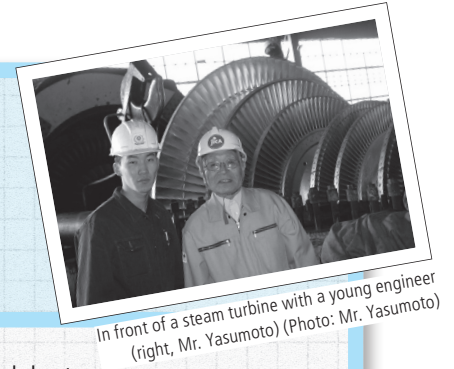


Protecting the Lifeline of Mongolia —Senior Volunteer Strives to Improve Thermal Power Plant—



In front of a steam turbine with a young engineer (right, Mr. Yasumoto) (Photo: Mr. Yasumoto)

With the success of Mongolian sumo wrestlers, Japanese people have become quite familiar with their country, Mongolia. But did you know that every year, the winters in Mongolia are very harsh, with temperatures reaching 40 degrees Celsius below zero? In winter 2009, approximately eight million livestock of nomadic people were affected by the heavy snow storm that swept through Mongolia that year. Protecting the livelihoods of the Mongolian people from the severe cold is "thermal power plant No. 4" in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar.

This power plant is the country's largest cogeneration power plant and provides 70% of all the electricity in Mongolia and 65% of the hot water for the central heating system in the Ulaanbaatar district. It was put into operation with the assistance from the former Soviet Union in 1983, when the country was still under the socialist regime. After the assistance was suspended, however, it became difficult for Mongolia to generate power on its own and Japan started providing support^(*).

Mr. Akihiro Yasumoto has been working at the power plant as a senior volunteer since 2008. Mr. Yasumoto studied primarily thermodynamics and heat-transfer engineering from the undergraduate to graduate level at Kyushu University. After joining Hitachi, Ltd., he was involved in various business about overseas thermal power plants, including contracts and construction. After his retirement, Mr. Yasumoto had a strong enthusiasm to contribute his experience and skills in electricity to countries abroad. That is when he learned about the recruitment for Senior Volunteers, and he applied. Although by then Mr. Yasumoto had already reached the age limit for Senior Volunteers, which is 69 years old, he was accepted for his skills and personality and assigned to Mongolia.

Mr. Yasumoto works for the Executive Director's Office and Planning Department of the power plant, and advises management improvement. Although Mr. Yasumoto knows everything about the workings of a power plant, in his new task, he has had to gradually face an entirely different set of challenges he had not confronted before.

In Mongolia, the prices of electricity and hot water are kept

low for historical reasons and due to the economic situation. With the increasing price of coal, which fires the power plant, however, the power plant was just barely turning in a profit. Therefore, it postponed the purchase of testing equipment necessary to continue safe operations as well as non-urgent repairs of machinery, and continued to operate with only temporary repairs. Under these circumstances, an accident was waiting to happen.

Mr. Yasumoto promptly took action. He, together with the executives of the power plant, lobbied to the government, as well as the chairman of the parliament who visited the power plant, insisting that unless the prices of electricity and hot water are raised, they could not pay salaries to their employees nor could purchase maintenance parts for the machinery. Thanks to Mr. Yasumoto putting up a fight, the prices of electricity and hot water were raised, which added momentum to the attitudes of employees towards their work.

In addition to urging external parties such as the government to take action given the limited budget, Mr. Yasumoto is also putting his wealth of knowledge and experience to good use to ensure the safe running of the power plant. He repeatedly urged his colleagues to concentrate inspections on severely worn-out parts and to create a list of spare parts which are piled up in the warehouse without being used and check to see if they could be used for other parts which need repair.

Regarding his colleagues, Mr. Yasumoto said, "The power plant staff members, who are working very hard to protect the energy resources amid the difficult management environment, deserve respect for their efforts and patience." In response, Mr. Tseveen, Executive Director of the power plant, expressed words of appreciation. "When we were at a loss as to what to do, Japan extended a helping hand. It also dispatched you, a power plant friend."

The development of the young engineers at the power plant encourages Mr. Yasumoto. "My role is to protect the lifeline of Mongolia with the staff of the power plant." At age 71, which he celebrated in this very cold land, Mr. Yasumoto continues to embark on his challenge.



Discussion about technology with Executive Director Tseveen (left, Executive Director) (Photo: Mr. Yasumoto)

*1 ODA loan, grant aid, and technical cooperation