces on the flexible ring net and the supporting structures of the flexible  
132 barrier are calculated respectively. Using the calculated results, the contribution of  
133 flexibility to impact loading reduction is quantified, and simple approaches for impact  
134 force estimation are verified.

135

## 136 **2. Experiment setup and instrumentation**

### 137 *2.1 Description of the experiment apparatus*

138 A large-scale testing device is built in the Road Research Lab of the Hong Kong  
139 Polytechnic University with a length of 9.5 m, a height of 8.3 m and a width of 2 m.  
140 The view of the experiment setup is plotted in Fig.1. This facility can be divided into 4  
141 main components: (i) a reservoir with the capacity of 5 m<sup>3</sup> at the top of the device, (ii)  
142 a novel quick flip-up door opening system at the front vent of the reservoir, (iii) a  
143 flexible barrier with supporting posts and cables, and (iv) a flume linking the reservoir  
144 and the flexible barrier. The prototype flexible barrier with a width of 2.48 m is made  
145 up of steel rings with a diameter of 300 mm (No. ROCCO 7/3/300, Geobruigg), which  
146 are commonly used in rockfall mitigation in European and Hong Kong. This ring net is  
147 covered by a flexible secondary wire net with the mesh size of 50mm to provide a high  
148 trapping rate for the granular flows. Two parallel posts that can rotate in the plane of  
149 impact are installed to stretch and support the ring net, and each post is supported by  
150 two inclined strand cables. The flume has a length of 7 m, an inner width of 1.5 m and  
151 an inclination angle of 35 °. Side walls of the flume are made up of tempered glass to  
152 provide a clear observation of generated granular flows and their interactions with the  
153 flexible barrier.



154

## 155 **2.2 Instrumentation**

156 To monitor the performance of a flexible barrier under the impact of granular flows,  
157 this device is instrumented with a well-arranged high-frequency measurement system.  
158 Two types of transducers are installed on the flexible protection system: mini tension  
159 link transducers and high capacity tension link transducers. The mini tension link  
160 transducers were calibrated in the soil laboratory with a maximum loading of 20 kN.  
161 The calibration is plotted in Fig.2. Those transducers are installed on the flexible ring  
162 net to measure the impact force on the flexible ring net directly. Specifically, the central  
163 area of the flexible ring net, which consists of 5 connected rings, is separated from the  
164 main net and reconnected to the neighboring rings by 10 mini tension link transducers.  
165 Fig.3 presents the measured central area and the arrangement of all the mini tension  
166 link transducers on the flexible ring net. The high capacity tension link transducers with  
167 a certified capacity of 50 kN are installed on the supporting cables of the posts (seen  
168 Fig.1 (b)). A data-logger with the capability of sampling 48 transducers at 1000 Hz  
169 simultaneously is used to collect the data of all transducers. Two high-speed cameras  
170 capable of capturing a resolution of 1024 ×768 pixels at a sampling rate of 1000 frames  
171 per second are used to capture the motions of the granular flows and the deformation  
172 of the flexible barrier under impact. One high-speed camera is located at the right side  
173 of the barrier, and the other one is set in front of the barrier.

174

## 175 **2.3 Experiment material and procedures**

176 The sample of material used in the tests is plotted in Fig.4, and their properties are listed  
177 in Table 1. Two consecutive tests, named Test 1 and Test 2 were conducted using the



178 same granular material. In test 1, the granular flow travelled on the steel plate of the  
179 flume and impacted an empty flexible barrier. While in Test 2, the granular flow moved  
180 on the upper surface of the deposition in Test 1 to simulate the second surge in multiple  
181 flows. At the beginning of tests, the door was flipped up in less than 0.5 s with the help  
182 of a novel door opening system to generate a uniform granular flow. The datalogger  
183 started to obtain data several seconds before the triggering of the granular flow to obtain  
184 initial values of all the transducers. Simultaneously, the high-speed cameras started to  
185 capture the motion of the granular flow and its interaction with the flexible barrier  
186 during the impact.

187

### 188 **3. Test results**

#### 189 ***3.1 Motion and impact of granular flow in Test 1***

190 In test 1, the initial time of the impact has been readjusted to 0 s in all plotted data and  
191 selected video frames, and the negative value of time represents the moment before the  
192 interaction. By tracking the motion of the granular flow with high-speed cameras, the  
193 speed of the granular flow was 5 m/s, which was relatively low compared with the  
194 measured velocities from 2 m/s to 12 m/s in literatures (Arattano and Marchi 2005;  
195 Prochaska *et al.* 2008; Berti *et al.* 1999). The deposition height of the granular flow,  
196 the maximum horizontal deformation of the flexible barrier and the tensile force of  
197 Transducer 1 with time are plotted in Fig.5. It can be seen that the deposition height of  
198 trapped aggregates rises almost linearly with time and reaches 0.55 m at the time of 1.0  
199 s, and the horizontal deformation of the barrier increases from an initial value of 0.262  
200 m to 0.481 m at the time of 1.0 s. The side profiles of the deposited aggregates at  
201 different times are plotted in Fig.6. From 0 s to 1.0 s, the front portion of the granular





202 flow shot up, impacted the barrier directly and deposited as a wedge-shaped dead zone  
203 at the base of the flexible barrier. The following granular flow climbed on the top  
204 surface of the previous stationary deposition, impacted the flexible barrier, and  
205 deposited behind the barrier layer by layer. After 1.0 s, the following granular front  
206 deposited behind the deposition wedge. It is worth noting that the tensile force on the  
207 net keeps increasing even the deposition height of the granular flow reach the maximum  
208 value (see Fig.5), and this phenomenon indicates that the granular flow can  
209 continuously exert impact pressure on the flexible barrier via the deposition wedge.

210

### 211 ***3.2 Impact loading analysis in Test 1***

212 Tensile forces recorded by the mini tension link transducers between rings are plotted  
213 in Fig.7. Signals of the transducers have some noises due to the intensive impacts from  
214 thousands of aggregates during the impact period. Thus, trend lines are added into those  
215 figures to clarify the changes of tensile forces. It can be observed that a gradual rise of  
216 static load and two dynamic impact peaks in the signals of most transducers. The first  
217 impact peak occurred at the beginning of the impact, and the second impact peak  
218 appeared at the end of the impact. These two peaks are much smaller than the  
219 accumulated static load. It is indicated that the dynamic load and the static load co-  
220 existed in the impact, and the static load was dominant. Besides, transducers connected  
221 to the bottom cross-tension cable (Transducer 7 and Transducer 8) present negative  
222 values, which shows that they were compressed in the impact. Fig.8 presents typical  
223 frames recorded by the side-view camera and the front-view camera combined with the  
224 signal from Transducer 1. From this figure, it can be indicated that the first dynamic  
225 impact peak came from the direct impact of the first debris front on the flexible barrier,



226 and the gradual increase of the static load was caused by the deposition of the  
227 aggregates. With the growth of the deposition zone, the impact loading of the following  
228 granular flow was finally fully resisted by the deposition cushion. Afterward, only static  
229 earth pressure of the deposition acted on the flexible barrier.

