

INTERIM REPORT

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FABIEN IN JAPAN



GRANTEE OF THE
SWISS-JAPANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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The city where I live: Otsu City

A bit of history...

1,300 years ago, albeit briefly, Otsu was the capital of Japan. Later, when the capital was moved to Kyoto, Otsu developed into a gateway city to eastern Japan and as a central city for land and water transportation systems. Also, Otsu became a center for Buddhism since many major temples such as Enryakuji were located there. In the Warring States Period (approximately 500 years ago), Otsu was the site of several battles and many local samurai had their names etched in history. During the Edo Period (1603-1868), Otsu was the largest gateway city between Tokyo and Kyoto. Since that time, Otsu has remained the capital of Shiga Prefecture. Rich in history and nature, the traditions of a vibrant culture characterize the city today.¹

Sister city... Interlaken (Switzerland)

In August in 1976, a tea ceremony took place in this city as the beginning of friendly relations. The two cities have some geographical similarities and fully expect to continue to promote friendly relations. On October 1, 1978, the 80th anniversary of Otsu City, the welcoming goodwill mission from Interlaken of Otsu.

Otsu: capital of Shiga Prefecture and its lake: Lake Biwa

Shiga is surrounded by gently rising mountains, and has Lake Biwa at its centre. Shiga, which neighbours Nara and Kyoto, has produced a varied and unique culture and has been a major stage for many historical events. There are many cultural heritage sites, which tell us of the long human history of this area. Today, Shiga is still a crossroad of transport, has enormous economic activities, and enjoys a rich culture.

Lake Biwa gracefully lies at the centre of the Japanese Archipelago. It is the largest freshwater body in Japan with area of 670 sq. km and maximum depth of more than 100 meters. It is also one of the ancient lakes ranking with Lake Baikal and Lake Tanganyika. Many indigenous species are observed after a long process of evolution. The Lake provides a sanctuary for migrating birds from the north (Siberia) and south (Southeast Asia). Lake Biwa was registered as a wetland site of the Ramsar Convention in 1993. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) put the lake into the Global 200 list of the world's important eco-regions in 1997. The significance of Lake Biwa is now internationally recognized. Moreover, the water of Lake Biwa is utilized for drinking by fourteen million people in the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe metropolitan area. For all of those reasons, Lake Biwa is a precious property.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

¹ <http://www.city.otsu.shiga.jp/english/welcome/frame.html>

Religious city rich in various temples

The most visited temple in Otsu is called Ukimi-do Temple. Constructed about 1,000 years ago, it is a representative scenic spot in Otsu. It is famous for having been built on stilts above Lake Biwa.

Otsu Festival

Every year on October, on the two days preceding Sports day (holiday), a big festival is held in the City's old streets. It began about 350 years ago and is similar to a procession of floats used in the Gion Festival in Kyoto. On festival eve, many floats are decorated with red lanterns.

And the next day, 13 floats decorated with gorgeous Gobelin tapestries are pulled around town. The floats are designated as an Important Cultural Properties. Moreover, it is very impressive to see the unique mechanical marionettes on some of the floats.

Great Lake Biwa Fireworks Display

The show is held in Hamaotsu each year on August 8. More than 10,000 fireworks light up the lake. Everybody from Shiga Prefecture and nearby prefectures come to assist this event. The show lasts for about an hour and a half, non-stop. The day before on August 7, Biwako Otsu Summer Festival take place and 3,000 people take part in Goshu-ondo.

The intensive Japanese course at KJLS - Kyoto

Tuition

The most important aspect of a school is the tuition it provides. Fortunately for Kyoto Japanese Language School (KJLS), this is one of its strongest points. The teaching has ranged from good to excellent, depending less on the particular teacher than on the particular day, and on the one occasion when our scheduled teacher called in sick, the cover provided was remarkably good.

