

# Midterm Report



Towards

Mr. Paul Dudler, Chairman of the Scholarship Foundation

Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce

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Language School: Naganuma School

Company: Nihon Siber Hegner KK.

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# 2 Preface

*“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. “*

Mark Twain

After my graduation I was ready to throw off my bowlines and sail to new horizons. Explore. Dream. Discover.

A year in Japan through the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce was an opportunity for me to do so.

In this report I would like to talk about some experiences, impressions and thoughts I have had during the first six months of my journey.



## 3 Getting started in Japan

### 3.1 Accomodation

I decided to organize my accomodation through Sakura House.<sup>1</sup> The advantages of this option are that there is no key-money to be paid, they offer rooms in around 120 locations in all areas of Tokyo and there is only a booking fee of 30'000 Yen of which 20'000 Yen are paid back when moving out.

Just three weeks before my arrival in Tokyo I finally booked a room in the Sakura House in Kichijoji. At that point in time I had not much knowledge about which location would be convenient. It turned out that Kichijoji was quite a good choice for me.

Kichijoji is very popular among Japanese as well as foreigners because it offers everything one needs to live and is easily accessible by the Chuo-Line from Shinjuku and by the Inokashira-Line from Shibuya. My shared house is just minutes away from places such as Inokashira Park, Kichijoji Station and busy Sunroad shopping street.

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<sup>1</sup> Sakura House: [www.sakura-house.com](http://www.sakura-house.com), 19.09.2007



### 3.2 Visa

I initially tried to get a student visa for one year through my language school, and to change the visa status once I have an intern position. According to them however, there are two important requierments that need to be fulfilled to be eligible for a student visa. Firstly the tuition fee for a complete year must be paid, secondly application must be filed at least 6 months in advance. Considering that I was only planning to study for a

period of 6 months and haven't found a job at this point in time, I entered Japan as a tourist. For Swiss Citizens the Tourist Visa can be prolonged for another 3 months for a fee of 4'000 Yen , in the immigration office in Shinagawa.

A student visa would offer the advantage of being able to purchase a student commuter pass for 50% of the adult price. Disadvantages are that students who don't attend 80% of the classes or fail exams may lose their visa quickly and for each trip abroad a re-entry visa has to be issued.

I'm very fortunate to obtain a working visa by the end of September, sponsored by Nihon SiberHegner KK., my employer starting in October. I only had to turn in a current CV, my original Diploma in English, two passport-photos and a copy of my passport to the HR Department.

A working visa must be initially sponsored by a company, but once obtained it is attached to the person and swapping jobs has no impact on the visa status.

### **3.3 Bank Account**

From Reading various SJCC reports I learned, that opening a bank account in Japan is not such a simple task, since the bank

regulations concerning people on a temporary visa have changed.

I tried my luck with Mitsubishi Bank , Shinsen Bank and the Suitomo Banking Corporation. In the latter I finally achieved to open a Japanese bank account and received a cash card only one week later. At that time I didn't have a cell phone yet, therefore I filled in the number of a friend that accompanied me. In my case a Hanko (name stamp) was not necessary to open an account.

The most important lessons that I learned is never to give up and try if must be, different subsidiaries of the same banking institution.

The Japanese banking system seems very conservative and bureaucratic out of a Swiss perspective. It's complicated and time consuming to open a bank account, to transfer money and ATM machines are not accessible 24 hours. Between 8.00 AM and 6.00 PM money can be withdrawn free of charge, after that there is a fee of 105 Yen until closing hours at 8.00 PM. It doesn't make sense, in my understanding, to have to pay a fee because it's only a machine. Money can also be withdrawn at Post Offices (similar opening hours to banks) and at some convenient stores.

An observation I made is that In Switzerland money can be withdrawn 24 hours a day, but the shops close always very early, and in Japan shops are open around the clock, but the ATM's are not always accessible.

### **3.4 Cell Phone**

From reading the scholarships reports I was aware that on a temporary visa, I could only purchase a pre-pay phone in Japan. In my third week I went to a Softbank-Store near Shibuya Station to get such a phone. When I showed my Foreigner Card to the clerk, she asked me, why I not rather opt for a contract. I immediatly signed a two year contract with Softbank, even though I'm probably only staying in Japan for one year.

The reasons for my decision were that signing a two-year-contract entails that I get the cell phone for free, which would have cost me 16'000 Yen with an one-year-contract. If I leave the contract earlier, I have to pay the monthly fee for the months I don't fulfill my contract. Leaving one year earlier would still be much cheaper than having to buy the cell phone with a one-year-contract. Further advantages are the lower rates per

minute and calls to other people with a Softbank phone are free between 1.00 PM and 9.00 PM.

## **4 Language School**

### **4.1 Choice of School**

I chose the Tokyo School of the Japanese Language aka the Naganuma School. I based my decision mainly on the midterm report written by Martin Petrinec, which had an extensive chapter on the Naganuma School, and I compared hompages of languages schools on the SJCC list. After having studied two terms at this school I'm glad having chosen this school and can highly recommend studying there.