230

### 231 *3.3 Motion of granular flow in Test 2*

232 The second granular flow was triggered after Test 1 to simulate the second flow in a  
233 multiple debris flow event. In Test 2, the granular flow travelled on the top surface of  
234 the deposition in Test 1 and came to rest without reaching the net. The motion of the  
235 granular flow in Test 2 is plotted in Fig.9. In that figure, the initiated time of the granular  
236 flow is readjusted to 0 s. It can be found that the granular flow had a thick front when  
237 it was firstly triggered, then the thickness kept decreasing during movement. Based on  
238 the recording of the side-view camera, the side-view of depositions in the two tests and  
239 the velocity change with the flowing distance of the granular flow in Test 2 are plotted  
240 in Fig.10. Thickness and velocity of the front reduced dramatically with the increase of  
241 the moving distance and finally stopped at 0.7 m before the flexible barrier.  
242 Correspondingly, no signal fluctuation and deformation increment of the flexible  
243 barrier were recorded by the transducers and the high-speed cameras. The reason for  
244 the flow stopping before the flexible barrier is the large basal friction from the rough  
245 interface between the moving granular flow and the deposition and the low fluidity of  
246 the dry granular flow. The multi-flow tests show that the impact from the latter arrived  
247 debris flows can be attenuated or eliminated by the resistance from the deposition of  
248 the previous debris flow in a multiple debris flow event.

249



## 250 4. Data analysis

### 251 4.1 Direct measurement of the impact force on the flexible barrier

252 As mentioned above, the central area is separated from the main ring net and  
253 reconnected to neighboring net rings by mini tension link transducers. Two assumptions  
254 are made to simplify the measurement of the impact loading on a flexible ring net. The  
255 deformation of the ring net is assumed similar to a membrane, and the deformation in  
256 the measured area is assumed cone symmetric. Based on the assumptions, the loading  
257 situation in the cross-section of the measured area which contains Transducer  $i$  and  
258 Transducer  $i+1$  is analyzed and shown in Fig.11. Thus, the impact force on the cross-  
259 section can be calculated with the following equation:

$$260 \quad F_{\text{impact},i,i+1} = F_{\text{tensile},i} \cdot \cos \frac{\theta}{2} + F_{\text{tensile},i+1} \cdot \cos \frac{\theta}{2} \quad (3)$$

261 where  $F_{\text{tensile},i}$  and  $F_{\text{tensile},i+1}$  are the maximum tensile forces on Transducer  $i$  and  
262 Transducer  $i+1$  installed in the measured area,  $\theta$  is the included angle between the  
263 opposite transducers,  $F_{\text{impact},i,i+1}$  is the calculated impact force on this cross-section.  
264 Since the deformation in the measured area is assumed cone symmetric,  $\theta$  is a constant  
265 in all cross-sections formed by two opposite transducers. Thus, for the measured area  
266 with  $n$  transducers, the maximum impact force,  $F_{\text{measured}}$ , can be calculated with the  
267 following equation:

$$268 \quad F_{\text{measured}} = \cos \frac{\theta}{2} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^{i=n} F_{\text{tensile},i} \quad (4)$$

269 In our study, the maximum tensile forces on all the transducers are measured and plotted  
270 in Fig.12, and  $\theta$  can be measured from the photograph taken at the moment of the largest  
271 deformation as shown in Fig.13.



272

273 The impact pressure from the granular flow is assumed to be uniformly distributed in  
274 the cross-section area of the flume width multiplied by the height of the debris  
275 deposition, which covers the measured central area. Combined with Eq. 4, the following  
276 equation is given to calculate the distributed impact loading on a flexible ring net as:

$$277 \quad F_{impact} = F_{measured} \cdot \frac{A_{impact}}{A_{measured}} = \cos \frac{\theta}{2} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^{i=n} F_{tensile,i} \cdot \frac{A_{impact}}{A_{measured}} \quad (5)$$

278 where  $A_{impact}$  and  $A_{measured}$  represent the actual impact cross-section area and the  
279 measured central area in the test as shown in Fig.10. All the parameters and calculated  
280 results are listed in Table 2.

281

#### 282 **4.2 Calculation of Loading Reduction Rate (LRR)**

283 The flexible ring net is supported by two posts that can rotate in the plane of the flow  
284 direction, and each post is supported by two inclined steel strand cables. Therefore, the  
285 impact force transferred from the flexible barrier to the supporting posts can be  
286 calculated from the tensile forces carried by the supporting cables in the direction of  
287 impact. Based on the symmetrical arrangement of the cables and the posts with respect  
288 to the flexible barrier, as plotted in Fig.14 (a), the loading situations of the posts and  
289 the supporting cables located on both sides of the flexible barrier are also symmetrical  
290 when they are under a uniform impact pressure. Thus, the left post and its supporting  
291 cables: Cable A Left and Cable B Left are selected as the analysis objects. The force  
292 analysis of the supporting cables is divided into two steps:

293 Firstly, forces on Cable A Left and Cable B Left are decomposed into components in  
294 the rotation plane of the post based on the top-view sketch (seen Fig.14(a)):



295 
$$F_{AL,H} = F_{AL} \cdot \cos \alpha \quad (6)$$

296 
$$F_{BL,H} = F_{BL} \cdot \cos \beta \quad (7)$$

297 where  $F_{AL}$  and  $F_{BL}$  are the measured maximum tensile forces on Cable A Left and Cable  
 298 B Left during the impact,  $F_{AL,H}$  and  $F_{BL,H}$  are the components of  $F_{AL}$  and  $F_{BL}$   
 299 decomposed in the rotation plane of the left post, and  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$  are the included angles  
 300 between Cable A, Cable B and the rotation plane of the post.

301

302 Secondly, based on the calculated  $F_{AL,H}$  and  $F_{BL,H}$ , components of the tensile forces on  
 303 Cable A Left and Cable B Left in the direction of impact can be calculated based on the  
 304 left-side-view sketch (seen Fig.14 (b)):

305 
$$F_{AL,impact} = F_{AL,H} \cdot \cos \gamma \quad (8)$$

306 
$$F_{BL,impact} = F_{BL,H} \cdot \cos \delta \quad (9)$$

307 where  $F_{AL,impact}$  and  $F_{BL,impact}$  are the components of tensile forces on Cable A Left and  
 308 Cable B Left in the direction of impact, and  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$  are the included angles between Cable  
 309 A, Cable B and the direction of impact.

