

Essay

Essay from expatriate in China

YAMAUCHI Kazuyuki

1. Introduction

I was a lone expatriate at KYB Industrial Machinery (Zhenjiang) Ltd. (KIMZ) in Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province, China for about two years and eight months from February 2021, which was in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that struck the whole world, until the end of September 2023, when the infection had subsided. At that time, the Chinese government enforced its zero-corona policy, which required all visitors to China, without exception, to be quarantined for a total of 28 days. After that, I started my expatriate life.

2. My 28 Days in Quarantine

First, I will show you how I lived during quarantine there.

When I flew to China, I had no choice but to fly from Kansai International Airport to Nanjing Lukou International Airport because only a few airports were open during the pandemic. I remember that there were few people in the Kansai airport building at that time, and only some of the restaurants were open. When I looked around after boarding the plane, I saw that the flight attendants and some passengers were wearing white protective clothing. There was an unusual, strange atmosphere in the cabin.

After arriving at Nanjing Airport, it took me quite a long time to leave the airport. I had to wait for the staff to check my PCR test results and health registration, which I had submitted in advance, and to take another PCR test. In addition, I had felt considerable anxiety about not knowing where to stay in quarantine until I arrived at Nanjing Airport, so I was relieved when I was directed to an acceptable hotel room.

Although hot food was provided three times a day for breakfast, lunch and dinner, I could hardly eat it because I am not keen on the spicy food specific to China. The instant food I brought from Japan and some food given by KIMZ helped me to endure the lonely, isolated life.

The Chinese New Year (Lunar New Year) came during my period in quarantine. As a special menu, shui jiao (boiled dumpling) was served for the day's dinner. It was delicious, but really heavy for my stomach. I fondly remember now that I had gastritis for a while.



Photo 1 A meal during my time in quarantine (special menu for the Chinese New Year)

3. Life in China

First, my experience of dining in China.

Since I am not keen on the above-mentioned spicy Chinese cuisine, I often went out to a Korean restaurant near my house and a truly Japanese-style yakitori restaurant in Zhenjiang City, where Japanese was understood. Drinking beer while watching baseball and football games on TV was the best way to enjoy my expatriation. It was quite good that I was able to enjoy various sports events in China, including the Tokyo Olympics, the FIFA World Cup, and the World Baseball Classic (WBC), which should have excited the Japanese nationwide.



Photo 2 Dining at a Japanese-style yakitori restaurant

China has advanced food delivery services. Food and goods are delivered from door to door by simply ordering

with your smartphone using apps. As the kind of person who likes to stay indoors, I really loved these services. However, on some weekends, thanks to such services, I did not leave my home at all. These may be services that are not good for your health.



Photo 3 Breakfast delivery



Photo 4 Delivery of grilled eel rice bowl

The next topic is shopping in China.

China has a communication app called WeChat, which is similar to LINE in Japan. This is one of the essential apps for living in China. Payment in almost all shops and restaurants is done with this app. China has gained an order of magnitude popularity of cashless payment compared to Japan.

This means that the battery life of your smartphone is critical and you must be extremely careful not to leave your smartphone behind.

However, this payment system is only available to those who have a bank account in China. It is unfortunate that foreign visitors without such a bank account cannot use the app.

On the other hand, mail-order application helped me a lot during my expatriation because it allowed users to buy even food sold in Japan, although the price was comparatively expensive.

4. Work in China

During my expatriation, I was mainly involved in the process improvement efforts of the production line of Kayaba Cylinder Highpressure (KCH) hydraulic cylinders

for use in 20 to 30 ton class hydraulic excavators, which are one of KYB's core products. The process improvement efforts included a horizontal deployment of improvements in Gifu South Plant, which is the parent plant. As the supervisor of the Production Engineering Dept. , I also supported original improvements made by KIMZ staff.

The KIMZ staff were highly motivated to improve. To be honest, I really had to try my best to follow the high level of their improvements and the high speed at which they were achieving those improvements. I felt very strongly that we, as expatriates, needed to model ourselves on them.

Among them, the first case of improvement by the Production Engineering Sect. was introduced at a production engineering presentation held during my expatriation. I felt proud at this event when such a memorable case was presented.

The presentation was made entirely in Japanese without an interpreter. KIMZ had many staff members who could speak Japanese in addition to the interpreters. That's why my Chinese didn't improve at all.

5. Temporarily Coming Home after One Year

At the end of February 2022, I temporarily came back to Japan after a year to also receive the COVID-19 vaccination. At that time, the Japanese government mainly required visitors to Japan to:

- submit a PCR test result with negative confirmation obtained before leaving the previous country,
- not travel by public transportation, and
- stay at home (or in a shelter) for one week to monitor their health.

After arriving at Narita Airport, I had to drive a rented car for about 440 kilometers to Gifu Prefecture, where my house was located. Fortunately, there was no problem because I am a person who likes to drive, but I had some anxiety because:

- I was driving for the first time in a year,
- the Japanese lane is the opposite of the Chinese lane, and
- I had never driven on the Metropolitan Expressway (*Shutoko*) before.

While suppressing my haste, I drove even more carefully than usual. Finally, after about seven hours of driving, I arrived home safely.

After coming home to be back with my family again, I spent the time with them with love and respect. In particular, we could together enjoy some events that were not possible during the expatriation, including watching baseball games at a ballpark, going to an amusement park, and playing baseball and sweating it out at a children's sports activity that my eldest son belongs to.