### **4.2 School & infrastructure**

The campus of the Naganuma School offers a language lab (LL Kyoshitsu), a computer room equipped with PC's and Mac's, featuring language training software to improve listening, pronunciation and reading capabilities and there is also a tiny library. Just minutes by foot there is a wide range of restaurants, where I usually had lunch with my classmates.

### **4.3 Teachers & Teaching Methods**

All my five teachers were enthusiastic about teaching and did a great job. It seems to be their personal goal that the students improve their level quickly. I was amazed about how much I could learn in a short time span.

From Monday through Friday I had classes from 9.00 AM to 12.30 PM. In the first lesson grammar from the day before is repeated, in the second lesson listening training takes place, in the third lesson new grammar is taught and in the fourth lesson is the time slot for kanji dictations, tests and further excercices.

### **4.4 Insight into Asia**

As I mentioned before I attended two terms of the Naganuma school. In both terms there were just one or two students from Europe. The other students were mainly Koreans, Taiwanese, and other Asians. This allowed me to gain insight into the Asian way of thinking and studying. I was always impressed how they pursued their studies. It was very hard to keep up with them, especially with the Koreans due to similar grammar to Japan, and with the Taiwanese, due to the Kanji's. The South East Asian students usually encountered more difficulties because

the school just offers books in English, Korean and Chinese. Some of the South East Asians were not very proficient in English and therefore had to translate everything on their own. A big advantage for the Asian students was also that they are used to this way of teaching. European and American students need more content while studying, ask many question and think too much. My Korean and Taiwanese classmates were excellent at learning by heart the complete text and grammar book.



## 5 Internship

I will start my internship with Nihon SiberHegner KK. on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. I was fortunate that I got accepted at the first company I applied to. I have had one interview with the Group HR Manager of Diethelm Keller Siber Hegner (DKSH) at Headquarters in Zurich and two further interviews in Tokyo, with people from Nihon Siber Hergner KK.

After six months of studying Japanese I am looking forward to yet another challenge.

## 6 Some Experiences, Impressions & Thoughts

### 6.1 Consumer Behaviour & Brand Awareness

Japanese customers are highly brand aware because they are concerned about the quality of a product and what other people think of them. The importance of quality can be observed in all areas. One beautiful example of good quality are the fruits and vegetables that are sold here. The shapes, colours and tastes are just perfect. Often the sizes of apples and other fruits amaze me, they are sometimes double or more of the fruits we eat in Switzerland.



Brand awareness is most obvious in fashion, electronic gadgets, cars and sports equipment. Due to the busy working life there is only little time for leisure activities, therefore the Japanese want to enjoy their sparetime at the most. It is very common to only have one hobby which they pursue with 100% commitment and the best equipment money can buy.

On my surfing trips to Chiba and Ibaraki I could observe how well equipped Japanese surfers are. They usually have the top of the range wetsuits and boards, in matching colours. It is common for Japanese Surfers to have a shower with an electric pump in the car. Reason for this is, that due to the denseley populated country the sea is polluted and the beaches that I have surfed at, have usually no infrastructure such as toilet and showers.

## **6.2 The Luncheons of SCCIJ in Tokyo**

Thanks to the initiative of Mr. Armin Frauenknecht, President of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (SCCIJ), the scholarship recipients are welcome to participate in the SCCIJ Luncheons for a reduced fee (3'000 Yen instead of 8'000 Yen).

The luncheons are a great opportunity to meet an interesting mix of people, to learn about some Swiss Japanese related topics and to enjoy the savour and atmosphere of a four-course meal at the Okura Hotel in the heart of Tokyo.

Especially during the time at the language school and staying in a shared house, most of the people I was in touch with were

other students and English teachers, therefore I appreciated meeting some professionals at the luncheons. For scholarship recipients without an internship, the members of the SCCIJ might be an invaluable source for finding working opportunities.

## **6.3 Design in Toyko & Pecha Kucha Night**

My younger brother had the opportunity to stay for two months in Japan, before starting his studies in industrial design in Switzerland. His aim was to meet many people in the fields of design, art and architecture. It was interesting for me to see that he perceived Tokyo with completely different eyes than I did. Together we discovered many new places in Tokyo, met designers and architects and had inspiring discussions about Japan related topics. From my brother I learned a lot about design and architecture in Tokyo, an area to which I haven't paid much attention before.



A good event in Tokyo to meet Japanese and foreign architects, designers and other creative minds is Pecha Kucha<sup>2</sup> Night. *“Pecha Kucha Night, devised by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham (Klein Dytham architecture<sup>3</sup>), was conceived in 2003 as a place for young designers to meet, network and show their work in public. Initially it was also a way to get more people to visit Super Deluxe, their then newly opened multimedia event space in Tokyo.*

*The formula of success of this event is its patented system. Each presenter is allowed 20 images, each shown for 20 seconds, giving 6 minutes and 40 seconds of fame before the next presenter is up. This keeps presentations concise, the interest level up, and gives more people the chance to show.*

*Pecha Kucha has tapped into a demand for a forum in which creative work can easily and informally be shown. This is a demand that seems to be global, as Pecha Kucha nights, without any pushing, has spread virally to over 80 cities across the world.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Pecha Kucha is Japanese and stands for the sound of conversation.