310

311 It is defined that the direction of the supporting force, which is opposite to the direction  
 312 of the impact force, is the positive direction. Thus, the components of the tensile forces  
 313 on the left cables in the direction of impact ( $F_L$ ) can be calculated by substituting Eqs.  
 314 (6) and (7) into Eqs. (8) and (9):

315 
$$\begin{aligned} F_L &= F_{BL,impact} - F_{AL,impact} = F_{BL,H} \cdot \cos \delta - F_{AL,H} \cdot \cos \gamma \\ &= F_{BL} \cdot \cos \delta \cdot \cos \beta - F_{AL} \cdot \cos \gamma \cdot \cos \alpha \end{aligned} \quad (10)$$



316 Finally, based on the conservation of angular momentum and the symmetrical  
317 arrangement of the cables and the posts with respect to the flexible barrier, the  
318 equivalent impact force can be calculated from the tensile forces on the supporting  
319 cables with the following equation:

$$320 \quad F_{Cables, equivalent} = \frac{l_{post}}{l_{impact}} [(F_{BL} + F_{BR}) \cdot \cos \delta \cdot \cos \beta - (F_{AL} + F_{AR}) \cdot \cos \gamma \cdot \cos \alpha] \quad (11)$$

321 where  $F_{Cables, equivalent}$  is the equivalent impact force calculated from the tensile forces on  
322 the supporting cables,  $l_{post}$  is the distance between the rotation fulcrum of the post and  
323 the connecting point of the cables,  $l_{impact}$  is the distance between the rotation fulcrum of  
324 the post and the equivalent impact height of the granular flow.  $F_{AL}$ ,  $F_{AR}$ ,  $F_{BL}$ , and  $F_{BR}$   
325 are the measured maximum tensile forces on the supporting cables. Their values are  
326 presented in Fig.13. All parameters, as well as the calculated results, are listed in Table  
327 2.

328

329 It is found that flexibility of flexible barriers makes an obvious contribution to the  
330 reduction of the impact loading from a debris flow (Volkwein 2014; Song *et al.* 2017).  
331 Since almost all the debris material was trapped in this study, the load reduction mainly  
332 attributes to the large deformation of the flexible ring net during the impact. To quantify  
333 the contribution of flexibility to impact loading reduction, the Loading Reduction Rate  
334 (LRR) of the flexible barrier is defined as:

$$335 \quad LRR = \frac{F_{impact} - F_{Cables, equivalent}}{F_{impact}} \cdot 100\% \quad (12)$$

336 LRR in the granular flow tests is calculated and presented in Table 2. It is found that  
337 around 28 % of the impact loading from the dry granular flow in Test 1 was attenuated



338 by the flexible barrier.

339

#### 340 ***4.3 Comparison of simple approaches with measured impact forces***

341 Two widely accepted simple approaches for impact force estimation: hydro-dynamic  
342 approach and hydro-static approach (Kwan and Cheung 2012; Volkwein 2014; Song *et*  
343 *al.* 2017; Ashwood and Hungr 2016) are compared in this section to validate their  
344 applications in the design of flexible barriers. The parameters and the measured impact  
345 forces on different components in Test 1 are used in this comparison (see Table 3). To  
346 quantify the accuracies of the simple approaches, Relative Error (RE) is defined as:

$$347 \quad RE = \left| \frac{F_{calculated} - F_{measured}}{F_{measured}} \right| \times 100\% \quad (13)$$

348 As listed in Table 3, it can be found that the hydro-dynamic approach with the dynamic  
349 coefficient of 2.0 has the best performance in estimating the impact force on the flexible  
350 net with a small deviation of 5.8 %. While the hydro-static approach with the static  
351 coefficient of 1.0 fits quite well with the measured impact force on the supporting  
352 structures. This is reasonable since the dynamic impact from the granular flow can be  
353 attenuated by the flexible ring net, and the static loading can be transferred to the  
354 supporting structures. This phenomenon is also proved by the gradually increased  
355 tensile forces on Cable B Left and Cable B Right shown in Fig.13 (b). Thus, in the  
356 design of a flexible barrier for debris flow mitigation, the hydro-dynamic approach and  
357 the hydro-static approach can be used in the design and the selection of the flexible ring  
358 net and the supporting structures, respectively. Even the dynamic coefficient and the  
359 static coefficient suggested by Kwan and Cheung (2012) are feasible in this study, more  
360 tests are required to further verify more appropriate coefficients before they can be used  
361 in the design.



362

363 **5. Conclusions**

364 In this paper, an improved large-scale physical modelling facility for debris flow  
365 research and a well-arranged high-frequency measurement system are introduced.

366 Using this device, two tests were performed to study the behavior of a flexible barrier  
367 subjected to the impacts of granular flows. From the experimental data and their  
368 analysis, key findings and conclusions are summarized and presented as below:

369 (a) In Test 1, the front of the granular flow impacted the flexible ring net directly,  
370 deposited behind the barrier layer by layer, and formed a deposition wedge. After  
371 1.0 s, the following granular flow deposited behind the deposition wedge.

372 (b) The static loading and the dynamic loading co-existed in the impact process, and  
373 the static loading was dominant. The static loading attributed to the gradual  
374 deposition of aggregates, and the dynamic loading was caused by the impact of the  
375 granular front. The latter arrived granular front applied impact loading on the  
376 flexible barrier via the deposition wedge. With the deposition of aggregates, the  
377 stationary debris formed a cushion behind the barrier and attenuated all the impact  
378 loading from the following granular front.

379 (c) In Test 2, the second granular flow in a multiple flow event was performed. The  
380 velocity and the flow depth of the granular flow decreased during movement, and  
381 the front stopped before it can reach the flexible barrier due to the large basal  
382 friction between the moving granular flow and the granular deposition and the poor  
383 fluidity of the dry granular flow.

384 (d) The impact loading on a flexible ring net was directly measured from the tensile  
385 forces on the central area of the flexible ring net. In Test 1, the measured impact





386 force on the flexible ring net is 10.96 kN.

387 (e) The contribution of flexibility to impact loading reduction is quantified by  
388 introducing the Loading Reduction Rate (LRR). By calculating the impact loading  
389 transferred to the supporting structures, it can be concluded that almost 28 % of the  
390 impact loading from the granular flow was attenuated by the flexible ring net in  
391 Test 1.

392 (f) From the comparisons of the hydro-dynamic approach and the hydro-static  
393 approach with the measured impact forces on different components, it is found that  
394 the hydro-dynamic approach with the dynamic coefficient of 2.0 fits well with the  
395 measured impact force on the flexible ring net, and the hydro-static approach with  
396 the static coefficient of 1.0 has a good performance in estimating the impact force  
397 on the supporting structures.

398

399 The motion characteristics of the multiple granular flows indicate that the motion and  
400 the impact of the following debris flow can be resisted or eliminated by the deposition  
401 of previous debris flow. By applying the LRR and suitable impact loading estimation  
402 approaches, the design of a flexible barrier can be optimized by designing different  
403 components such as the flexible ring net and the supporting structures individually,  
404 which provides a safer and more economical method in design. In the future, the tests  
405 of rapid debris flows will be conducted to investigate the behavior of debris flows and  
406 examine the performance of a flexible barrier under the impact of rapid debris flows.

