

SJJC Year in Japan Scholarship – Mid-Year Report

Luc Meier, May 2005

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Introduction

Dear Members of the SJCC Scholarship Committee,

After having spent seven months in Japan and having now moved from Tokyo to Nagoya for a second professional experience in the country exactly two months ago, I feel that the time is far ripe enough to provide you with the present mid-year report. The present document, which I will try to keep as informative and complete as possible, accounts of both my three-month linguistic schooling experience in Tokyo and my professional experience in the country's capital.

My first perspectives on possible professional opportunities in Japan came about more than a year ago in January 2004, when I was offered an internship at the Culture & Press Section of the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo, starting from fall of that same year. The Embassy suggested that I request a scholarship from the Swiss Japanese Chamber of Commerce in order to financially support my sojourn in Japan, and I was granted said scholarship in late May 2004, while I was in the middle of another internship in San Francisco, USA.

Over the summer of 2004, however, the internship at the Swiss Embassy turned out not to be feasible, but was soon converted into another, related, Switzerland-focused work opportunity, thanks to the input of Scholarship Fund Chairman Paul Dudler. My Japanese internship would combine a half-year presence in Nagoya to assist Presence Switzerland on the Aichi World Exposition site and a three-month stint at Focused Communications Co., Ltd, the Tokyo-based public relations company mandated by Presence Switzerland to handle the in-Japan part of media relations and promotion of Swiss projects at and related to Expo 2005 Aichi.

Consequently, this report deals with both my introductory months to the Japanese language in a Tokyo school and my internship at Focused Communications Co., Ltd., alongside a few additional topics.

I wish to thank the SJCC Scholarship Fund Committee for its support and for providing me with the opportunity to experience a year of life and work in Japan, and I hope that the present report will provide the Committee and future scholarship recipients with interesting and useful insights.

Luc Meier, Nagoya, May 2005

I. Japanese language training: autumn semester at Kai Japanese Language School (October – December 2004)

I started taking Japanese lessons at Kai Japanese Language School in Tokyo on October 11th, 2004, two days after my arrival in Japan.

Due to some delays in the concretisation of my stay in Japan, I chose a language school relatively late, in the few weeks preceding my departure to Tokyo. Following advice given to me by the SJCC, by the Embassy of Switzerland in Tokyo, personal acquaintances knowledgeable about language schools in Tokyo, and reliable web forums dedicated to the topic, I had narrowed my choice to a few schools, among which the Kai School soon appeared to be the most serviceable and trust-inspiring. Kai was able to provide me with quick, complete and really helpful answers to my rather tardy inquiries, which was not necessarily the case of the other schools I had asked information from. Considering quality of information and correctness of tuition fees, I choose KAI, and in my opinion the choice proved to be a good one.

Conveniently located in the neighbourhood of Shin-Okubo, in the northern part of Shinjuku, KAI is easily accessible with the JR Yamanote line and stands just a quick walk away from the Shinjuku transportation hub. It was thus an easy one-hour commute for me, in spite of my rather distant (and hastily chosen) apartment in Ichikawa, at the far eastern end of the Tokyo Metro Tozai line and just across the border of Chiba-ken.

KAI occupies two floors of a modest Shin-Okubo building. The space is divided between small but convenient classrooms, two convenient computer-and-internet spots, the regular amount of vending machines, and sizeable administration-cum-information desk area.

Beyond registration procedures, KAI's administrative staff continued to provide extensive and efficient information and help to the school's students throughout my two-and-a-half-month stay there. Although I personally didn't need the school's assistance regarding visa matters, I witnessed the care with which each individual student's case was treated, especially for people that were in for longer-term studies at the school. Every step of the acquisition of one-year student visas, including the often time-consuming trips to the Shinagawa immigration office, was handled by staffs. The same care being given to the more cultural and social side of student support (well-prepared sightseeing tours of Tokyo, carefully set-up trimester-end and other celebrations, etc.), I can only laud KAI's administrative organisation.

The broad range of students learning Japanese at the school also helped make it a stimulating environment. KAI welcomes a very diverse international cast of students: important European and North-American delegations mingled in with less numerous but equally motivated students from Latin and South America, Africa and Australia. The school also hosts sizeable numbers of Asian students that occupy most of the seats in the more advanced-level classes. Korean *gakusei* were by far the biggest group, but China, Taiwan, and the Philippines were also well-represented nationalities. As is probably the case in every language school in the world, this confluence made the English language a hard-to-avoid communication tool; however, it seemed to be a common agreement between students that using Japanese not only when required, but in a maximum of conversational situations, was to be a benefit for everyone.