All instruction is given in Japanese. I gather that the introductory classes involve a substantial amount of pantomime and large numbers of pictures, as well as textbooks that have notes in other languages, but the intermediate classes are pure Japanese. As a result, my listening comprehension has improved dramatically over the three months I spent studying there, and I don't think the value of working constantly in Japanese can be overestimated. I know a few people who knew no Japanese at all when they arrived three months ago, and they are now capable of using the language, so it clearly works at all

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levels.

Lessons are highly interactive; students are expected and encouraged to speak and contribute. In fact, our class was told to say more during lessons, and one of the teachers thanked me for being noisy. (OK, that isn't exactly what she said.) Class members are asked to produce example sentences using any new grammar, and most other exercises are the subject of class discussions. There are also lessons focusing entirely on conversation, often in the form of debates. My spoken Japanese has also improved dramatically, largely, I think, as a result of this format. The lessons also use a variety of media, from listening tapes to videos of Japanese television programmes, and cover a wide range of topics.

All of KJLS's teachers are experienced teachers of Japanese, native speakers, and virtually all have studied abroad. I don't think I've heard a single serious complaint about any teacher. Of course, they are human beings, and thus not perfect, but they all seem to enjoy teaching, and to enjoy teaching at KJLS. They also seem to be willing to answer questions, and lessons have generally seemed well planned on both the small scale (within the lesson), and large scale (over the quarter). The only real problem is that KJLS's teachers are almost all female, which is an issue because men and women speak distinctly different forms of Japanese. There isn't, however, much that KJLS can do about this; virtually all teachers of Japanese everywhere are women. They are aware of the problem, and take steps to stop male students speaking like schoolgirls.

There are small tests almost every morning, checking the previous day's grammar, vocabulary, or kanji, and a number of larger tests during the quarter. We had two, but the report card has space for seven. The tests, however, are probably the weakest points in KJLS's academic offering. While the classes are highly interactive, the tests are much more constrained, particularly the test administered by the whole school at the end of every quarter. This mismatch means that my improvement, on which my teachers have also commented, has basically failed to show up in the tests at all. Fortunately, this is a minor problem, as KJLS seems to treat the tests as one source of information among several, rather than as the make-or-break determiner of future placement. My recommendation would be to not worry too much about KJLS's tests, and instead to concentrate on getting what you want out of the excellent lessons.

KJLS claims to be one of the most intensive Japanese language schools in Kansai. After a quarter, I have to say that this is entirely plausible. At any rate, a more intense school would be very difficult to keep up with. This is a good thing; you pay by the quarter, not by the amount of Japanese learned, after all. However, it does mean that you should only apply to KJLS if you are serious about studying. If you plan to skip school every other day, another school would probably suit you better.

Academic Facilities

The classrooms are a good size, so they don't feel cramped. If there were fifteen people in a class, the room would feel full, but not really crowded; the tables could be left in a

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horseshoe with a space in the middle. With ten or fewer, there is plenty of space to spread your papers around. The heating is good; the main problem I've had with it has been students from tropical countries setting it higher than I'm comfortable with. The furniture is fine, although my legs were a bit too long for some of it. (There are few 185cm Japanese.)

The KJLS building seems to be a good structure. Certainly it has all the necessary features -- the roof and windows keep wind and rain out, the toilets all work, the heating and lighting is all fine, and so on. It is also kept clean, although I wish the cleaner would do the toilets just after lessons start at 9am rather than just before.

The computing facilities are good. Some of the machines are showing their age, but there are plenty available, and there are spare Ethernet points around to make it easy to plug your laptop into the network.

The network, however, is rather overloaded. You can expect connection speeds equal to a good modem, not broadband Internet. Upgrading the network would, I think, be the biggest improvement the school could make here.

Information and Application

The KJLS website (<http://www.kjls.or.jp>) is excellent, containing answers to just about any question you might have. It is also extremely accurate; KJLS is as described there. The classes really do focus on communication and use, the sizes are as advertised, and the school really does have all the facilities listed on the page. If you are considering studying here, the website should be your first port of call (or possibly second, after this page).