407

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## Tables

502

503

**Table 1.** Main properties of aggregates used in the test

Main properties	Values
<i>The total volume of aggregates in Test 1 and Test 2 (m<sup>3</sup>)</i>	4
<i>Particle diameters (mm)</i>	15 ~ 30
<i>Internal friction angle (°)</i>	36
<i>Interface friction angle (°) (between aggregates and painted steel plate)</i>	28
<i>Bulk density (kg/m<sup>3</sup>)</i>	1600

504



505 **Table 2.** Values of measured parameters and calculated results in Test 1

Parameters and results	Values
<i>Moving speed (m/s)</i>	5
<i>Included angle <math>\theta</math> (<math>^{\circ}</math>)</i>	130
<i>A<sub>measured</sub> (m<sup>2</sup>)</i>	0.644
<i>A<sub>impact</sub> (m<sup>2</sup>)</i>	1.44
$\sum_{i=1}^{i=n} F_{tensile,i}$ (kN)	11.59
<i>F<sub>measured</sub> (kN)</i>	4.9
<i>l<sub>impact</sub> (m)</i>	0.242
<i>l<sub>post</sub> (m)</i>	2.7
<i>h<sub>debirs</sub> (m)</i>	0.086
<i>h<sub>deposit</sub> (m)</i>	0.58
<i><math>\alpha</math> (<math>^{\circ}</math>)</i>	62
<i><math>\beta</math> (<math>^{\circ}</math>)</i>	24
<i><math>\gamma</math> (<math>^{\circ}</math>)</i>	76
<i><math>\delta</math> (<math>^{\circ}</math>)</i>	60
<i>F<sub>AL</sub> (kN)</i>	0.062
<i>F<sub>AR</sub> (kN)</i>	0.062
<i>F<sub>BL</sub> (kN)</i>	0.79
<i>F<sub>BR</sub> (kN)</i>	0.79
<i>F<sub>Cables, equivalent</sub> (kN)</i>	7.89
<i>F<sub>impact</sub> (kN)</i>	10.96
<i>Loading Reduction Rate (LRR) (%)</i>	28.01

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508 **Table 3.** Comparisons of the calculated impact forces using simple approaches with  
 509 the measured impact forces on different components of a flexible barrier in Test 1

Simple approaches for impact force estimation	Calculated impact force (kN)	RE with impact force on the flexible net (%)	RE with impact force on the supporting structures (%)
		$F_{impact} = 10.96 \text{ kN}$	$F_{Cables, equivalent} = 7.89 \text{ kN}$
$F_{calculated} = \alpha \rho_{bulk} v_0^2 h w$ (hydro-dynamic approach with $\alpha=1.5$ ) (Hungry et al. 1984)	7.74	29.4	1.9
$F_{calculated} = \alpha \rho_{bulk} v_0^2 h w$ (hydro-dynamic approach with $\alpha=2$ ) (Kwan and Cheung 2012)	10.32	<b>5.8</b>	30
$F_{calculated} = \kappa \rho_{bulk} g h_{deposit}^2 w$ (hydro-static approach with $\kappa=1$ ) (Kwan and Cheung 2012)	7.92	27.7	<b>0.38</b>

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511





512 **Figure lists**

513 **Fig.1.** (a) side view of a large-scale physical model design (unit in mm) and (b) view of the  
514 physical modelling facility constructed at a site in Hong Kong

515 **Fig.2.** Calibration of a tension link transducer

516 **Fig.3.** (a) schematic diagram of a flexible barrier and (b) front view of the flexible barrier with  
517 numbered tension link transducers between rings and the measured area in the physical  
518 model (unit in m)

519 **Fig.4.** Aggregate samples in the granular flow impact tests (unit in mm)

520 **Fig.5.** Relation of the deposition height of the granular flow, horizontal deformation of the  
521 flexible barrier and tensile force of Transducer 1 with time in Test 1

522 **Fig.6.** Side profiles of deposited aggregates at different times in Test 1

523 **Fig.7.** Recorded forces with time by the mini tension link transducers between rings in Test 1

524 **Fig.8.** Interpretation of the typical video frames in Test 1 recorded by (a) the side-view camera  
525 and (b) the front-view camera with the data of tensile force from Transducer 1

526 **Fig.9.** Motion of the granular flow in Test 2

527 **Fig.10.** Side profile of the depositions in Test 1 and Test 2 and the velocity change of the  
528 granular flow in Test 2 with the moving distance

529 **Fig.11.** (a) sketch of the flexible barrier under the impact of a granular flow and (b) the  
530 simplified force analysis of the measured area in the cross-section of Transducer  $i$  and  
531 Transducer  $i+1$

532 **Fig.12.** Sketch of the impact and measured area in Test 1 and the maximum tensile forces  
533 measured from 10 mini tension link transducers under the impact of the granular flow  
534 (unit in m)

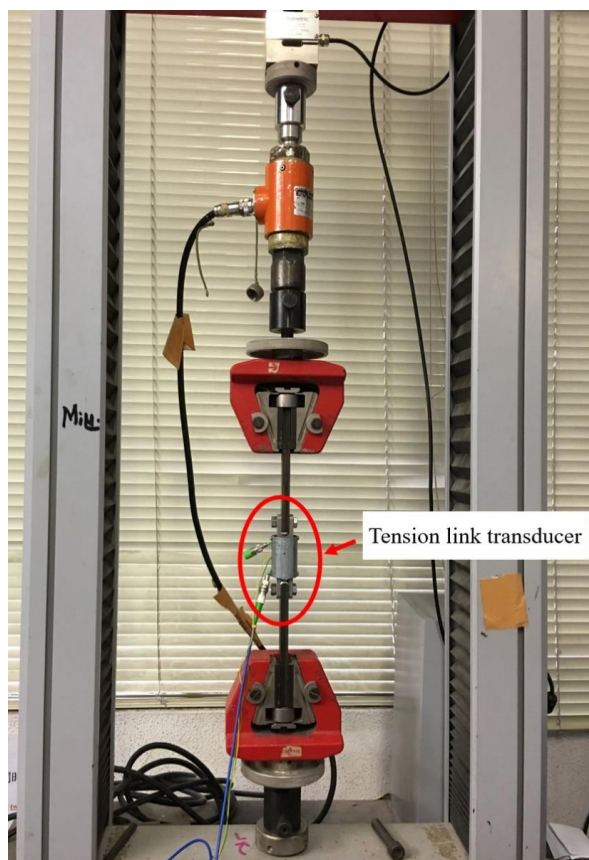
535 **Fig.13.** (a) photograph at the instant of the largest deformation with measured parameters and  
536 (b) recorded forces and time by the tension link transducers on the supporting cables in  
537 Test 1

538 **Fig.14.** (a) top-view and (b) left-side-view of sketches with the force analysis of the posts and  
539 cables