To come to the heart of the matter, that is, teaching of the Japanese language: KAI School offers nine levels of teaching, from beginner levels to very advanced classes investigating elaborate conversational and business Japanese. My previous 50-or-so hours of language courses taken in San Francisco proved not to be enough to skip the Beginner 1 level of the school, which I was subsequently very happy with.

The lessons at KAI, where two teachers split teaching duties for each class, are from the start given exclusively in Japanese, the purpose being to immediately train the student's ear (and tongue) to the language being taught, where providing grammatical explanations in English would instead establish an unnecessary distance to it. By relying solely on Japanese, much more instinctive ways of explaining grammar and other linguistic rules are being used, and contribute to a much quicker and more efficient acquisition of the language. It is to be noted that, contrary to my expectations, this Japanese-only rule was maintained by the teachers and respected by the students throughout the trimester.

The learning pace at the school was very quick, with one to two new key grammatical points being examined on every school day. The same pace was applied to the acquisition of writing: *hiragana* and *katakana* were taught (or, for most students, revised) in about 2 to 2 ½ weeks, before moving to *kanji*, of which about 150 were taught in the six to seven remaining trimester weeks.

A particular attention was also paid to oral expression and comprehension in addition to grammatical acquisition and writing training, with regular speaking exercises and oral presentations and special exercises prompting spontaneous reactions to Japanese sentences among students

At all levels of teaching, KAI relies exclusively on self-produced teaching manuals, except for the teaching of *kanji* (for which the *Basic Kanji Book* series is used – Bonjinsha, 2004). Slim but actually chockfull of information, these handbooks do not have a single *romaji* character in them, keeping in line with the oral teaching method of the school. They cover grammar rules step-by-step and frame them in useful topical situations and vocabulary adjuncts. Having previously used several different Anglo-Japanese language books, I found the seemingly succinct handbooks of the school much more direct and efficient.

With a library located nearby and the many cafés that abound in both Shin-Okubo and neighbouring Shinjuku, the environment around KAI was very fitting for self-study purposes. Evaluation of students' progress was made through series of micro-tests (about every second day), one mid-term and one final exam, which both covered ample ground and provided great revision opportunities. Completion of term and successful examination came with a complete check-up of each student's abilities and weaknesses, with precise ways of pointing out the areas that needed the most improvement. Since I was exiting the school's regular program after that winter trimester, my "goodbye package" came directly and very conveniently with a school certificate, perfect for curriculum files, the kind of item one sometimes has to ask for/run after in retrospect.

After the Christmas holiday break and after taking a bit of time to settle in my new work schedule at Focused Communications (see further below), I returned to KAI towards the end of January to take the school's evening classes, which proved as satisfactory at the previously followed full-time course and which I followed until my departure for Nagoya. Taking place for two hours twice a week, this class was extremely helpful in acquiring further knowledge of the language: we were only three full-time working students in the class, all having the same level of acquired Japanese. This allowed us to move quickly through a good part of the school's second-level program, by focusing on only the essential grammar points. One or two of these were inspected during each class, and helped acquiring more supple ways of expressing what we had already learnt as much as it opened new grounds of learning. *Kanji* were not taught further in this setting, and I found myself lacking the time to really deepen that area through self-studying, but I am happy I took these further lessons in order to broaden my conversational skills.

I was thus very happy with my choice of a language school in Tokyo, and I can only further recommend the KAI School to any future SJCC scholarship recipient. I am keeping good contact to the school's staff, and I would gladly provide any recipient with further information about the school should there be any queries.

II. First months in Japan, other introductory topics: visa-related issues

As an addendum to the above description of my initial schooling experience in Tokyo, I think a bit of information regarding visa-related issues when arriving in Japan might also prove useful for future scholarship recipients.

a) *Visas and bank accounts*

Since I was going to get a special Japanese working visa for my sojourn at the Expo 2005 Aichi and since this special visa was not yet ready at the time of my going to Tokyo, I went to Japan with a simple, three-month tourist visa, on the advice that this would be sufficient to get me through necessary administrative procedures, such as opening a Japanese bank account on which the SJCC funding could then be deposited.