The application process is also quite smooth. There were, as described in my diary, a couple of communication glitches at the tail end of my process, and the 'express' mail service the school uses is no faster than regular air mail, at least not to the USA, but apart from that the forms are clear, the staff in the International Office are responsive to questions, and the school deals with most of the complex immigration bureaucracy for you.

Arrival, Orientation, and Support

The support provided to new students is worth emphasizing that it is very good. The value of being picked up at a railway station and driven to your accommodation cannot be overstated, and similarly the orientation session covers a lot of features of Japanese life that are not at all obvious to foreigners newly arrived in the country. The KJLS Office is very good at answering questions. The Office has native speakers of English, Korean, and Chinese available most of the time.

Accommodation

By far the best thing about KJLS's accommodation is that it exists. The school has contacts with enough accommodation for all its students, and rents are entirely reasonable. A quick survey suggests that they are certainly no higher than the prevailing market rate in Kyoto, and they may, in fact, be a little lower. However, the rent is not the main advantage. Finding accommodation in Japan is hard if you are a foreigner, and short-term accommodation can end up being very expensive indeed. The fact that KJLS has contacts with many accommodation means that you don't need to worry about that, and have somewhere to live as soon as you arrive in Japan.

Kyoto City

The imperial capital of Japan for more than a thousand years, until it ceded that position to Tokyo in 1868, Kyoto was founded in the eighth century. It remains one of the country's premier center of traditional culture, art, and craftsmanship and plays a major role in the religious life of the country as home to a couple thousand Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines and the headquarters of both ancient and new religions. Largely spared in World War II, Kyoto retains an architectural heritage found in few places in Japan.

Located in the Kansai region, an area of great cultural diversity that includes Osaka, Kobe, and Nara, Kyoto is surrounded by mountains on three sides and is traversed by two major rivers. Japan's largest lake, Lake Biwa, is a short ride over the Eastern Mountains by the Stanford Japan Center. The city is approximately forty minutes from Osaka and, by Shinkansen, two and a half hours from Tokyo.

One of Japan's largest cities with 1.4 million residents, Kyoto is both traditional and modern. Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and master craftsmen in the traditional arts are interspersed with shopping arcades, pachinko parlors, and corporate research parks specializing in biotechnology, electronics, and the development of new materials. For centuries the city has been the cultural heart of Japan, boasting magnificent art treasures. The city is known for its cloisonné, bronzes, damascene work, porcelain, and lacquer ware, and its renowned silk industry dates from 794. Kyoto is home to over 140,000 university students and forty colleges and universities, including Kyoto and Doshisha Universities. Among the city's artistic treasures are the Old Imperial Palace, Nijo Castle (former palace of the Tokugawa shoguns), and Kiyomizu Temple. Others are housed in the Kyoto National Museum of Fine Arts, the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, and the city's other numerous museums and galleries.

Typical Japanese experience: Onsen

Getting naked, hot and wet with a bunch of total strangers is perhaps the most quintessentially Japanese thing to do. There are thousands of onsen (natural thermal hot springs) scattered the length of Japan, perhaps a bequest from the gods made as a sort of

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natural compensation for all of the earthquakes. No earthquakes equals no onsens, and the Japanese are in general fairly happy with the tradeoff. The difference between onsen and sento (public bathhouses) is the water itself (onsen water comes from deep underground, often containing many different minerals, whereas sento water is usually town water from local reservoirs). The mineral content of almost every onsen in Japan is slightly different, and many onsens use the healing effects of their particular mineral mix in their marketing.

Although there are natural onsens in towns and cities, the popularity of relaxing in onsens is such that an entire tourism industry has grown up around some of the most famous onsens in rural and regional areas of Japan. Just as ordinary Japanese have made the act of taking a bath into something equivalent to an artistic ritual, tourism operators have turned some of the more onsen destinations into something akin to a concrete and neon decorated circus. There are however many simple onsens in unspoiled parts of the country, and no trip to or within Japan is complete without enjoying one.