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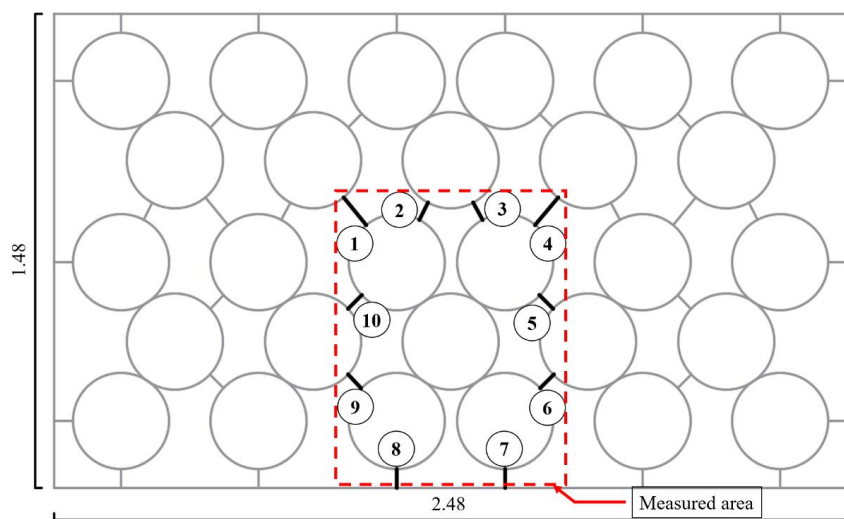


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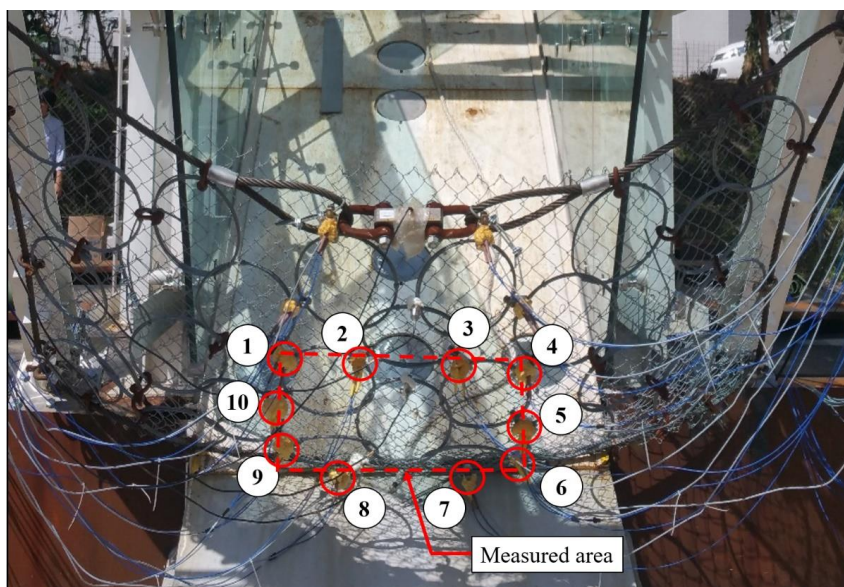
**Fig.2.** Calibration of a tension link transducer



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(a)



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(b)

**Fig.3.** (a) schematic diagram of a flexible barrier and (b) front view of the flexible barrier with numbered tension link transducers between rings and the measured area in the physical model (unit in m)

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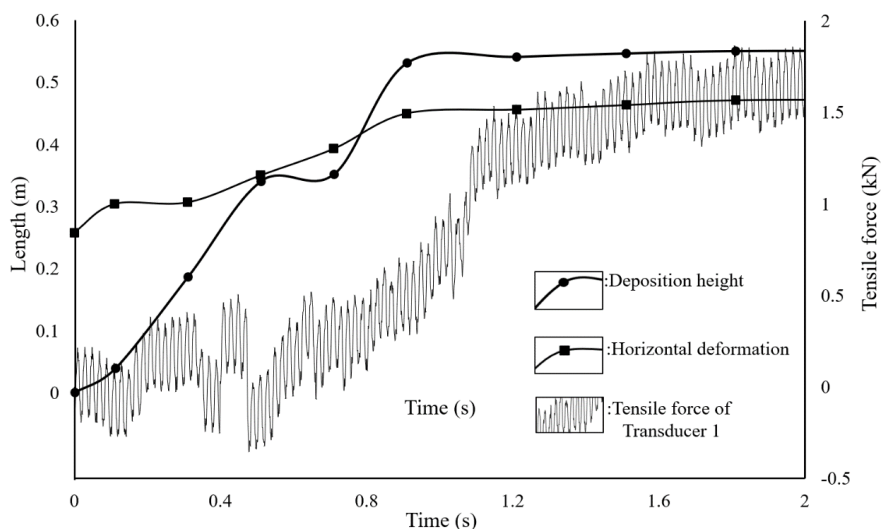


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562 **Fig.4.** Aggregate samples in the granular flow impact tests (unit in mm)

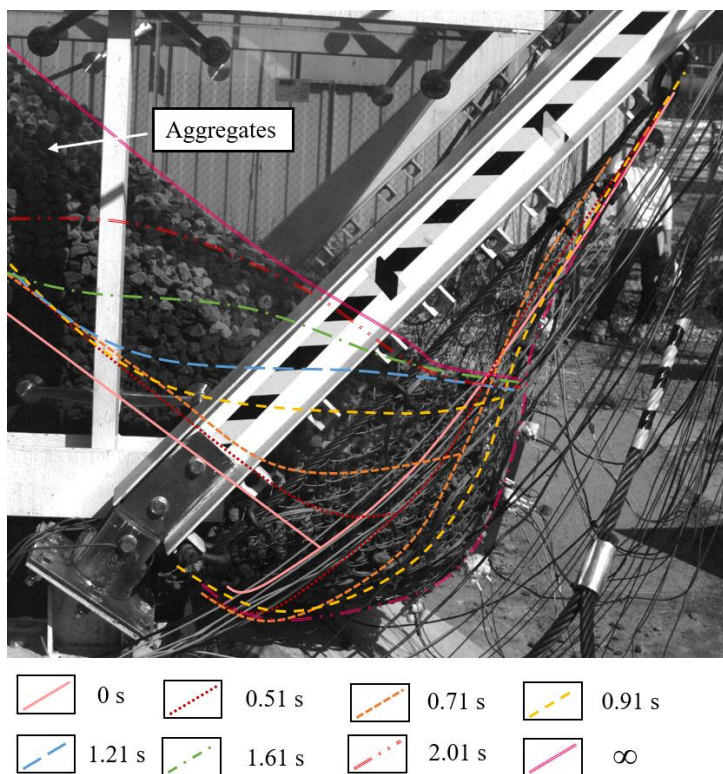
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565 **Fig.5.** Relation of the deposition height of the granular flow, horizontal deformation  
566 of the flexible barrier and tensile force of Transducer 1 with time in Test 1

