

Scholarship Fund of the
Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce
Midterm Report



IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

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Preface



My diving into the Japanese way of life would not have been possible without the financial support of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC). I herewith want to thank the SJCC Scholarship Fund and its Chairman, Mr. Paul Dudler, for granting me a scholarship and making a long-held dream of mine come true. I am very grateful to have been given the chance to spend a year in the land of the rising sun, which enables me to gain unique insight into a fascinating country and culture. Furthermore, I would like to thank Mr. Felix Moesner, Science & Technology Attaché of the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo, who promptly informed me about the possibility of taking up an internship at the Science and Technology in Society (STS) *forum* and who personally handed over my application documents – a great asset in a country where relationships play an essential role in the business environment. In this respect, I would like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Yu Serizawa, Secretary-General of the STS *forum*, for giving me the great opportunity to work behind the scenes of the Fourth Annual Meeting, and Mr. Takashi Ōhama, Program Officer of the STS *forum*, for enabling me to gain insight into a wide spectrum of processes and tasks. I would also like to thank Susan Joho, my predecessor at the forum, who provided me with very useful information on life in Tokyo. Many thanks also to other scholarship recipients who have always been ready to share their experience and advice. I would very much like to pass on my knowledge in the same way and contribute to a successful and memorable sojourn of future scholarship recipients. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Last but not least, I thank my family and friends for their constant love and support.

Franziska Buenzli

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1 Introduction



Not having been to Japan before, my interest in the island nation in the Pacific was awakened when I was looking for a new linguistic challenge during my studies at university in Switzerland and found myself drawn to the mysteriously looking *kanji*. The attraction of Japanese initially being the yet to decipher script setting it apart from the familiar alphabet, the idea of someday experiencing it in its home country soon started to take shape. However, it was not until I learned about the SJCC Scholarship Fund that a still rather vague idea was given a realistic fundament.

Ever since my exchange year abroad during high school, I knew that I wanted to live in a foreign country for a longer period of time again. Naturally, a different culture is best accessible when taking part in everyday life, adapting to the pace of the respective society and drifting in the stream of another nation's time. Gaining new perspectives is paramount to me, and I am always fascinated when I realize that the line between diverse conceptions of doing things becomes blurred in my mind.

Only a few weeks after graduating from university in Switzerland, I was sitting in a plane heading east towards what would become a fascinating journey. I was ready to experience Japan with all my senses. Now, several months later, I have seen the seasons come upon the country, heard the tolling of the bell and the chanting monks in Chion-in temple during *o-shōgatsu*, smelled the Japan sea on a rainy afternoon on top of the Tottori sand dunes, tasted *chanko-nabe* at an installment of the Grand Sumō Tournament, and felt the genial hot water of an *ashi-yu* when resting my tired feet after a long day of exploring the hills around Kyoto.

Moreover, I have gained a whole lot of new respect for the people living here. Especially in Tokyo, space is tight, commuting and working hours are long, society is demanding on many levels, cold winters are often braved without heaters, discipline is a principal value... Life in Japan, to me, does not seem as easy as all the technological progress might suggest in the first place.

2 Kyoto

2.1 In the Former Imperial Capital



„Even in Kyoto / I long for Kyoto / At the cuckoo’s cry” wrote Bashō a long time ago. Four centuries later, I came to understand what one of the most famous *haiku* poets expressed in only a few words (in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern, to be precise). I spent the first four months of my sojourn in Japan in the former imperial capital attending school and could not have asked for a better environment to study the language and get accustomed to my new home. Something took hold of me the moment I arrived in Kyoto and has not let go ever since. There is some kind of magic about this city that many words cannot describe, but requires the brilliancy of someone like Bashō to do it justice in a seemingly very simple yet highly sophisticated way.

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Kyoto’s many temples and shrines in particular acted like a magnet upon me and never ceased to amaze me. Blue skies, moon light, rain, maple leaves, or cherry blossoms each bathed the grounds in a distinct atmosphere, enhanced by special *raitoappu*. The latter are featured in seasonal events and artfully display gardens, bamboo groves, and trees by lighting them up. The celebration of the seasons in general has taught me a lot about people’s relationship with nature, deeply rooted in Shintō and Buddhist belief.