Internship: the Asian Disaster Reduction Center

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The Asian Disaster Reduction Center was established in July 1998, with a mandate to facilitate multinational cooperation for disaster reduction in the Asian region. Along with 24 member countries, ADRC pursues activities leading to further prosperity and safe, peaceful, and comfortable lives in Asia.

ADRC addresses the issues of concern related to disaster reduction from a global perspective, in cooperation with international organizations and initiatives, such as International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN/OCHA), UNESCO, the United Nations University (UNU), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN/ESCAP), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the World Health Organization Regional Office of the Western Pacific (WHO/WPRO).

MAIN ACTIVITIES

1. INFORMATION SHARING

Learning from Disasters, Benefiting from Information

a. Provision of Disaster Information

ADRC provides information on the latest disasters in Asia and the other part of the world, disaster management in member countries, and good

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practices for disaster risk reduction, as well as multilingual glossary of natural disasters in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese available on its website. <http://www.adrc.or.jp>

- b. **Promotion of GLobal Unique Disaster IDentifier (GLIDE) Number**
ADRC proposed a globally common, unique identification scheme for disaster events, as a tool for facilitating the sharing of disaster archived by organizations around the world. The idea was shared by various organizations including OCHA/ReliefWeb, and was jointly launched as the new initiative, “GLIDE”

EQ-2001-000033-IND-[-001]

Hazard code – year – serial number – ISO country code – optional state private code

- c. **Organizing International Meetings**
ADRC holds an annual international meeting attended by representative from member countries and disaster experts from International organizations to promote information sharing, and enhance partnerships among participating countries and organizations.

2. HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Disaster Reduction begins with Capacity Building

- a. **Organization Seminars, Workshops & Trainings on Disaster Reduction**
ADRC organizes and conducts various seminars and trainings for fostering human resources capable of pursuing effective disaster management in member countries.
 - Seminar on Total Disaster Risk Management (TDRM)
 - Seminar on Flood Risk Management (Vietnam)
 - Seminar on Earthquake Disaster Management (Mongolia, Bangladesh, and Tajikistan)
 - Disaster Management Training for Local Government Officials (Cambodia, Sri Lanka)
 - Urban and Rescue Training in Singapore (ADRC has supported the participation from 10 member countries to date)
 - Training on Supply Management System (SUMA) in the Philippines
 - JICA Seminar on Disaster Management

- b. **Program for Inviting Researchers from Member Countries**

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Each year, ADRC invites four officials in charge of disaster management from Member Countries as visiting researchers for a term of about half a year. The researchers are provided with opportunities to discuss challenges for disaster management of each country, enhance understanding of the Disaster Management System, Disaster Reduction, and International Cooperation in Japan.

3. BUILDING COMMUNITIES CAPABILITIES

Community Involvement is a Key to Effective Disaster Reduction

a. Development and Dissemination of Tools for Encouraging Community Involvement

Risk reduction measures are most successful and effective when they involve the direct participation of the community most likely to be exposed to hazards. ADRC undertakes various efforts including increasing public awareness of disaster risk management, and development and dissemination of tools for reducing vulnerability of communities.

- Town Watching Program for Disaster Risk Management
- Community-based Disaster Reduction Program (Indonesia, Nepal)
- Creation and Distribution of Posters and Brochures for Disaster Risk Awareness (Papua New Guinea)
- Program for Encouraging Disaster Reduction Educational Programs in Schools (Philippines)

b. Assistance for the Activities of Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN)

ADRC supports the efforts to improve networking among Asian NGOs, which play an important role in disaster reduction and response. This leads to more efficient and effective activities for the network members.

My experience in ADRC so far

I started my internship in the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) in July. After my intensive Japanese language course was over, I was really looking forward to put into practice what I had learned, use the knowledge acquired on the field. I was really excited about the idea of being immersed in a Japanese company, which I already knew, is constituted by a totally different system than what I was used to. I was excited, but a bit anxious. I didn't know what to expect, it was going to be a totally new experience, new responsibilities, in a completely different environment. Especially after having read Amelie Nothomb's novel, *Fear and Trembling (Stupeur et Tremblements)*, which tells

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her 1-year working experience within a big classical Japanese corporation and all the difficulties she encounters to adapt herself, I became even more anxious.