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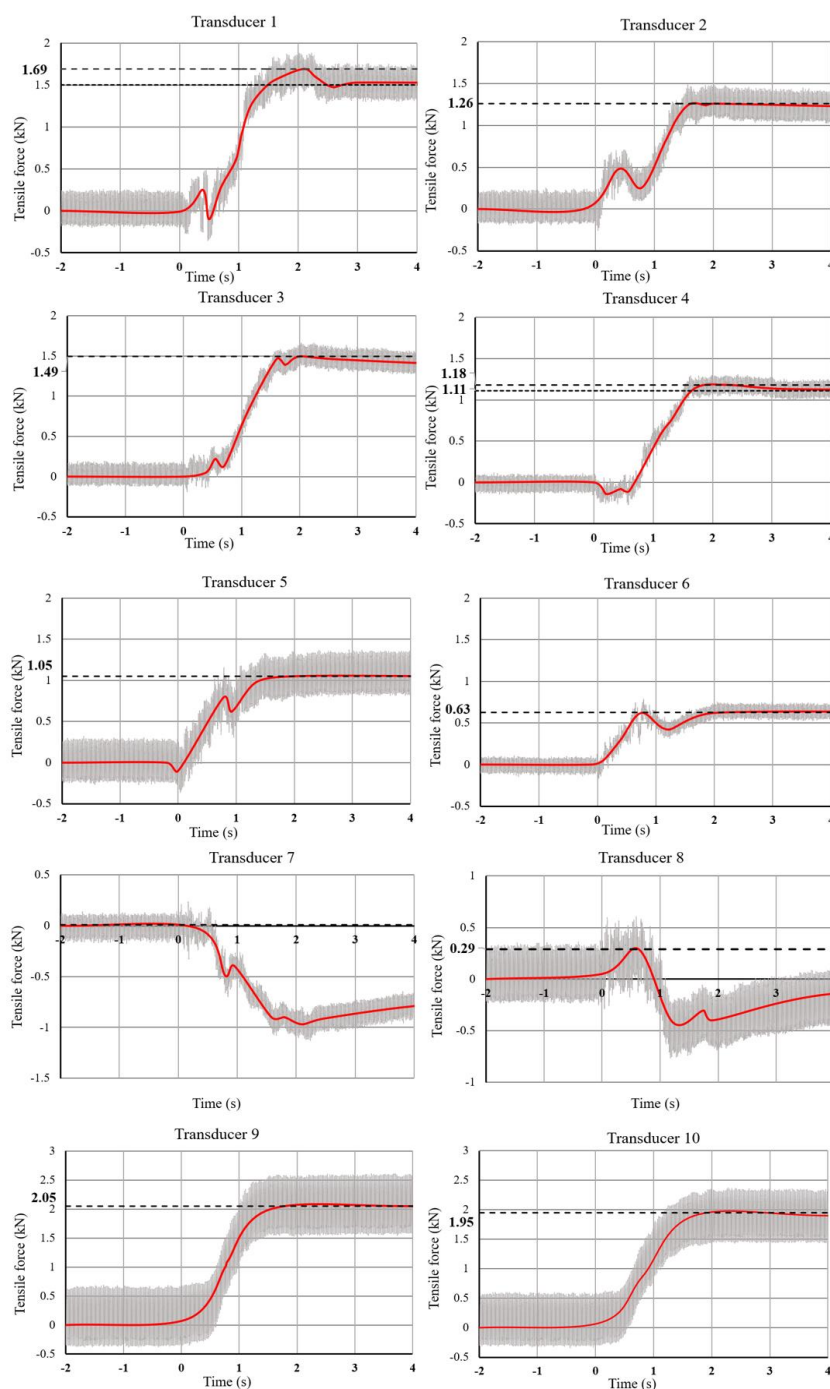
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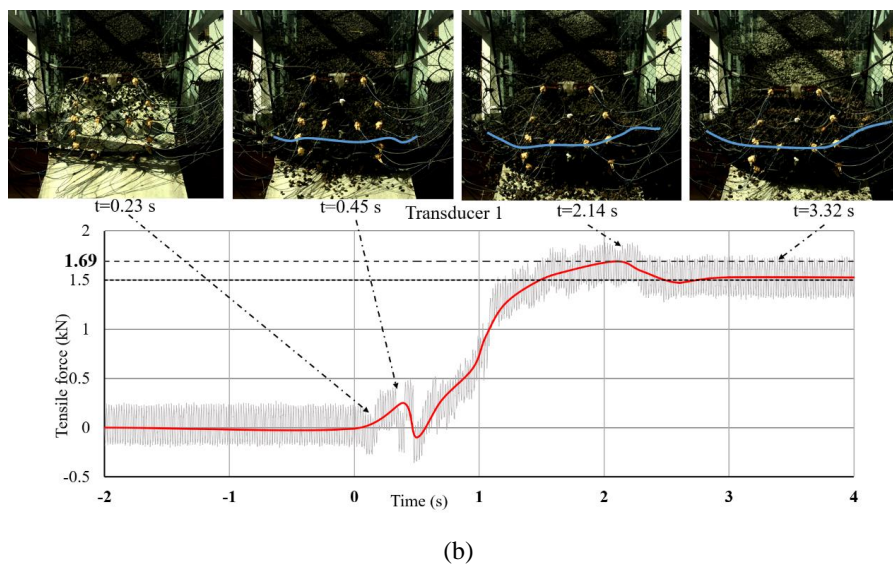
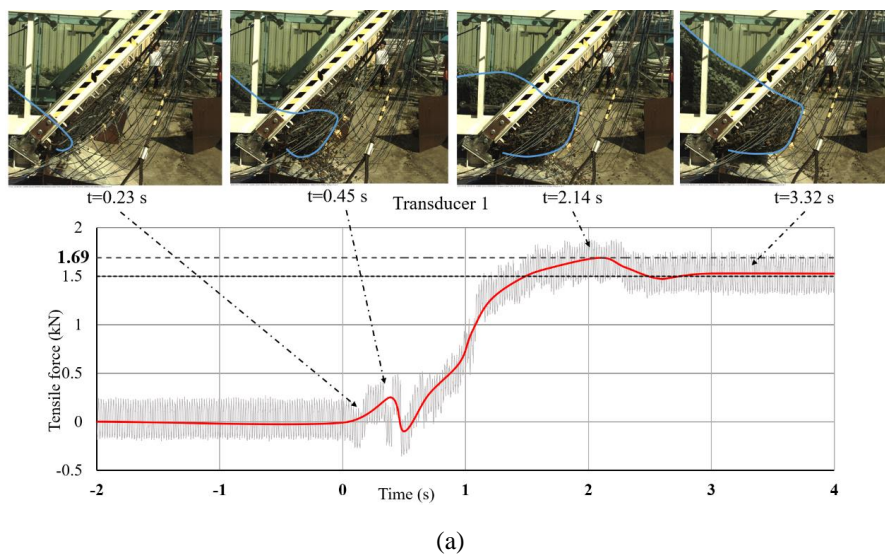
**Fig.6.** Side profiles of deposited aggregates at different times in Test 1