Although Kyoto is most famous for its cultural heritage, modernity has not been shut out. In fact, I have become quite fond of modern Japanese architecture which – despite being contemporary – always seems to respect its surroundings. I never perceived either modern or historic buildings in Kyoto to be out of place in their respective neighborhood, even if a small temple was sandwiched in shopping arcades, but rather to form some sort of symbiotic relationship.

2.2 Kyoto Japanese Language School (KJLS)



From the beginning, I knew that I wanted to start my sojourn in Kyoto for I assumed that if I was going to find an internship, it would most likely be in Tokyo. Attending a language school in Kyoto would then give me the possibility to live in both cities. Although I could thereby considerably narrow down the area where I had to find a language school, I was still faced with a wide spectrum of potential schools. In order not to simply roll the dice, I decided to apply to Kyoto Japanese Language School (KJLS, www.kjls.or.jp) due to the very positive feedback Fabien Clerc gave in his scholarship report. It turned out to be the right decision. Office staff is very helpful and supporting, and the fact that every class is taught by four alternating teachers makes studying less monotonous and more dynamic. Teaching methods are very diverse in how newly introduced grammar is practiced. Classes consist of roughly 10 people, which allows both ample speaking time and changing composition of smaller groups.

In line with Fabien Clerc, I can emphasize the excellent tuition KJLS provides. I was very satisfied with the progress made during the 12 weeks I attended the school (that is, covering the whole Minna no nihongo II) and would go back to the same school in the future.

My only negative critique refers to the school's facilities. As I did not have internet access at home for the first six weeks (at which point my landlady installed a wireless network), I had to rely on "external" sources. Unfortunately, the school had only one PC and no setup to bring one's own laptop computer. I found better internet access near Kyoto station (free) and in internet cafés. Furthermore, classroom interior was quite old-fashioned. Chairs and tables were low, the latter offering not a whole lot of space to spread papers (and the obligatory tea cup). Fortunately, it is not the furniture that had a big impact, but the intensive and excellent lessons.

2.3 Accommodation



KJLS is able to provide accommodation for all its students. I was lucky enough to be recommended a room in the annex building of an elderly woman's private residence. I felt very much at home from the beginning due to the hospitality I was received with and the surrounding environment. Though a thirty minute bike ride from Kyoto's center, I found myself in the western area of the city close to Kinkakuji, Ryōanji, and Arashiyama. Moreover, due to the city's topography being mostly flat, most other places were always easy to reach by bike. The annex building has four rooms on two floors that are rented to female students, tourists, or Japanese and share a common kitchen and bathroom. As winter season is not a peak season in Kyoto, I had the whole (though small) annex for myself once the maple leaves had fallen off the trees. Even though I had air-conditioning in my room, it did not really heat up, so that I was left wearing multiple layers at home. Despite winter 2006/07 being unusually "warm" in Kyoto, I could see my breath when I was cooking in the kitchen. In return, the seat of the recently installed western-style toilet was heated... There are always two sides to the medal!

When looking for affordable accommodation in Tokyo, I relied on comments and advice by other SJCC scholarship recipients as I did not have the time to travel to the capital before actually moving. I decided to stay at the Teacher's Lodge, a guesthouse near Gotanda (JR Yamanote Line) with furnished rooms and shared communal facilities (www.tokyo-information.com). The house could use remodeling, but people are very friendly and make living there unproblematic.

3 Tokyo

3.1 In the Metropolis



After four months and with an internship under my belt, my stay in Kyoto came to an end. I packed my belongings with mixed feelings in view of the people and places I had to leave behind, but I knew I was ready for yet another challenge, a new city, a new adventure. However, it did not really help that Japanese friends in Kyoto did not have a lot of good to tell about the capital city, though I accredited this fact more to a certain rivalry also existing between, say, Basel and Zurich in Switzerland. In some way, my curiosity was even more awakened as I wanted to find out myself what Tokyo – not being Japan, but representing a big part of it – was like. I took advantage of *takuhaibin*, a very convenient and cost-effective delivery service (look for the black cat as its symbol), to send my suitcase, so that I could board the Shinkansen without unwieldy luggage, and headed for the bright lights of the capital.