During the temporary return, I basically worked by

telecommuting and sometimes reported to Gifu South Plant and Gifu East Plant to meet my colleagues after about a year to greet them and collect information about the latest improvement activities and others.

Such a pleasant time finally came to an end. After completing the COVID-19 vaccination, it was time to return to China.



Photo 5 Watching a baseball game at Vantelin Dome Nagoya

I knew that the next temporary return would be a year or more ahead. Needless to say, I felt lonely when I left my family. However, I will never forget that, as an expatriate with family left behind in Japan, this only increased my eagerness to work even harder than ever.

6. Traveling in China

Let me change the subject and tell you about my travels in China during my expatriation. In June 2023, when the zero-corona policy was over and the COVID-19 pandemic had subsided, I visited Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, which is famous for the Terracotta Army. In September 2023, I was able to go to Datong, Shanxi Province.

In this essay, I will only describe the trip to Xi'an because space does not permit more. In June, China has consecutive holidays called the Dragon Boat Festival. By taking advantage of the holidays, I was able to travel with KIMZ staff for three nights. I had never gone out of Jiangsu Province, partly because of the effect of COVID-19 infection. I remember that I was excited to go out and learn about China, about which I knew little.

This was indeed China. Even domestic travel required us to take an airplane. It took us six or more hours by bullet train (equivalent to the Shinkansen in Japan). I felt how big the continent is.

When we arrived in Xi'an, the first thing we ate was

local food. I felt that the food was different in taste from that of Zhenjiang. Since I had heard that wheat is more popular than rice in this region, I often found restaurants serving bread and noodles made of wheat.

On the first day, we enjoyed restaurant hopping while sightseeing in the city. When I saw the brightly lit downtown at night, I felt again that this was indeed China.

On the second day, I took a taxi to the Terracotta Army Museum. To be honest, I had only had the impression that the Terracotta Army was just a lot of arrays of stone statues, obtained when I read about it in a textbook during my school days. When I actually visited the Terracotta Army, I realized for the first time that it was the tomb of the Qin Emperor Zin Shi Huang. The visit made me think of reading *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* thoroughly to learn much more about China, as I was not familiar with Chinese history originally.



Photo 6 A lit street in Xi'an

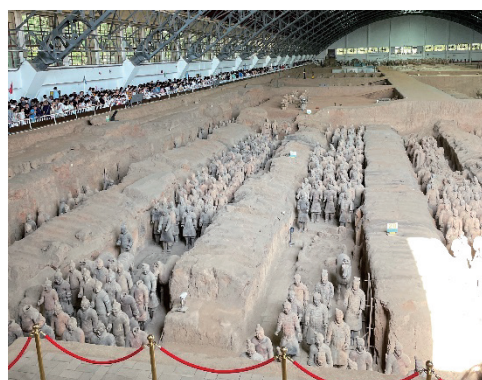


Photo 7 Terracotta Army

Partly because of the consecutive holidays, the inside of the museum was crowded with many tourists, which made it difficult for us to move forward. But it was good to learn about Chinese history.

For dinner, we had Biangbiang noodles, which are famous in Shaanxi Province for their Chinese characters with 56 strokes, which is the highest number of strokes in China. The noodles are pronounced "biang biang

mian", which is probably one of the typical characters that even Chinese people can read but not write.

Biangbiang noodles are a kind of mixed noodles without soup and are not as spicy as they look. The wide noodles can be mixed with chilies, Japanese pepper, and sweet and spicy thick sauce, and are very delicious.

On the third day, we climbed a mountain famous in China called Hua Shan, which is designated as a 5A-rated tourist attraction. I said "climbed", but of course we used the cable car. It was indeed a mountain considered as one of the Five Great Mountains of China. With the perfect weather, the scenery we saw from the mountain was so beautiful that I can still remember it clearly.

In fact, I was afraid to even walk on the ridge of the mountain because I don't like heights. I lost my footing at a typical photo spot without a fence, leaving me with unfortunate memories.



Photo 8 Biangbiang noodles



Photo 9 Scenery from Hua Shan

On the fourth and final day, we visited the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, which are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The grottoes are rock faces carved with Buddha statues. The stunning scene includes a large



Photo 10 Longmen Grottoes

Buddha statue over 10 m on the wall and many Buddha statues engraved in a cave. These statues were completed 1500 years ago. It is amazing that these statues still exist today.

7. In Closing

My expatriation began with 28 days in quarantine, which I will probably never experience again in my life, and at first I was very afraid. But now I can remember that the two years and eight months passed in a flash.

During my expatriation, many people supported my work and life in China. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude.

In addition, I sincerely thank those who held a farewell party many times just before my repatriation. I will never forget the taste of baichu, the typical Chinese liquor,



Photo 11 Dinner with staff of Production Engineering Dept.



Photo 12 Dinner with staff of Production Dept.

which I drank with the staff.

Finally, I have to say again that I was a lone expatriate, not taking my family with me to China. I left my two sons in Japan, both of whom are now in elementary school and increasingly able to take care of themselves. At the time of my departure, however, my older son was in the senior class of a kindergarten and needed a lot of

looking after, and my younger son was at his most boisterous in the junior class of the same kindergarten.

I would like to express my gratitude to my wife for raising two such sons all by herself.

I would also like to thank the sons who tolerated their loneliness in the absence of their father, even though we talked every morning by video phone.

Author



YAMAUCHI Kazuyuki

Joined the company in 2005.
Administration Dept. (Cost Planning),
Gifu South Plant
Took present post after working in
Production Engineering Sect. of Gifu
South Plant, and as expatriate at
KIMZ (HC).