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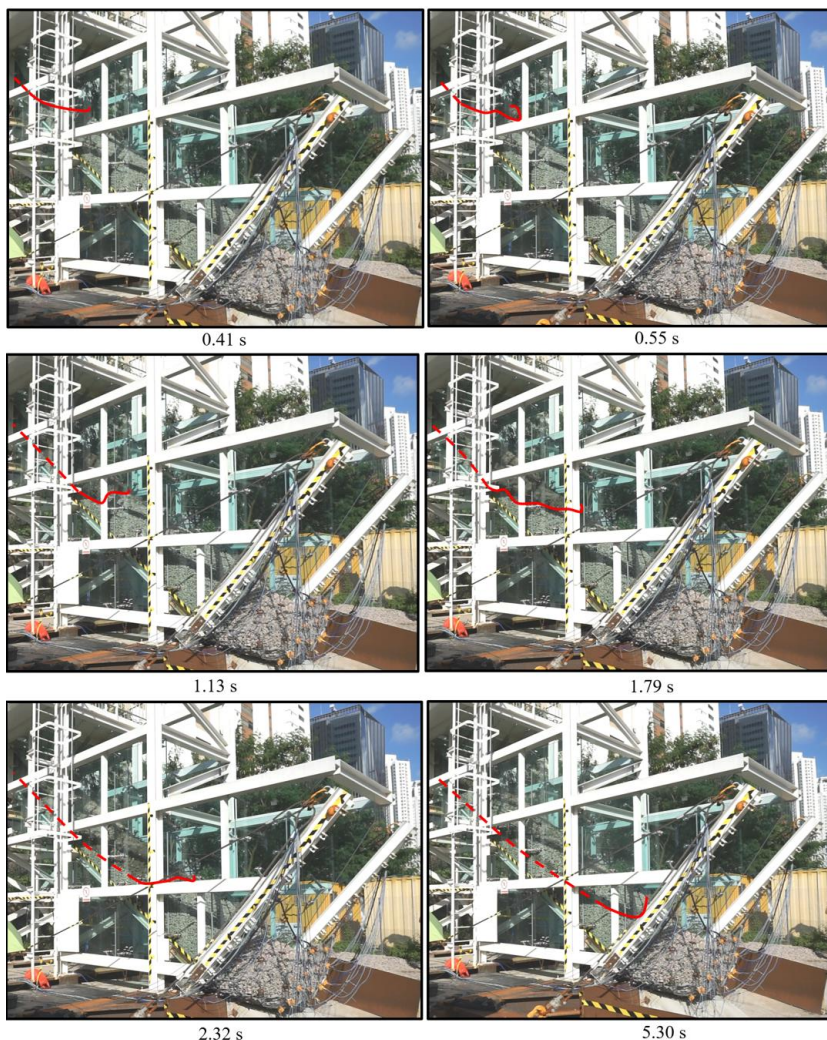
**Fig.7.** Recorded forces with time by the mini tension link transducers between rings in Test 1





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581 view camera and (b) the front-view camera with the data of tensile force from  
582 Transducer 1

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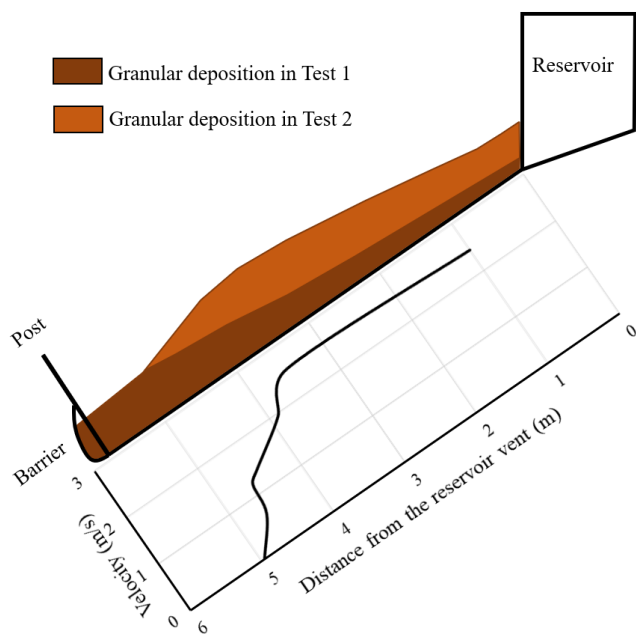


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**Fig.9.** Motion of the granular flow in Test 2



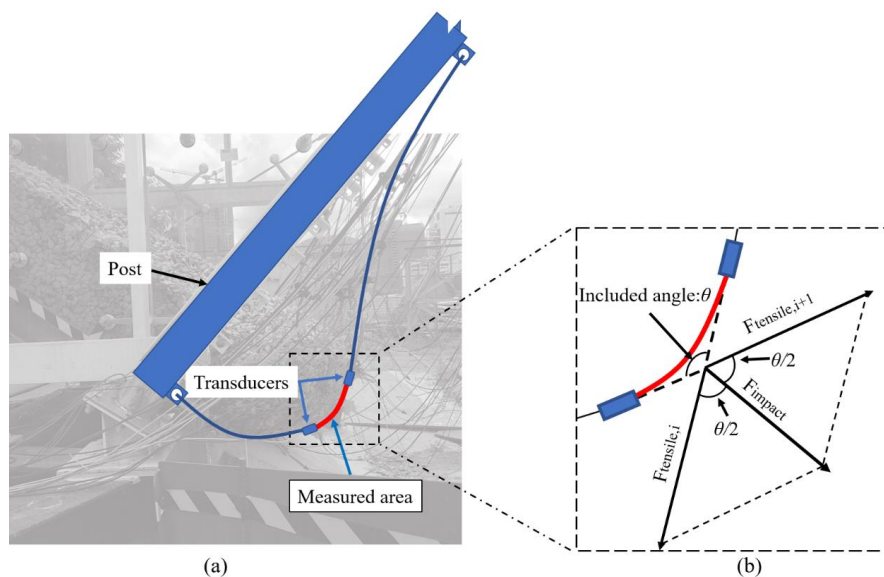
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588 **Fig.10.** Side profile of the depositions in Test 1 and Test 2 and the velocity change of  
589 the granular flow in Test 2 with the moving distance