As described by many other scholarship recipients who moved from another part of the country to Tokyo, I arrived in a completely different world. Nevertheless, it did not take long to wake the big city girl within. Watching the sun set from the 45th floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building with Mount Fuji suddenly appearing out of nowhere while the sky's color ran the whole spectrum through yellow, red, and dark blue as well as having the chance to welcome the new year a second time in Yokohama's Chinatown showed me part of the magic of the big city within the first few weeks.

Furthermore, I finally got a clue about something that had always puzzled me. Consciously fighting my European reflex of drawing to the right when giving way riding my bike and concentrating to properly stand on the left side when using, for example, an escalator, I found people in Kyoto to not always follow this pattern, which left me confused at times. In Tokyo, however, I did not encounter these problems anymore. When talking about differences between the Kantō and the Kansai region in my language class, the instructor came forth with the explanation according to which the reason why people in Tokyo would stand on the left side dates back to the Edo period. During the latter, the

city's many *samurai* wore their sword on the left side, thus drawing it with their right hand and therefore using the left side of the stairs. The Kansai area, on the opposite, was inhabited by a larger number of merchants who wanted to protect their wallets from thieves, thus keeping to the right. A more commonly heard explanation of the phenomenon refers to the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka when staying on the right side was promoted in view of the many foreign tourists while all other regions of the country have simply been sticking to left-side traffic rules.

3.2 Internship



Since my efforts to find an internship while still in Switzerland had not paid off, I entered Japan with a plan that contained a lot of uncertainty. Luckily, toward the end of last year, I was contacted by Felix Moesner who informed me that the STS *forum* was looking for a successor for Susan Joho – who was the first SJCC scholarship recipient to complete an internship at the organization's Tokyo office – to support the Program Officer. I was fortunate enough to be introduced by both Felix Moesner and Susan Joho, which shows an important characteristic of Japan's business environment: Relationships are crucial.

The Science and Technology in Society (STS) *forum* is a small non-profit organization founded by Japan's current Minister of Finance, Koji Omi, and aims to provide a platform for eminent figures from the political, scientific, and economic landscape to discuss pressing issues in today's globalized world, in particular arising from the application of science and technology in society. The three-day annual meeting is held each fall in Kyoto and marks the climax of preceding year-long preparations, organization, and net-working efforts.

The STS *forum* secretariat is located in the very heart of Tokyo. Despite it being a small open-plan office, or much rather, due to this fact, I find it very pleasant to work there. Since everybody can listen in on conversations and on-going discussions, information is always shared, to the effect that I feel well-integrated and usually up-dated on the current

state of affairs. This advantage outweighs possible privacy issues by far. Also, there is a certain team spirit that creates a good working atmosphere. While mornings are usually more quiet with everyone getting busy behind their computer, things tend to loosen up in the afternoon when an occasional joke is cracked or a funny story is shared.

I would characterize the STS *forum* to be a Japanese organization with an international touch stemming from the diverse backgrounds of the office staff. This mixture allows me to experience a Japanese business style and environment, but not in a strictly traditional sense. For example, hierarchical structures are of course present, but not as tight as could be, and working over time is not expected from me. Dress code, for women, is not enforced. Men wear suits but often take off their shoes in the office. Besides Japanese, four other languages are spoken by the staff – with a current total of ten people working at the office.

The ultimate working in Tokyo experience remains daily commuting. It takes me about an hour and two to three transfers to get to the STS *forum* secretariat in the center of the city. Especially now, with summer on the rise, I catch myself feeling a hint of quiet desperation when seeing an ultra-crowded train or subway pulling into the station. Then again, everybody is standing in the same train. And without being here, I would not be greeted by a uniformed staff member at the entrance of the office building, wishing everybody a good morning while bowing his head.

3.3 Immigration



A lot has been written about the process of obtaining a visa that allows the holder to work. In fact, it seems to me that every scholarship recipient experienced this procedure in a slightly different way, which left me a little confused if not worried about possible scenarios I might face (i.e. having to leave the country and apply for the change of

residence at the Japanese Embassy in Bern). With the following paragraph I hope not to add to the confusion, but to contribute to the matter with a positive experience.