<sup>3</sup> Klein Dytham Architecture: <http://www.klein-dytham.com/architecture>, 16.09.2007

<sup>4</sup> Pecha Kucha Night: <http://www.pecha-kucha.org>, 16.09.2007

Pecha Kucha Nights are held at Super Deluxe<sup>5</sup> on the last Wednesday of every month starting at 8.00 PM. My brother, some friends and I enjoyed the various presentations and meeting people. Usually about 300 people, Japanese as well as foreigners, attend this venue. I recommend to have a glance, even for people who are not working in the field of design and architecture like me.

#### 6.4 Public Transport & Mass Discipline

Japan has the best public transport system that I have ever encountered. It is efficient, safe, clean and always on time. I got accustomed to the Tokyo metro system in just a couple of days without knowing any Kanji's. The signs and even the announcements in the trains on the more frequented lines are usually in English. The downside is of course that using public transport in Japan doesn't come cheap.

Even though trains are crowded most of the time, people are quiet, polite and disciplined. The passengers spend their time on the train sleeping, listening to music and reading. From young age on the Japanese are used to the masses and feel

comfortable. In no other country I would like to be in as crowded trains as the Yamanote or the Chuo Line during rush hours.



<sup>5</sup> Super Deluxe: <http://www.klein-dytham.com/superdeluxe>, 16.09.2007

## **6.5 Perfectionism & Customer Service**

In no other country than Japan, customers are treated like here. In Japan the customer is truly king, unlike in Europe where sometimes customer can be happy to be attended.

I enjoy the hot towels in restaurants in winter before eating and how friendly the sales personell are in Japan.

## **6.6 Eye Contact in Japan**

My stay in Japan taught me many things about other cultures, customs and mentalities, but I also could learn plenty about my own personality, my attitude and my culture. It made me think more about myself, and opened my eyes, that there are more ways to approach something. I realized strongly how I was brought up and what values I have. Sometimes by doing something that would be perfectly acceptable in my home country, I may offend someone in Japan or make them feel embarassed.

One example of such a situation is eye contact when having a conversation. Only after two months, a classmate told me that

she feels embarassed because when I talk to her I look straight into her eyes. She felt that I was staring at her. I was astonished to hear that, because for me it is natural to have eye contact while talking to someone.

## **6.7 Homestay in Haibara**

In the last month of my language school I had the idea to join a homestay program between language school and my internship. For most programs it is necessary to apply at the latest 8 weeks prior. Therefore it was not accepted and decided to organize a homestay on my own. My initial plan was to live in three families, in three different regions of Japan.

Through Japanese friends I found a young family in Haibara, Nara-ken, who invited me to stay at their home. They made a great effort to make my homestay rememorable and accepted me as a family member. During this week I enjoyed the finest home-made cooking, received an intensive Baseball training by the three boys, visited an Onsen for the first time and had many more nice Japanese experiences.

A Japanese actress who has performed in New York for the last 10 years, who I met recently in a small jazz club, made a

comment which I experienced to be true: “New York is not United States, it is just a metropolis, in the same way is Tokyo not Japan but just another big city.” After staying almost 6 months in bustling Tokyo, it was a nice change for me, to get to know the life on the country side too. My homestay family appreciated to learn in exchange about my culture and we had interesting discussions. One night I prepared Spaghetti Bolognese with a fruit salad as desert, and I baked a Swiss Bread (Zopf) for Sunday morning.

## **7 Acknowledgments**

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the donors of the SJCC Scholarship fund, and especially Mr. Paul Dudler, for accepting me as a grantee and supporting me. Without his invaluable work I would have never been able to gain the wonderful and rewarding experience of a year in Japan, would not have been able to, as Mark Twain calls it, throw of the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in my sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

Best Regards from Tokyo,  
September 2007

Marcel Kuhn



## **8 Links**

Some links that were useful during my first 6 months in Tokyo.

### **8.1 Accomodation**

<http://www.sakura-house.com/german>

### **8.2 Language School**

<http://www.naganuma-school.or.jp/>

### **8.3 Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan**

<http://www.sccij.org>

### **8.4 Train Route Finder Tokyo**

<http://www.jorudan.co.jp/english/norikae/e-norikeyin.html>

### **8.5 Outdoors & Sports**

<http://outdoorclubjapan.com/>

<http://www.japansurf.com>

<http://www.outdoorjapan.com>

<http://www.flyinghighwakeboarding.com>

### **8.6 Homepage of Thimo Sauter, fellow SJCC Scholarship recipient**

[http://www.thallius.com/japon/index\\_en.html](http://www.thallius.com/japon/index_en.html)

### **8.7 Night-out and Events**

<http://www.pecha-kucha.org/category/tokyo/>

<http://metropolis.co.jp/>

<http://www.worldsbestbars.com/city/tokyo/index.htm>