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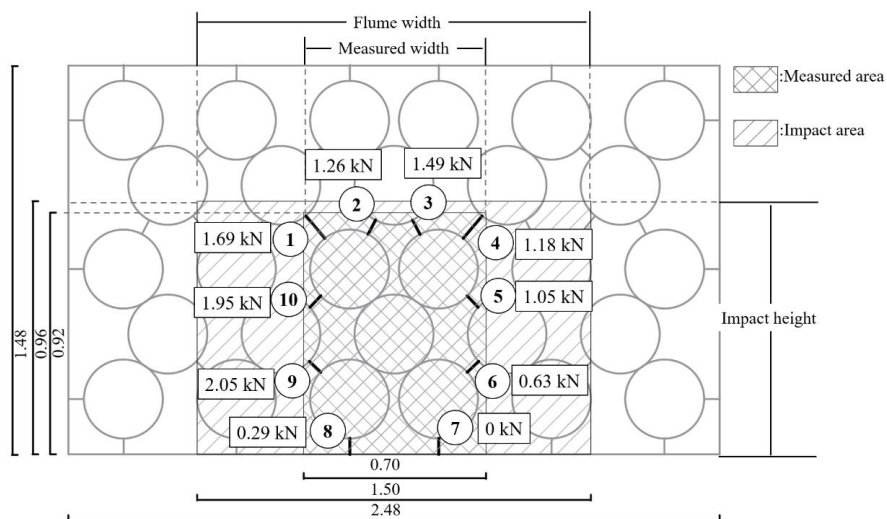
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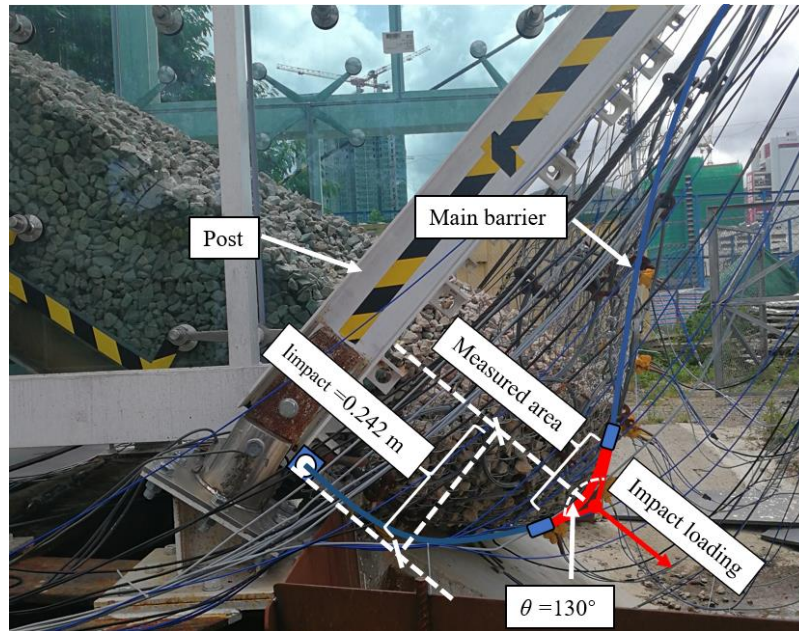
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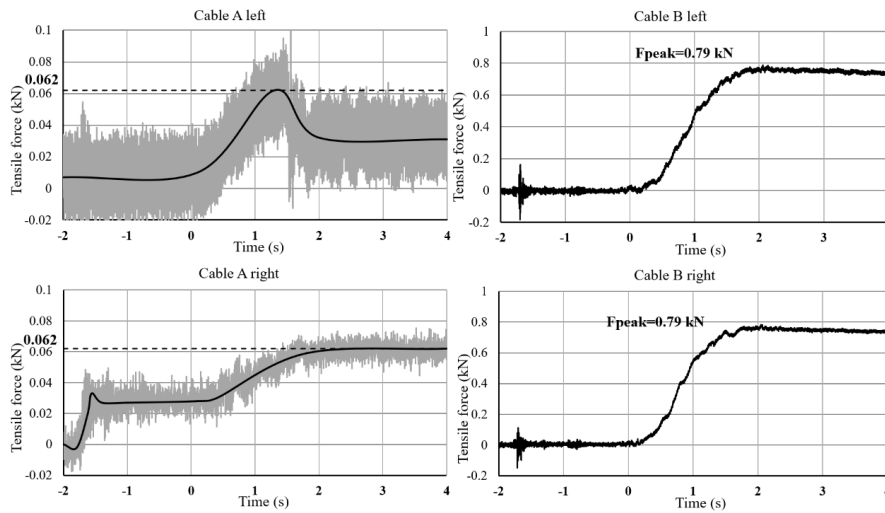




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(a)



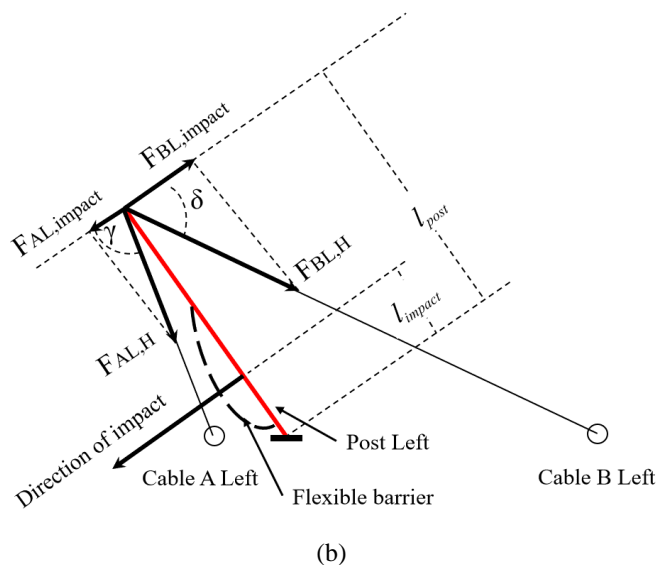
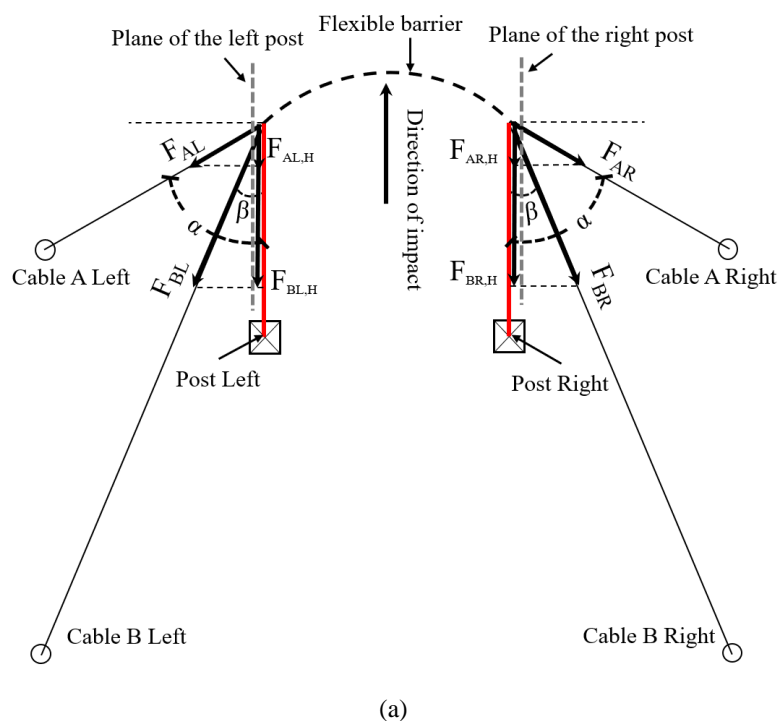
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(b)

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 618 posts and cables

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