Unfortunately, this is not exactly correct, and despite having done all ward office registration procedures, etc., correctly, and in spite of going the rounds in Shinjuku and Shibuya bank branches for quite a number of days, I was not able not open a bank account in Japan before early November, which left me slightly “in the cold” money-wise for a while. When I finally managed to open an account while still on my 3-month tourist visa, it was still purely a question of luck.

The explanation is that Japanese banks don't grant the opening of an account to anyone that doesn't hold an authorization of stay of a 6-month minimum validity, which has to come in addition to all regular foreigner registration documents. What came out of my bank visits was basically the following (with requirements seeming to change slightly depending on one's direct interlocutor, though):

- most of the major Japan-based banks (such as Mizuho, Sumitomo, UFJ) actually require that, along with being in possession of a valid visa of a minimum validity of 6 months, one must already *have been* in Japan for a minimum of 6 months before being allowed to open an account. When asked about when this rule had come into validity, the clerks' and administrators' answers ranged from “about a year ago” to “recently” by ways of “anyways, the rules change every second week”, within the same banking institution.
- A few other banks simply require a valid visa, but one lasting for a minimum of 6 months from the date of query on. Among these banks are Tokyo Mitsubishi and Citibank (the latter passes as the most permissive and foreigner-friendly, but also has its set of restrictions).
- In both cases, the Alien Registration Card is also needed. The official paper issued by one's Ward Office and authorizing its carrier to open a bank account is not always asked for, but it still good to have it around. It has to be noted that this document, as official as it may be, will normally be of no help in the absence of a six-month visa.

Other scholarship recipients had previously managed to open an account on the absence of a 6-month visa, but after some email exchanges with them, I can confirm that the (regular) procedure they had just been lucky, just as I myself ended up being. In both their cases and

mine, opening an account while on a tourist status reposed on encountering sympathetic, not-too-overworked, clerks with an above-average mastery of English. I personally had to then insist slightly and produce some random Swiss “official documents” (in French and German) in addition to the required Japanese ones. The fact that all successful attempts I know of were made at Tokyo Mitsubishi is also noteworthy, and I would recommend that bank as the first to try out in similar no-visa cases, although it also took me a few visits there to get accepted there.

Although this kind of “lucky ending” might happen pretty often, I would still recommend to have 6+-month procedures completed before coming to Japan, or to be assured that they will be relatively shortly after arrival. In the case of more refusals and delays, scholarship recipients may not be able to open a bank account soon enough, and might be left out dry of SJCC funding, expect if they end up relying on much less practical solutions than the opening of their own Japanese bank account.

b) Further visa issues

In December 2004, I could finally proceed to changing my visa to a special Expo 2005 Aichi working visa. I received the official Expo application papers authorizing visa change through the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo mid-month and then went to apply at the Immigration Office in Shinagawa.

Although all of my documents were covered with official Expo stamps and signatures, I still had to get through a few hours' worth of negotiations with the Shinagawa clerks before getting my new visa. It seems information about Expo-related procedures hadn't really filtered beyond Nagoya, and my interlocutor first refused to grant me the visa, arguing that a jump from a “tourist” visa to an “official” one was out of the question, and that I had to fly back to Switzerland and resume all applications procedure from there. It took about three hours to get my point across and convince the clerk that I was right, and after more arguing and some final apologies on his side, I could then walk away with my visa confirmed and came back to get the document itself shortly before Christmas.

Although it ended up working out, I was still surprised by the lack of information and understanding of the particular Expo situation, since the event represents quite a sizeable amount of work authorizations, and that it is easily imaginable that they were not all handled by Nagoya immigrations offices, with Shinagawa probably among the biggest non-Nagoya entry-points offices.

3. Three-month working experience at Focused Communications Co., Ltd., Tokyo (January – March 2005)

I started my 3-month (rather, 2 ½-month) internship at Focused Communications Co. Ltd (hereafter FCC; www.focused.co.jp,) on January 6th, 2005, and ended it in mid-March in order to move to Nagoya in time for the last preparations and the preview days of the World Expo 2005 held in Aichi.

This Tokyo internship had been made possible by the support of Mr. Paul Dudler and of my then-future Expo employer Presence Switzerland, am I am grateful to them for providing me with this opportunity to experience Tokyo on the professional side.