Since I did not have an internship before entering Japan, I was not left with much choice than to receive a temporary tourist visa upon my arrival at the port of entrance. As pointed out in other recent reports, it is no problem for Swiss nationals to extend the period of stay of the tourist visa from 3 to 6 months. Once I was told about my successful application for the internship, I prepared all papers necessary – including personal records, my university diploma as well as company documents – to apply for the Certificate of Eligibility. Within one month, I received it by mail. My next step was to apply for the change of status of residence with the CoE. Despite my worries and some contradictory information along the way, the process ran smoothly and I did not have to leave the country whatsoever. At the immigration office, I received an application stamp in my passport, which would nullify any negative impact of my tourist visa on my legal status in case of expiration. A few weeks and a 4000 Yen revenue stamp later, I became the happy owner of a one-year visa in Humanities and International Services. I do hope that my thoroughly positive experience of the immigration process can be shared by future scholarship recipients.

3.4 Volunteering



After settling in and adjusting to my new daily working rhythm, I set out to find a language class in order to continue studying Japanese on a regular basis and came upon courses offered by my ward, Ōta-ku, that are taught by volunteers throughout the week. I quickly found a class that suited me regarding level and time frame. My instructor is a bubbly *obaasan* who radiates with enthusiasm and is very passionate about teaching foreigners her native tongue. Although growing class size does not make it possible to work on an individualistic schedule at the moment, I feel I can greatly benefit from the course. There is a clear structure to it and we always meet the target set each week.

Towards the end of the class, we often engage in a discussion about a topic of interest, which I particularly enjoy because all my classmates come from Asian countries and let me gain more insight into their points of view. An integral part of the two-hour lessons is a break of roughly fifteen minutes when everybody gathers in the common room for tea and sweets. This is the time to exchange backgrounds, opinions, and everyday advice while relaxing one's brain muscles to be ready for the second round of grammar patterns, kanji, and all that jazz.

I have great regard and esteem for people who are involved in volunteer activities and have made very rewarding experiences with it myself. Now, benefiting from Ōta-ku residents devoting part of their time to me and my fellow classmates, I did not think twice when I received the opportunity to give something back in a very similar way. Having been a regular at the Goethe-Institut's German circle in Kyoto for the interesting discussions and the traditional dinner with Japanese learning German, I stopped by its Tokyo counterpart, the *Goethe-Treff (doitsugo kaiwa no atsui)*, only to learn that there was an upcoming opening. Two weeks and a German co-host later, I saw myself in the position to develop a whole new concept for the weekly meeting, being granted complete freedom of creativity and methods to be applied. We enthusiastically threw ourselves into work and quickly discovered the multiple layers of our object. The Goethe-Treff is a conversation meeting for German language students. Participants do not have to apply, but can join in – for free – any time they want. Hence we never know how many people to expect. Also, people of all language levels can come, which thereby places us in the difficult position to having to satisfy learners with a wide spectrum of skills without forgetting that we are not a language class, but a discussion circle. Last but not least, we want to give people the chance to learn more about the German-speaking part of Europe while giving them as much speaking time as possible. In the beginning, it seemed like quite a lot to balance, but overwhelmingly positive feedback from both participants and Goethe-Institut staff has shown us that our efforts really pay off. As much as the people of my Japanese language volunteer group share their time and zeal just for the matter of it, we hope to do the very same thing.

4 Japanese Rhapsody

4.1 Reflections on Societal Potpourri



Tokyo is many things. Each station exit serves as the gate into a new world. In the maze of the streets, contrasts characterize the cityscape and contradictions lure behind the next corner. Architectural wonders serve as the backdrop to quaint neighborhoods with family-run restaurants and little specialty stores. The hippest place in town for beyond fancy teenage fashion and culture lies within a stone's throw from a famous shrine's large wooden *torii*. When walking through the quiet residential area where I live, ear-deafening din escapes from the local *pachinko* parlor when the sliding doors happen to open the moment I pass them. When night falls, flashing neon lights transform entire districts into futuristic spaceships ready for take-off. Life inside the bustling *karaoke* bars clashes with formal Japanese etiquette. And despite amazing progress in technological – in particular, robotic – research (these days, robots not only walk and talk like humans, they even look every bit of them) and un-manned trains like the Yurikamome safely transporting passengers to Odaiba, people, among other lifestyle choices, keep using small heaters during winter – or even face the cold creeping through the thin walls with iron discipline.

