


**Essay**

## Account of Residence in Indonesia

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### 1. Introduction

I was sent to PT. KYB Hydraulics Manufacturing Indonesia (hereinafter "KHMI") located in Indonesia in October 2015 and worked for the company as an expatriate for about six years and eight months until my repatriation in June 2022. During the expatriation, I definitely experienced various things. In this essay, I've written several episodes I remember rather freely like a collection of short stories. I will be happy if you take time to read them.

### 2. Indonesian is the Second Easiest Language in the World

When I asked the then President of KHMI "is there anything I should prepare for expatriation?", I was told, "First of all, learn Indonesian to be able to have conversations in everyday life". Before expatriation, I took an Indonesian course for about 90 hours. The teacher was a Japanese who used to live in Indonesia for quite a long time and taught me not only the language but also local culture and customs. This information was very useful for me to live in Indonesia during my expatriation. One thing that particularly impressed me in the Indonesian course was the phrase "Indonesian is the second easiest language in the world" as seen in the title of this section. Probably when my learning came to a deadlock, the teacher abruptly told me, "Indonesian is the second easiest language in the world". This phrase was followed by the question "What do you think is the easiest language in the world?" I answered, "I think it's English", because it is widely used as an official language in the world. The teacher gave me an unexpected answer full of humor, "Unfortunately no, the correct answer is your mother language". Those were the teacher's words to encourage me to have confidence since Indonesian is the next easiest language to your mother language that you are familiar with.

### 3. No Orders

In October 2015 when I moved to Indonesia, the Southeast Asian Region including Indonesia saw a significant slowdown in demand for construction equipment. Only less than one year had passed since KHMI had started operation. During that time, the company had no product delivery at all in some months partially because it was able to produce only one model of construction equipment. I was

told by the President as soon as I arrived at KHMI, "You do not need to report to duty on Friday since we've just decided to make Friday a no-work day to reduce production". I then recalled those days when I had joined KYB as a newcomer. When I reported to work at Gifu South Plant which was my temporary workplace in that July, the General Affairs Manager told me that, "Those who have been assigned to Hydraulic Engineering should take a paid leave on next Monday. Full-time employees belonging to Hydraulic Engineering will be off for lower production, but trial employees will not be covered". History was repeated. The words of the President made me feel insecure about the start of my work in Indonesia which would begin with a no-work day for lower production. I managed to switch my mind by recognizing the situation as "I will only rise up from the current worst of times" and then started to work.

On those days on which workers had nothing to directly produce, we provided group education. But we almost ran out of suitable topics for lectures. Workers were under accumulated stress as they continued taking lectures sitting in a classroom. We thought it better that workers should do some physical exercise and then decided to ask them to develop a futsal ground on an expanded space of the premises for nearly half of each working day. I also tried to take time to work together with them in developing the ground so that they could recognize me. Finally, the futsal ground was properly completed, and I sometimes found employees playing futsal after work. However, as they gradually came to work harder with overtime and a two-shift operation, the futsal ground fell into disuse and eventually fully deteriorated. While I regretted the deterioration in spite of our efforts to develop the ground, I also felt happy with the increase in production.

### 4. When You Are in Trouble...

I sometimes feel acutely aware that an important thing in living in an unfamiliar place is the link among people. KHMI operates a welding process using CO<sub>2</sub> gas. One day, a rectifier installed on a CO<sub>2</sub> gas cylinder had a failure, which interrupted the gas supply resulting in a production shutdown. We informed Gifu South Plant of the fact, but they replied they did not use the rectifier used by KHMI because their gas supply system for welding was different from ours. We then had to manage to obtain a rectifier of the same type in Indonesia. Since the target equipment was a product made in Japan, the Indonesian staff were at a loss with no prospect of obtaining the

equipment. Then, I happened to recall the face of a person from a trading company from which we bought hydraulic fluid and welding wires. When I got in touch with him right away, he told me he would check it out quickly. After just a few hours, I was informed that he would send a unit that had just arrived at the airport out to us. Thanks to his arrangement, we successfully minimized the line shutdown. After that, he helped us over and over again when we were in a tight corner. We are gratefully obliged to him.