Founded in 2000, FCC is a public relations company led by Chairman Mr. Takashi Miura and President & CEO Mrs. Akemi Ichise, both of whom rely on a 20- to 30-year experience in the domain of public relations in Japan and had been working together under different mandates for a long time already before they founded their own company. The Japanese partner of United States-based PR group Porter Novelli, FCC handles a large number of direct Japan-based accounts just as well as it takes over the Japanese PR part for international clients of Porter Novelli, which include firms and brands such as Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Procter & Gamble, Hewlett Packard or Gillette. While its directing team provides expertise in areas such as consumer and corporate PR, and crisis management, the FCC team also includes account teams specializing in areas such as healthcare or IT.

A rather rare occasion among Japanese firms, as far as I know, FCC is a principally feminine venture, with women making up a good 80% of the approx. 20 people the firm's staff is comprised of; all but one of the senior account management position are held by women, in addition to executive leadership. This is a peculiarity FCC is keen on making a point on, just as it tries to be as supple as possible in matters such as maternity leave, which Japan is known to normally handle in rather trenchant ways.

Among other recent business opportunities, FCC has also been granted the Japanese PR contract for the Swiss activities at and around the Expo 2005 Aichi. Other than the Swiss Pavilion at the *Banpaku* itself, these Swiss undertakings in Japan principally include a Supporting Programme which brings together Switzerland's foreign promotion offices (Osec, Seco, Pro Helvetia, Switzerland Tourism) around a coordinated event schedule, which started in October 2004 and will last until way into 2006. Since I had been recommended to FCC through Presence Switzerland, the Foreign Affairs subordinate responsible for the official representation of Switzerland abroad, my main task during my tenure at FCC was to assist the company's "Presence Switzerland account team", while providing help on various other PR accounts, depending on the time available and the current opportunities to be taken to task by FCC.

I was given an Assistant Account Manager position among FCC's Presence Switzerland account team, which consisted of four colleagues, led by Senior Manager Mrs. Mieko Morita. The first period of work was not necessarily the easiest but nonetheless a very interesting one: my colleagues had to get used to my presence as much as I had to get accustomed to their office habits, since it was completely unusual for the firm to both host an intern over a short period (this is generally the case in Japan), and to welcome a foreigner into the office. At the same time, I had to immerse myself in the Presence Switzerland account pretty much on my own since my colleagues were far busy enough with tasks of their own, and had to simultaneously get busy quickly on new business pitches that needed to be dealt with on very short schedules.

I had already had the impression in preparatory meetings held in November 2004 that the FCC team had slightly too optimistic expectations in regards to my Japanese speaking abilities, and was expecting a close-to-fluent speaker, which I was (and still am)... pretty far

from being, especially when it come to my *keigo* skills. From the slight but palpable disappointment that could be felt, I had feared some important communication problems with my colleagues; but those turned out to be quickly resolved, both because of my own attempts to speak Japanese whenever possible and by the fact that given the (international) clients, a lot of the business had to be done or spoken about in English anyways. Moreover, I held the special position of being the only Swiss person in a Japanese company managing a pretty big Swiss project, which allowed me to be a useful connector when it came to explaining Swiss peculiarities essential to parts of the “Dynamic Switzerland” projects, produce on-the-spot translations of key documents, or update my colleagues on the latest Bern-Tokyo administrative cockfights we were being kept updated on.

And in a more general sense, I feel that my professional and personal relations to my colleagues quickly got excellent, and I am very happy to presently keep these relations going, since I often still have to deal with FCC as part of my current work at the World Exposition, albeit in a more lateral way than before.

Presence Switzerland account manager Morita-san was also my supervisor in relation to the other tasks I had to carry out during my tenure, and we first collaborated intensively on these other accounts, the PRS matters taking precedence only a bit later. In January, I could therefore help Morita-san on two new PR pitches: the first one was to prepare a one-year PR plan proposal for the Japanese branch of Corbis, the digital image database and rights-management company founded and funded by Microsoft’s Bill Gates. Including a string of events and image-definition proposals, our proposal, among other elements, made an extended use of the recent acquisition by Corbis of the rights to artist Andy Warhol’s digital image bank. Due to a very busy schedule on the side of our potential client, feedback was slow to come, but we were finally greeted with a very positive response. At the time of my departure, FCC was expecting instructions on the second phase of project presentation with high hopes.