Tokyo is many things. And more. Adding to the different faces of the city described above, I have come to find many artificial worlds as well. Cities within the city. And themes everywhere: a shopping mall in 18th century European style; temperatures below freezing that turn a bar into an ice cube; and various food theme parks, just to name a few. Speaking of which: Plastic replica food presented in showcases outside of restaurants perfectly displays what guests can expect to be served inside. Whoever has to use her imagination to find the slightest resemblance between the photoshopped ads of fast-food chains and that thing sitting inside the cardboard box will not be disappointed this time around. You get exactly what you see.

When one's eyes get weary of seeing, there is still plenty to hear. Everything talks. It seems to me that objects are given a voice as if to breathe life in them and help them move or function. Besides announcing the next stop, recorded messages in busses inform

about what can be done at the next stop and repeatedly ask passengers to watch their step. At train stations, people are moreover kindly asked to step behind the yellow line due to the dangers of the approaching train. Then, it is the closing doors that require one's attention. Upon departure, another automated voice asks to switch mobile phones to silent mode and to refrain from talking on the phone. More than once, the driver repeats what just has been announced. Ticket machines greet passengers with “*irasshaimase*“ (welcome) sounding out of the microphone while a figure bows her head on the screen. Escalators feature an infinite loop of audio tape informing about the proper use. Larger vehicles backing up or turning feature a female voice taking on the role of the more familiar warning beeping sound. Last but not least, elevators in my office building wish everybody a good morning before proceeding to inform about the direction they are moving and the floor they are stopping at. *Ding dong*. With six elevators side by side, there is a whole choir of constantly ringing elevator bells echoing in the hallways of the building.

4.2 The Sound of Feeling



Even abstract concepts such as emotions and moods are given a distinctive voice, making Japanese a highly colorful language. While English makes rather obvious use of onomatopoeic expressions – such as “woof woof”, “click” or “buzz” – Japanese has gone far beyond imitating sounds to create a great variety of words that literally integrate feelings and states of being into communication. This unique style of onomatopoeia often repeats the same syllables twice (*kasane kotoba*).

Due to the beginning of the rainy season, umbrellas have been crowding the streets lately. What starts out as *potsupotsu* (small drops falling sporadically) can instantly transform into *butsubutsu* (heavy downpour) or *zaazaa* (raining cats and dogs). What helps in a situation like this to save oneself from getting *bishobisho* (soaking wet) is to head straight into the nearest *izakaya* in order to wait for the worst to pass whilst doing something

about that *pekopeko* (hungry) feeling in the stomach. And while we are at it, *karakara* (being thirsty) might also be an issue. Indulging in eating *shabu-shabu* (hot pot) and sipping warm *sake* gives you ample time to reach *pokapoka* (state of being nice and warm). With one's stomach *panpan* (full), one leaves the place all *nikoniko* (with a smile), only to face the never-disappearing crowds on the way home to *gorogoro* (relax). *Girigiri* (just in time) making it through the closing doors of the train, the feeling of *gyūgyū* (jam-packed sensation) sets in very *dondon* (quickly). When lucky, the train goes from *gayagaya* (crowded) to *garagara* (almost empty) and enough seating becomes available until it is time to hop off. Be careful when walking home on the street that is still *tsurutsuru* (slippery) if you do not want to risk the *chikuchiku* (prickling pain) of a bruised leg.

And if you feel a little *magomago* (confused) after reading the above, there are *iroiro* (various) books about this topic out there that help you become *perapera* (fluent)!

4.3 Ir Ysebahn (Mystery Train)



Japan and Switzerland share the top rank in the world when it comes to the statistics of riding on trains. People in both nations make ample use of this means of transportation and Swiss chansonnier Mani Matter even wrote a song about the pros and cons of sitting in the (opposite) direction of travel. Japan offers a great variety of train tickets and deals, though traveling by Shinkansen remains the most obvious choice. Because I wanted to see as much of the landscape during my journey as of my actual destination, I was looking for something different and found the *seishun 18 kippu* which is valid on five days that do not have to be consecutive and costs a mere 2300 Yen per day. This special kind of ticket is seasonally available and allows the holder (it can be shared) to use JR lines nationwide – local and rapid trains, that is. There is the catch: Express trains and Shinkansen are out of bounds. Hence, you need to bring an affinity for (slow) trains, a lot of time, and a good itinerary (check the online Hyperdia timetable for the best connections). Then, you are in for a fun ride.