In the end, the culture choc wasn't as strong as I was thinking it would be, probably due to the fact that ADRC is quite internationally oriented. Indeed, it deals with many other countries, and its structure and organization don't really reflect the Japanese reality. Even though it is a bit Occidentalized, it was interesting to discover some big differences with my prior experience in Swiss companies. First, the hierarchy is really predominant and really well respected. Everybody respects everybody. It is more present here than in the Swiss companies I have worked in. The director is almost considered as a God. This has been really interesting to observe. Nobody disagrees with the director, he is always right. This is true within every hierarchal level of the company.

Moreover, the job is quite individualistic. I haven't had so much interaction with my colleagues. Everybody keeps quiet behind his computer. There is an intense silence inside the office from morning to night. But it allows you to work well. However, everybody is always willing to help you whenever you need it. I have very nice colleagues, who helped me a lot to adapt inside the office. I can practice my Japanese with them during lunchtime, and of course, during the different meetings. Today, I feel completely integrated and got used to this oriental environment.

If I look at the more concrete part of my experience in ADRC up to now, it has mainly been consisting of English related tasks. I have been checking English documents, or translating documents from Japanese to English. Beside that, I helped conceiving some Memorandum of Understanding between ADRC and other institutions like UN/OCHA and UNESCO. I have also spent many hours learning about ADRC activities to become more acquainted with the company spirit. I've been reading many publications and been through the website information (<http://www.adrc.or.jp>).

Natural disasters are something I'd never given much attention to. This is probably due to the fact that Switzerland is not a country struck by many of them, not like Japan. In Japan, we constantly have to live with the fear of being struck by an earthquake or typhoons. We have to live with those occurrences. Since I started in ADRC, I have become really interested in those phenomenons, how to work together to be prepared when they happen, and to reconstruct effectively after their occurrences. We have many relations with many Asian countries. It is very interesting to see the interaction between all the different cultures. Languages are really important, something that I've always been interested in. The knowledge I will acquire during this internship will be very useful for me entering a Master's program, which I'm planning to do next year. Now I am seriously considering entering a program related to international relations and global studies. Natural disaster management has always been very important in Japan and will be forever.

Beside English-related jobs I've been doing in ADRC, my main activity has been to elaborate a big document concerning the disasters' activities of each member countries. Every year, it is important to update the information concerning what is being done

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against natural disasters, prevention and post-recovery. It is important to keep this update to allow every country staying well informed about all the best measures to adopt for the most effective dissemination of information among the population, training for experts, and post-recovery activities. I have been collecting information together with a visiting researcher from the Philippines, Mrs. Maria. This document has to be ready for the World Conference on Natural Disasters, which will take place next February in South Korea. I also give my help to IRP, the International Recovery Platform, whose office is right next to ADRC.

ADRC is already thinking in keeping me inside the company after my internship. They are willing to sponsor my post-graduate studies. I hope to be able to keep working for them, and be able to devote myself, in a team, to helping people.

Tips to find the internship and immigration procedures

I hope the following description will be useful to the future SJCC grantees. It consists of my experience related to how to look for the internship and what to expect, as well as some tips concerning the immigration procedures.

Finding the internship

First, it is important to know that **finding an internship in Japan** is far from being easy. Indeed, many Japanese people have kept telling me that Japanese companies are not used to accept intern, or in other words, people for a temporary period of time. I still haven't really understood why, but have guessed that it must come from the traditional characteristic of long-term employment, which is still strongly anchored in the society. I had the chance to be introduced to Ms. Tsunosaki, a senior researcher in the Asian Disaster Reduction Center. She was really sweet, willing to help me the best she could. After talking to her boss, Mr. Kitamoto, ADRC's Executive Director, she announced me that he had just accepted me for a 9 months internship in the company. Of course, I exploded of joy, after all the efforts furnished and time spent writing emails, calling people, looking through the Internet. My efforts had finally paid off.