The second project was the preparation of a PR plan for the San Francisco-based law firm Morrison & Foerster LLP, whose Tokyo branch counts among the biggest foreign protagonists on the currently fast-changing Japanese law market. Our proposal was well-received and FCC participated to a second-round, oral project presentation, to which I unfortunately could not take part.

Both of these projects were very instructive for me: first, they gave me precious insights and allowed me to make thorough research on markets I didn’t know much about – the global digital image property and licensing market (and its polarization around image giants Getty Images and Corbis), and the local Japanese law business market, which is currently experiencing some major shifts in power and alliances since barriers limiting its access to foreign firms are gradually falling. Second, they taught me how to process this newly acquired market information into succinct elements fitting into FCC’s time-tested PR plan patterns, as well as into the abrupt Power Point rhetoric, and this always on a very tight schedule. I am thankful to FCC for having let me participate in these undertakings, which gave my internship additional polyvalence and value.

Still, my main task at FCC was to assist the Presence Switzerland account team with the promotion of the Swiss projects in and around the Expo 2005 Aichi, a six-month event taking place from March to September 2005. Basically, these Swiss project are divided into: the participation of Switzerland in the Expo itself, with the pavilion showcase proposal “Yama – The Mountain”, managed directly by Presence Switzerland; and the parallel run of the Supporting Programme (*Rahmenprogramm*), a very consequent schedule of Swiss-Japanese events in the fields of arts and culture, science, business and tourism, managed respectively by Pro Helvetia, the science office of the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo and the

technology schools of Switzerland, Osec and Seco, and Switzerland Tourism – with Presence Switzerland acting as a coordinator, and the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo providing local support..

The task of FCC is to keep the Japanese media and their audiences aware of these Swiss projects, by way of press conferences, newsletters, articles and interviews placements, management of web presence, and so on. After having had a few days to absorb the organizational chart of this collective Swiss undertaking and its schedule plan, I soon enough was given assignments by Morita-san as well as directly by Mr. Michel Hueter, acting as the public relations coordinator for Presence Switzerland and based in Bern. During the period I was at FCC, the focus was on preparing all media information relative to the opening of the Swiss Pavilion at Aichi in late March, and to get a concurrent and comprehensive *Rahmenprogramm* update ready in the same time. Therefore, my tasks included: updating of the English version of the platform website www.dynamic-switzerland.jp, creation of media content for some of the *Rahmenprogramm* events, coordination of *Rahmenprogramm* information requests and processing, translation of press releases and other documents for media or internal usage, as well as occasional stand-ins as PR delegate to various organizational *Rahmenprogramm* meetings.

During the whole “Switzerland in Japan” campaign revolving around the Expo 2005 Aichi and going by the overall name of “Dynamic Switzerland”, the eponymous, bilingual (Japanese and English) website serves as an information platform for the Swiss Expo pavilion, as the event calendar of the *Rahmenprogramm*, as well as a constantly updated news resource about Switzerland, for both the general public and the media (who are provided with complete online press releases and image databases). The functioning of the website, conceived and run on the open source content management software Mambo, was taught to the involved FCC and Swiss Embassy by its creators at Swissinfo in Tokyo, and from the end of January to the launching days of the Expo I could take care of a substantial part of the event and press kit updates of the website’s English version, my first experience of directly managing online communications.

Updating of the website as well as preparation of online and “paper” versions of newsletter for the *Rahmenprogramm* meant that I also had to establish contact to the various actors involved in the organization of the programme and maintain a constant information flow with them, as well as keep them updated on the evolution of the common. While contact was very frequent and collaboration excellent with some of the programme’s partners, such as the Pro Helvetia envoys to the Swiss Embassy whom I was in contact with regularly anyways, establishing regular working relations proved a bit harder with a few of the other organizations and their respective representatives in Japan, but it all turned out working fine after a few hesitant initial contacts. In order to finalize both web and tangible information updates and press releases, final approval of information items by each partner was deemed necessary by both Presence Switzerland and FCC, a process which often unnecessarily, slowed down the publication of fresh news.