Indonesia saw the outbreak of COVID-19 around April 2020. Its Delta variant raged in July 2021. Under the circumstances, we exchanged information about COVID-19 with our customers, suppliers, and friends and acquaintances, and then cooperated with each other to manage to overcome the difficulty. We finally did it thanks definitely to the network of people we had built. The pandemic reminded me anew that networks are so important for expatriates working far away from Japan.

### 5. Delivering Products to Customers

KHMI manufactures hydraulic cylinders for construction equipment. The company has only one assembly line. In order to avoid the risk of delay in delivery due to equipment failure or other trouble, KHMI operates the plant with a certain amount of product inventory on hand. However, in the event of a major equipment failure involving part replacement during a period with many orders, I had to spend several days feeling uneasy until the repair was done. If I found the inventory having gradually decreased in the course of making rounds of the plant, I checked out the upcoming delivery schedule in the next morning meeting. I was often waiting for replacement parts to arrive at the plant while trying to figure out until when we would be able to continue delivering products with the existing inventory. That was quite stressful indeed. When the parts arrived and we completed the replacement work to resume production, I felt very happy together with the local employees. I breathed a sigh of relief when I heard the production equipment starting to make a sound. Then I went back to work in the office.

A hydraulic cylinder consists of about 40 kinds of parts when they are counted by item number. Naturally, the cylinder cannot be assembled even if only a single part is missing. In the morning meeting one day, I was told that the production schedule had to be postponed due to a lack of seal parts. A seal product is generally compatible with other counterparts as long as they are identical in size. Unfortunately, the seal part we used had no other counterpart of the same outside and inside diameters. I heard that, if the next sea freight arrived as scheduled, the product delivery would be made with no problem at all. I knew things would usually get harder under such a situation. In fact, the freight was delayed as expected. Our staff from Production Management eventually went out to the forwarder's warehouse to meet the arrival of the container at the warehouse and receive the necessary parts from the container. They hurried back to KHMI to bring them to the assembly line and managed to successfully deliver the product at the last minute by the delivery time.

Another experience I remember was a local supplier ranking for delivery performance announced at a supplier

meeting of our customer. In addition to the conventional announcement of quality failures and worst suppliers, the results of their evaluation of delivery performance were indicated at that meeting. As I was confident that we had never delayed a delivery, I tried to find the name of KHMI in the list from the top one by one, but I couldn't see it. I finally found our name around the middle of the list. Actually, the customer evaluated suppliers by marking their delivery as "on time", "early", or "delayed". KHMI had certainly never delayed any delivery but showed a relatively high rate of early delivery. This was the cause of the lower than expected rank of KHMI. Then, first of all, we interviewed the customer to hear the evaluation criteria, successfully identifying, among the information provided by the ordering system, the parameters used to determine whether a delivery is late or early along with the reference date. Next, we looked back at the delivery performance in the past to investigate possible factors leading to the evaluation results of "early" deliveries. The investigation revealed that KHMI moved forward some deliveries in order to raise the loading efficiency of motor trucks, which were then evaluated as "early" deliveries. KHMI originally operated the plant with a certain amount of product inventory on hand and the customer was located around only 10 km away from the KHMI plant. From these reasons, we determined that we could make delivery on time by transporting the products of the models in the quantity as instructed by the ordering system in auto trucks we arranged every day. With this new delivery system, KHMI actually had to deliver products more often. So, we changed the forwarder to another located in the same industrial park as KHMI for freight cost reduction and then started to make deliveries according to the exact delivery date, item number and quantity instructed by the customer's ordering system. In the next supplier meeting, KHMI won the No. 1 prize for on-time delivery with 100% delivery achievement. I'm very glad to hear that KHMI still continues to achieve 100% on-time delivery.