So my advice to find an internship in Japan is talking to people who work in the field you are interested in. Usually, it is wise to look through academic institutions, such as universities, first because many people can speak English, and second, they always have relations with the best companies, and most of these are often interested in taking students. Based on my experience, it is not useful to keep sending CV to companies, because they will reject your request most of the time. I believe this way of doing it must be too impersonal. You will need outside help first to be able to access the inside. Use the people you already know and ask them who they know in Japan, it is the most efficient way to find an internship. I hope that you will find a similar person as Ms. Tsunozaki.

Immigration issues

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Now that I was accepted, I was greatly relieved. I just had to take care of the immigration issue. First, as a Swiss national, it is good to know that you can enter Japan without a special Visa. As soon as you land, you will receive a tourist Visa right at the airport, which will be valid for 3 months. Second, I found out that there are special relations between Japan and Switzerland concerning immigration. Indeed, in case you need to extend this visiting period, just make a request to the closest immigration office within Japan. You will be able to extend your stay for 3 more months, without having to go out of the country. In summary, you can basically stay in Japan for 6 months as a tourist, without a special Visa. This was really convenient to me, and will certainly be to any grantee of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce. Why is that? The first 3 or 4 months consists of studying Japanese in a language school. This institution will not give you a 1-year visa. You will have to take care of the long-term visa later. So, during this period of time, you will be studying Japanese with a tourist Visa, which seems to be legal in Japan. So, it is very probable that you will have to extend your 3 months tourist Visa to 6 months. The immigration office will give you a paper that you have to fill (in English), you will have to buy a 3000 Yen stamp which represents the extension cost, and you are all set. You get your extension within an hour time. It is very simple.

The first thing you should do after having entered Japan is making your Alien Registration Card (“gaijin toroku” in Japanese). Even with a tourist Visa, it could be useful to have it, even though it is not mandatory. It is the most important ID for foreigners in Japan. It kind of proves that you entered the country legally. It could be very useful when you need to prove your identity. That’s why I advice you to do it. You will need it anyway the day you will change your Visa status. To make this card, just go to the Ward Office of the region where you live (you have to find a place to live before, because you will need an address to make the card). You will also need this card to open a bank account. But I am not sure you can open an account with a tourist Visa. I already had an account when I arrived in Japan, which I opened by the time I was living here as a university student. So I am unfortunately not aware about this issue.

Some time before the beginning of my internship, I started to look for information about how to apply for the 1-year Visa I was going to need. The most important document needed to get the Visa is the Certificate of Eligibility, which has to be issued by the employer, who will send it directly to the immigration. You don’t have to take care of this! The employer should do it for you. In my case, ADRC did everything for me. In a Japanese company, there should always be a person in charge for immigration matters. Don’t lose time looking to apply for this document; you will simply not be able to do it. The immigration only gives this kind of application form to certified institutions. In the end, I just had to wait for this Certificate, which will take about 1 month. In fact, I started to work with a tourist Visa, but since I don’t have a salary, I guess there is no legal conflict. Since it is the company that takes care of applying for you, it is then almost 100% sure that your Visa won’t be denied.

As soon as you receive this Certificate of Eligibility, you just have to go to any immigration office, fill out a form, pay 4000 Yen for the status change (a stamp), and

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your Visa is ready within an hour. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE THE CHANGE OF STATUS IN SWITZERLAND ANYMORE.** This is a new law. Until 2 months ago though, you only could apply for a 1-year Visa or change your status in the Japanese Embassy in Bern, which was really inconvenient if you already were in Japan. Today, you don't need to go out of Japan anymore. You can do everything from the inside. I got my Visa on August 29th. It is a 1-year Visa, whose status is, as surprising as it can seem, "Cultural Activities". So, the immigration procedures are not really complex. And it is interesting to notice that Swiss people can stay in Japan up to 1-year and a half without having to go out of the country.

To all the future SJCC grantees, I will you of the luck you will need. It will be one of the best experience of your life.

みいんなさん， がんばってください。

きをつけてください。