With its abundance of promotional institutions taking care of various facets of the country’s image abroad, and with the doubling of persons to refer to between Tokyo and Bern/Zurich (the latter with an 8-hour delay on feedback), the organizational framework of Swiss foreign representation does not just make it hard for the foreign observer to understand exactly who is dealing with which part of that representational task, it also sometimes makes, so is my feeling, optimal common undertakings difficult. The wait for delayed feedback and approvals from Switzerland and the seemingly endless bickering around and corrections brought to rather minor news update items sometimes made it hard to carry on PR tasks at exactly the pace FCC and myself were wishing for, and thus proved sometimes frustrating.

Another interesting aspect of my participation in managing the Presence Switzerland account was that I could attend quite a few inter-organizational meetings, alone or with my FCC account colleagues, as the public relations representative of the whole undertaking. This

provided me with many opportunities to meet a lot of the various contributors to the project on the Swiss side, and their Japanese counterparts: a good occasion to see how each of the Swiss organizations builds up its relationship network in Japan, and a prime one to further expand my own list of contacts. In the frame of such meetings, I notably had the pleasure to sit down a few times with Mr. Felix Moesner, the Scientific attaché to the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo and himself an alumni of the SJCC Scholarship program, around the 2005 Tokyo Colloquium on Sustainability and Education, an ambitious event organized jointly by the ETH Zurich and three of its Japanese high education counterparts and made part of the Swiss *Rahmenprogramm*.

On the same plane, I was very happy of the relationship I developed with the local Pro Helvetia project manager, Mrs. Regula Koenig. In order to provide additional reading content to the event menu of the Pro Helvetia part of the *Rahmenprogramm*, I was sent to various art events around Tokyo involving Swiss artists, and had the pleasure of meeting and collaborating with Mrs. Koenig on various of these occasions (for example, the launching conference and event of the Expo 2005 Art Program, organized by the Wacoal Spiral Art Center in Harajuku; preparatory talks and interviews regarding the exhibition of book designer and publisher Lars Müller at Aoyama's Watarium Art Museum). These opportunities were of particular importance to me since they lay close to my heart and prime interests, and provided a considerable complement to my own, private investigations of the arts and culture scenes of Tokyo. I wish this collaboration could have gone on for a longer stretch immediately, and I am currently investigating possibilities of joining the management team of the Pro Helvetia program once the *Banpaku* will have closed its doors.

Speaking of networking opportunities, the FCC management was also keen on providing me with such occasions. An example of this willingness to introduce me to FCC's business contacts was that I could meet with account managers of other Porter Novelli offices active in English-speaking countries.

Another fact that I am very grateful for and that I will fondly remember is that FCC Chairman Takashi Miura invited me several times to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ), whose offices lies in Hibiya. Having for a long time dealt in crisis management as well as government relations PR, Miura-san is a well-know personality among FCCJ members (along with being one himself), and he , could therefore introduce me to several very interesting people who for some of them have been performing journalistic duties in Japan for over thirty years. Moreover, the events I attended were extremely interesting regardless of networking possibilities: among others, I was invited to a recital by renowned *biwa* performer Mari Uehara and to a conference and performance event featuring Shokouji Kina, the famous Okinawa folk singer who is now a representative of the island at the Japanese Diet, as a member of the Democratic Party. Hearing Kina talk about Okinawa's particularities both musical and political was of deep interest, and I caress the prospect of going to Okinawa once if time and financial resources allow it, in order to compile interviews of Kina and other politically engaged musicians originating from the island.

My internship at Focused Communications came to an end on March 14th, just two days before my departure to Nagoya, and just a few days after the Presence Switzerland account team had completed its most recent of promotion and news update around the "Dynamic Switzerland" brand. Having rounded out this assignment, combined with the positive feedback received from the other prospective accounts I had been working on, made this an ideal time to put a term to my tenure. Along with heart-warming presents and extremely kind words of support, I also received offers of help from the FCC management in the case that I would like to extend my professional stay in Japan. As I truly want to investigate further employment possibilities in this country, I will be glad to ask FCC for advice and assistance

while prospecting the PR market for more work. Overall, I am extremely satisfied with this internship and with the insights it gave me, as well as the new prospects it may have opened, and I will keep a good contact with the people at Focused Communications.

4. Other Tokyo activities during the January – March 2005 period

After having set a big priority on studying the Japanese language during the October-December 2004, I then invested more of my free time in getting to know the Tokyo cultural scenes better, especially the city's music scenes, both for my own pleasure and interest and to scout for subjects to process into articles and reports for newspapers or other types of publications.