### 6. Clothing, Food and Living

The first is "clothing". As you know, Indonesia is located in the tropical zone right on the equator. The year can be divided into two seasons: rainy and dry seasons. Since there are almost no daily temperature variations throughout the year, you do not need to change clothing by season. Still, a big and famous Japanese apparel shop that I often found in shopping malls in Jakarta sold down jackets and clothing with functions such as moisture absorption and heat generation during the Japanese winter. While these products were definitely convenient for me to temporarily go back home in the winter to Japan, I doubted if Indonesians really needed to use these goods. The winter in Japan generally corresponds to the rainy season in Indonesia. In the rainy season, the average temperature is slightly lower than that in the dry season. I actually felt the intense sunlight in the dry season and chilly in the rainy season. Taking into account these changes in climate in Indonesia, I had a hunch that's why such winter clothing was in stores even in Indonesia.

The next topic is "food". Many Japanese-owned companies had branched out into Jakarta where I lived and around the industrial park in Bekasi where KHMI was

located. These places had a variety of Japanese restaurants. Some of them directly bought airfreighted seafood from the Japanese market. As I describe in detail in the paragraph for "living" later, after work I used to take dinner at a Japanese restaurant in the industrial park before going back home because the Jakarta suburban area often had traffic jams. That restaurant served a variety of Japanese food cooked by the full-time Japanese chef. I went to the restaurant almost every night on weekdays. The Japanese meals in the restaurant always appealed to me and conversations with familiar Indonesian staff there allowed me to refresh my mind.

I often had Indonesian food for lunch after playing golf on weekends. I looked back on how I had been playing while eating Satay (skewered meat; salty or marinated chicken with coconut milk is popular) or Tahu Goreng (fried tofu). It was common practice for me to finish off a night of drinking with Nasi Goreng (Indonesian style fried rice), Me Goreng (Indonesian style fried noodle), or Soto Ayam (curry-flavored soup with chicken and rice vermicelli, sometimes containing rice). What I personally loved was Sop Buntut, which is a rather light taste, spicy soup made with oxtails. You may take Sop Buntut with plain rice and add Sambal (chili sauce) or lime to enjoy taste variations. This is one of my recommendations, although I did not eat it so often.



**Photo 1** Sop Buntut (in the right bowl)

I think that most Japanese like the typical taste of Indonesian cuisine. However, those who are not fond of spicy food (like me) should be careful of some Indonesian dishes because they use a good amount of red pepper. On the other hand, most Indonesian beverages taste sweet. Even coffee and tea are very sweet as they are served with sugar already mixed in as standard. When ordering, I needed to ask them to give me a "non-sweet" drink.

The final topic is "living". I lived in an apartment in the center of Jakarta for all the six years of my expatriation. The 1st to 3rd floors of the office and apartment complex had a small-sized shopping mall including Japanese-operated supermarkets, Japanese restaurants, and ramen shops. I never felt any inconvenience during my stay in the apartment on holidays.

The industrial park where KHMI is located was about 40 km away from the apartment. It was "normally" an

approximately 40-minute ride to report to duty using an easy-to-drive highway, but heavy traffic jams frequently occurred due to traffic accidents or heavy rain. Some people say that Jakarta is the world's worst city for traffic jams. Particularly, three transportation systems were under construction at that time: the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, the Jakarta-Bekasi-Bogor suburban railway, and the Jakarta-Karawang high-speed railway. When roadworks related to these lines were conducted simultaneously in the same area, it often took over three hours each way for commuting, which really frustrated me.

