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Tokyo, 24 March 2005

Report to the Chairman of the Scholarship Fund of the SJCC, Mr. Paul Dudler

After 7 months spent in Japan, I am sending the first report about my experience to the scholarship foundation of the Swiss Japanese Chamber of Commerce.

I. Japanese Language

Expectations:

- Improve my Japanese language skills significantly
- Get in touch with and learn about Japanese culture and mentality

Intensive language course in the Yamasa Institute, Okazaki-shi: March – May 2004

As a language school I chose the Yamasa Institute ([www.yamasa.org](http://www.yamasa.org)) in Okazaki-shi, Aichi-ken for three reasons:

1. I knew that I was going to do my internship in Tokyo. Therefore I wanted to do my Japanese course in the countryside where there are less distractions and I could concentrate more on my studies.
2. The Yamasa Institute's SILAC course strongly focuses on Japanese conversation.
3. I wanted to start the course at the beginning of March. In that respect, Yamasa offers entry dates every two weeks throughout the year, which was very convenient for me.

Although I have been taking classes in Switzerland, I started a beginner's course in the first week of March 2004. My class consisted of only 3 people, so the course was very interactive with a strong focus on conversation. The pace of the lessons was very high, in three months most of the two books of "Minnano Nihongo" were covered.

It is in the nature of a language school, that there are many foreigners. Because the lingua franca is English, I wanted to apply what I had learned with some native speakers and make some Japanese friends.

It was quite easy to find people who were interested in practicing English or French and with whom I could speak Japanese. I met quite regularly with two of these language exchange partner, and besides conversation classes, we made trips with the car to the seaside or went out for dinner. I am still keeping contact with one of them.

With the help of Yamasa, I also found a Host Family who accommodated me. I spent four weeks at their home and I felt really a member of the family. I had the unique possibility to experience the life in a Japanese household, and I was taken to activities a tourist in Japan could never experience. My host father is an engineer in nearby Toyota Company and my host mother is a housewife who holds English classes for school children at home. I soon became the assistant for my host mother in the English classes, where I talked to the children about Switzerland and other topics in English. My host father is a music band member and taught me how to play the drums. On weekends he sometimes used to play the guitar, while I was struggling with the drums.

I was overwhelmed by the friendliness of the people I met and by all the things I had the chance to do. Although life in Okazaki was quite simple, every day was a special day. I didn't know very well what to expect of Japan, before I came here, but I was very happy that I took the step.

The intensive course combined with my stay at the host family and the language exchanges made my Japanese level rise from a near beginner to a level where I could have a basic conversation about daily topics. However three months is too short to acquire sufficient skills to be able to use it on a business level. Because I would like my Japanese skills to be an asset for my future, I am planning to do another intensive course at the end of my internship.

## II. Work experience

### Expectations:

- Experience work in an international environment while working with Japanese staff.
- Understanding the company structure, company's strategy, the market, key concepts from a financial viewpoint,
- Prepare myself for a possible career in Japan

### Contributions:

- I have no specialized knowledge in finance, but I acquired a multilevel approach of solving problems during my studies. I also have quite a large experience of previous jobs. I hope that I can contribute to business control with some fresh views from the outside.

### Internship at Syngenta Japan, Finance Department, Tokyo: November 2004– August 2005

Syngenta is a world-leading agribusiness company. Japan is a very important market for Syngenta both in terms of sales and profits.

I started my internship in the Business Control section of the Finance Department of Syngenta Japan. Business Control analyses the performance of the company on a

regular basis. It delivers reports about Sales, Costs and Prices etc. to the local managers, to the regional office in Singapore and to the global HQ in Basel. Because my boss, the CFO is German and two of my co-workers are French, there is no real language barrier. The downside of this is, that I rarely have the opportunity to work together with Japanese employees and therefore I rarely speak Japanese during working hours.

The internship is not conceived as a real training programme, it is sort of learning by doing. At the beginning I got a quick overview of the basic concepts of the Syngenta financial flow by my co-workers. I then got first assignments which allowed me to get familiar with three important computer applications used by finance: SAP, EXCEL and POWER POINT.

Besides larger assignments like the analysis of travel and entertainment expenses and the logistic costs of sample products I am gradually getting involved in day-to-day work of the business control section. I had the opportunity to work on the function cost budget 2005 and on the monthly cost center report to the local management.

I am now also involved into one of the projects, which is to improve the forecasting for function costs, a part of the new company strategy in finance. Besides that, Syngenta will provide me with training in the database software ACCESS, so that I can create a database for Business Control.

#### Annual Company Meeting:

From 9 to 11 March I had the chance to take part at the annual three-day company meeting in Toyohashi, Aichi-Ken. The purpose of the company meeting was to present the performance figures of 2004, to communicate the new global strategy and to allow the different departments to present their projects for 2005. I had the chance to learn more about the other departments, and I really felt motivated to be part of Syngenta.

#### Projects for the four months to come:

My goal is to get experience in finance that will be of use in my future career. Therefore I try to get involved as much as possible in the recurring tasks of the finance department.

To get a more global picture of the company I would also like to spend some weeks in the sales and in the marketing departments.

Regarding the language, my goal is to gradually speak more and more Japanese with my co-workers to improve my Japanese skills on a business level.

#### Life in Tokyo:

My one room apartment is in Kamata in the southernmost ward of Tokyo, in Ota-Ku. In my neighbourhood I have all conveniences. From a traditional Japanese shopping street - the Shotengai - to a real Hot spring bath - Onsen -, I can reach everything in a 10 minutes walk. I commute every day by train and by subway, the trains being always extremely full.

The contrast between the quiet life in Okazaki, and the bustling life in Tokyo could not have been bigger. Besides my studies, I spent a lot of time with my friends, going for small bike trips around Okazaki, meeting my language exchange partners or going to Karaoke. Although the possibilities for entertainment were few, I didn't have the impression to miss anything. It was the simple things, which made my stay such a good one.

Tokyo, however offers so many choices that it can be confusing at times. My weekly schedule is quite busy, and time is passing too quickly.

Free time on weekdays is relatively sparse. However I strive to practice the Japanese language as often as possible. I am having a Japanese class once a week for two hours with a volunteer group in my ward. Besides that I found again two language exchange partners with whom I meet at least once a week.

On weekends I try to visit different spots in and around Tokyo.

I have been back to the Okazaki area already three times, where I visited my host family and friends. I am planning to go back to Aichi during the next months to visit the Expo 2005.

#### Closing remarks

I thought of keeping the report rather short, describing my experience at the language school and the internship.

I read some of the reports of other scholarship recipients after I have drafted my own report. V. Sennhauser wrote, that a foreigner who lives in Japan goes through a lot of emotions. I totally agree. In many aspects the Japanese way of thinking and feeling is different from the European way. This requires a constant openness and effort to understand. This challenge is maybe one of the most enriching experiences of life here.

I realize that during the totally 7 months I have only scratched the surface of life in Japan. Therefore I would really like to stay in Japan longer. If possible I would like to extend the duration of my internship and I am now starting to look for job opportunities in companies in Japan.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss Japanese Chamber of Commerce who makes this valuable experience possible.