I had already been listening to, and quite often had already met the major protagonists of the Japanese musical avant-garde abroad, which made it easier for me to find my way through the musical networks of Tokyo. In spite of that, I was still expecting having a bit of hard time finding my way through the city's maze of performance spaces and concert schedules. This turned out not to be worth the worry: both Japanese curators and audience are very keen on providing/being provided with thorough information about the scene they are interested in, which results in each concert organiser staffing the audience with neatly packed stacks of flyers providing the most complete information about the next scheduled events – a practice that makes it very easy for the newcomer to find his way around.

I quickly met again most of the musicians I had previously encountered abroad as well as a lot of people I had yet not talked to and a range of protagonists that had so far been completely unknown to me. I therefore could quickly start doing a series of interviews, which yielded excellent results. While most of the collected material still awaits the right opportunity to be published in a form or another, a first result was the publication in mid-March of a full-page article in the Geneva daily newspaper *Le Courrier* about Otomo Yoshihide and Sachiko M, two major figures of the current Japanese experimental music scene, who happened to be concurrently performing at the yearly Archipel contemporary music festival held in Geneva.

While currently collecting solid background material to be able to write longer pieces about the so-called *onkyo* scene, a vital branch of Tokyo experimental music that has spread its influence far behind Japan's border over the last years (potential interview schedule including artists such as Tetuzi Akiyama, Atsuhiro Ito, Ami Yoshida or Taku Sugimoto), I was also keen on investigating some of Japans' older musical history. In that respect, I met several times with the venerable Teruto Soejima, a jazz historian, music critic and concert organizer that has been actively promoting innovative jazz in Japan since the late 1950s and somehow stands as the living memory of post-war Japanese jazz and Free Jazz (he is the author of the only monographic work dealing with the history of post-1965 Free Jazz, unfortunately not translated yet into English). These interviews ended up yielding more than three hours worth of recorded material covering forty years of musical, personal and social experiences, which I plan to use in snippet mode for various short articles, just as I intend to find a suitable way to process the conversations in their whole.

In an interesting set of coincidences, Soejima-san also turned out to be involved in the setting up of a new jazz festival based in Yokohama, tentatively scheduled to take place in October 2005 and which had already gained the attention of Pro Helvetia as being a prime spot to showcase Switzerland's new jazz talents in Japan. This kind of interesting and fruitful blending of my work environments and my own Tokyo discoveries also happened for example when I proposed to Pro Helvetia's Regula Koenig that Swiss experimental alphorn duo Stimmhorn play one more date on their April 2005 Japanese tour schedule, which included dates in Kyoto and at the Expo in Nagoya, but not in Tokyo. I handled introductory steps to the Nishi-Azabu performance and concert space Super Deluxe, whose curator team

I was befriended with, and we could pretty quickly add one well-received concert for Stimmhorn in this spacious and rather high-standard independent performance space.

Another good opportunity on the musical and journalistic side was provided through Franck Stofer, owner of the Tokyo-based record label Sonore. Previously based in Bordeaux, from where he had already been deeply involved with the new currents of Japanese experimental music, Mr. Stofer moved his business to Japan itself about two years ago to be closer to the artists whose projects he is implicated in. In 2001, Sonore published a reference book designed to be a pioneering A to Z of Japanese fringe music. Simply and suitably called “Japanese Independent Music”, the book provided an impressive critical list of Japanese fringe musicians and artists as well as a thorough compilation of essays around the topic of independent music in Japan. Now planning a web publication of a corrected version of the book and debating which type of presentation would be more suitable for an internet version, Mr. Stofer expressed his interest in having me collaborate on the conception and co-editing of this web book, while also contributing writing pieces to the work, notably an introduction to current alternative music scenes by way of a historical account of Japanese Free Jazz, based on my talks with Teruto Soejima. Although my schedule has been rather tight since I moved to Nagoya, I am of course extremely interested in carrying this project further as soon as I have enough time to spend on it, and it is a pretty good argument to encourage me to keep on writing about and researching on music.

I have been extremely satisfied by the six rich and varied months I could spend in Tokyo between October 2005, and I am looking forward to reporting on my six-month stay in Nagoya in only a few months from now.

Luc Meier
Nagoya, May 2005