The car I used in Indonesia was not equipped with a navigation system. When I was involved in a traffic jam or moved to a place I did not know, I used map applications, which had evolved with the spread of smartphones, to figure out the best route or predict the time to arrive at the destination. These applications were very convenient tools but required me to take care when driving on an unfamiliar open road. This is because, while map applications indicate busy traffic in color, I was often caught in a traffic jam where cars could not move an inch even after selecting a "busy" route along open roads rather than a "jammed" route. While Indonesian highways cannot be accessed by motorbikes, its open roads are available for both four-wheeled cars and motorbikes. On an open road with a traffic jam, cars certainly could not move at all, but motorbikes could drive through the jam. This apparently causes the map applications to indicate that this road is "busy". In spite of this precaution, one of my good memories was of working together with my driver trying to reach the destination by giving navigation instructions to him with my smartphone in one hand saying, for example, "Turn left at the next corner" and "Go straight for a while". Looking back on the expatriation period, the person with whom I spent the longest time was my driver. I really thank him for getting me to various destinations safely for over six years.

## 7. Birthday

In Japan, the person whose birthday is celebrated usually receives birthday presents from their family and friends. In Indonesia, on the contrary, the person whose birthday is celebrated usually gives presents or buys food for their family and friends. Since I had learned this custom before my expatriation, I asked local staff to order a pizza delivery for my birthday before my first birthday after being sent to Indonesia. On the day, when I was back at my desk after a morning assembly, I suddenly heard a voice singing the Happy Birthday song and saw a staff member approaching me carrying a birthday cake. All members in the office celebrated my birthday. I still remember that I was very surprised because I had not expected such a celebration at all while I was overwhelmed by the great joy of being a member of KHMI. Thereafter, all staff members continued to celebrate my birthday every year with a birthday cake they had prepared.

In the last year of my expatriation, I wanted to give the staff a gift that they could use for a long time. Indonesian people generally bring a drink bottle ("my bottle") to their workplace or a place to go out. So, I gave a plastic drink bottle as a gift to all employees, drivers, janitors, and cleaners working in the premises of KHMI, expressing my gratitude for helping me so far.



**Photo 2** Birthday cake and KHMI staff on my birthday in the last year

## 8. The 100,000th Cylinder

KHMI rounds up actual production every month. At the beginning of 2021, we had almost achieved a total production of 100,000 cylinders. I was deeply moved by the fact that we had managed to accumulate production in spite of many different things happening up to then. Hoping to hold a company-wide celebration event, I came up with an idea. How about a quiz event for all employees to ask them "What model will the 100,000th cylinder be?". We listed up all possible models that could be produced at that time. Individual employees were supposed to vote for which model would be the 100,000th cylinder. Actually, only I had known about which cylinder on which day would be the 100,000th cylinder based on the planned and actual daily production data. Still, I was looking forward to finding out what model would be the 100,000th cylinder along with employees as the production schedule might change due to an abrupt change in orders for instance. Finally, the 100,000th cylinder was the model that was being produced most at that time, and which had been voted for by the highest number of employees. The prize money funded from my pocket was divided amongst those employees who voted for that model before the end of the 100,000th Cylinder Quiz. In

commemoration of the 100,000th cylinder, we decided to exhibit it in the entrance lobby along with the first mass-produced cylinder that was already being exhibited. We also decided to post the name of all 95 employees (including retirees) who had been involved in the production of the 100,000 cylinders beside the actual cylinder. We asked them to make a banner to indicate their name. I am very proud of having been present at this memorable event that added another page to the history of KHMI.



**Photo 3** The 100,000th cylinder (gold color) and banner

## 9. In Closing

When I was sent to KHMI, there were three expatriates including me. I was the only expatriate when I was about to be repatriated. In those days, I was in charge of a wider range of operations and had taken on heavier responsibility. Now I would like to appreciate anew the KHMI employees, who were always cheerful, for supporting me in continuing to work for KHMI until the end. I also feel that I was able to grow as a KAYABA personnel in such an environment where expatriates had to definitely do whatever they had to do.

On the other hand, I regret that I could not visit the World Heritage and other famous sites dotted throughout Indonesia partially because I was working on weekdays and went for golfing on weekends as well as being an expatriate away from my family. I hope I will visit Indonesia again with my family to enjoy the local culture before I forget the language and will take the opportunity of introducing the living environment during my expatriation to my family.

Author



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Joined the company in 1999.  
Management Manager, Sagami Plant,  
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