One of my journeys by seishun 18 kippu was to Amanohashidate in northern Kyoto prefecture. The name refers to the pine tree covered sand bar stretching across the bay which transforms into a literal “bridge in the heaven” when turning the back to it, bending over, and looking at it upside down from between the legs. This perspective creates the impression that the sand bar is floating between heaven – the dwelling place of the Shintō spirits (*kami*) – and earth. At dawn, the scenery is said to turn into a dragon-fly.

Rural Japan is much more accessible when traveling by local trains, and so are fellow passengers who are usually equipped with a seishun 18 kippu as well. I have enjoyed chatting with all kinds of people about our destination and provenance, being invited to taste Japanese sweets out of the provisions pack of a group of hikers, and joining in on general excitement when Mount Fuji appeared for the first time on a trip to Mount Minobu. In all of these cases, the journey was as much of a reward as the destination.

Along the way, I might have even developed an ear for individual train stations. Many of the latter play their own little doors-are-closing-now tune setting them apart from each other. And more than once I could see students hopping off at several train stations en route carrying a microphone on a long stick and a recording device to get the muzak on tape in what looked like field research for some school project. Another feature of train stations is the sound of birds chirping, which, as far as my own findings go, is always the same. However, I am very happy to have another half year in front of me to verify this fact and to hopefully discover more characteristics and oddities that lie in the depth of the Japanese railway system (and elsewhere).

5 Future Prospects



For the next several months, the Fourth Annual Meeting of the STS *forum* will continue to be the main goal I am working towards. In anticipation of our office transforming into a busy bee yard in light of the approaching conference, I am very much looking forward to all the processes we are currently involved in coming together in October and to reaping the fruit of our labor in terms of a successful forum that will significantly contribute to global dialogue and debate on science and technology in society.

As to my language skills, I am determined to advance further on all levels in order to be prepared for level 2 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test at the end of this year. The leap from level 3 is quite big, particularly in respect of the number of kanji required, but I feel confident that setting an ambitious goal will have a positive effect upon my studying.

Regarding the near future, I am planning on climbing Mount Fuji in summer. As an avid hiker, I am very eager to experience the sunrise on top of the mountain of all mountains in Japan. Furthermore, I am looking forward to the season I have not yet experienced. Although supposed to be hot and humid, summer has its very own charms with many festivals and outdoor celebrations. In this regard, I am also looking forward to an upcoming trip to Hokkaidō that promises volcanic landscapes, crater lakes, delicious cuisine, many *onsen* – and lavender ice cream.

Annex

<i>ashi-yu</i>	足湯	foot spa
<i>chanko-nabe</i>	ちゃんこ鍋	hot pot dish, staple food of Sumō wrestlers
<i>haiku</i>	俳句	mode of Japanese poetry
<i>izakaya</i>	居酒屋	bar, tavern where drinks and food are served
<i>kami</i>	神	spirits within objects in the Shintō faith
<i>kanji</i>	漢字	Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system
<i>karaoke</i>	カラオケ	“empty orchestra”
<i>obaasan</i>	おばあさん	grandmother
<i>onsen</i>	温泉	hot spring
<i>o-shōgatsu</i>	お正月	Japanese New Year
<i>pachinko</i>	パチンコ	Japanese gaming device
<i>raitoappu</i>	ライトアップ	English: light-up
<i>samurai</i>	侍	military nobility in pre-industrial Japan
<i>seishun 18 kippu</i>	青春 18 きっぷ	“youthful 18 ticket”, seasonally available railway ticket
<i>shinkansen</i>	新幹線	high-speed railway line, bullet train
<i>takuhaibin</i>	宅配便	delivery service
<i>torii</i>	鳥居	traditional Japanese gate at the entry of a Shintō shrine