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Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce
Final Report



IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

Franziska Buenzli

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Preface



Swapping fork and knife for chopsticks for a total of 15 months would not have been possible without the financial support of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC). I herewith want to sincerely thank the SJCC Scholarship Fund and its Chairman, Mr. Paul Dudler, for granting me a scholarship and enabling me to discover the many facets of a fascinating country while growing on a personal as well as on a professional level. I highly appreciate all advice and encouragement received from Dr. Felix Moesner, Science & Technology Attaché of the Embassy of Switzerland in Tokyo. Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Yu Serizawa, Secretary-General of the STS *forum*, for giving me the great opportunity to contribute to the success of the Fourth Annual Meeting, and Mr. Takashi Ōhama, former Program Officer of the STS *forum*, for enabling me to gain insight into a wide spectrum of processes and tasks. Many thanks to all the people I had the privilege to meet in Japan and who gave me their time and advice and offered me their friendship. Last but not least, I thank my family and friends for their constant love and support. I would very much like to pass on my knowledge and provide information to future scholarship recipients. Please do not hesitate to contact me (f.buenzli@gmx.ch) if you have any questions.

Franziska Buenzli

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1 Introduction



Time flies! Exactly one year ago, I packed my belongings and moved from Kyoto to Tokyo to set out to discover the dynamics, excitement, and vibrancy of the metropolplex, the world's most populous metropolitan area. I became one in 35'000'001. Now, several weeks after returning to Switzerland, I have slowly readapted to the lifestyle that used to be so familiar yet felt somewhat foreign all of a sudden. It was very interesting to observe how my perception of Switzerland had changed. Not dramatically, but noticeably. While spending New Year's Eve in Zurich, I caught myself reminiscing about the summer fireworks in Yokohama. The event attracted several hundreds of thousands of spectators, many of them dressed in colorful *yukata* (light summer *kimono*). Despite the huge number of people enjoying a summer evening celebrating with family and friends overlooking Tokyo bay, everything was meticulously orchestrated. The handling of the masses was most impressive, mainly because the prevailing discipline made it look effortless. In comparison, I was taken aback a little bit by what I suddenly perceived as chaos ruling the streets of Zurich: People firing private rockets and firecrackers in the crowds, raucous bawling, garbage lying around everywhere... (On second thought, I did ask myself whether to interpret this behavior as a sign of lack of discipline or a sign of a more liberal society.) As to the fireworks display, the Swiss keep it short compared to the Japanese. It makes sense that with such a high turnout, people cannot be sent home after half an hour. The show lasts at least one hour (the event starting long before with food stands and a fair-like atmosphere), although there are quite lengthy breaks in between. During the display, people do not hold back with applause and "*sugoi, kirei*" calls, which can be heard after almost every "fire flower" in the sky.

This is only one episode I was reminded of recently illustrating how my sojourn in Japan has added new perspectives. Time flew by. I returned with experiences and memories that I will always treasure and some of which I want to share in this final report. Please refer to my midterm report for information on my first half year in the land of the rising sun.

2 The STS *forum*

2.1 Internship



In February 2007, I started my internship and was welcomed aboard the Science and Technology in Society (STS) *forum*, a non-profit organization chaired by Japan's former Minister of Finance, Koji Omi. It 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* headquarters are located in the very heart of Tokyo. Despite them being a small open-plan office, or much rather, due to this fact, I found it very pleasant to work there. Since everybody could listen in on conversations and on-going discussions, information was always shared, to the effect that I felt well-integrated and usually updated on the current state of affairs. It was also a great way to improve my Japanese listening and understanding skills.

On average, there were about ten people working at the office, and a few more joined in the months and weeks leading up to the forum. Japanese was the predominant language, but correspondence with all international participants was conducted in English – or any of the three other native languages spoken by the staff. These diverse backgrounds added to the team's dynamic and it was indeed very interesting to see different approaches and work styles come together, sometimes complementing one another and sometimes clashing.

I joined the Program Division and hence gained insight into a wide spectrum of processes, such as designing session structures, enlisting and inviting major speakers and participants (participation is upon invitation only), and making travel and ground arrangements for the former in Kyoto in order for everything to run smoothly before, during, and after the conference. Other tasks included database maintenance (the Access database being at the center of all processes) and administrative work. Furthermore, I helped out colleagues with

software-related matters and proofread English texts. My working hours were from 9:30am to 6:30pm and overtime was not an issue until only a few weeks before the forum. I was very happy that I could balance things out by engaging in after-work activities on a regular basis, such as attending Japanese classes and organizing and moderating the “*Goethe-Treff*”, a weekly conversation meeting for German language students held at the Goethe-Institut Tokyo.

The work load grew visibly in September in light of the approaching conference. As a consequence, the working days got longer and longer, and dinner turned into a *bentō* box (single-portion takeout meal) delivered to the office. Since it was only a short period of time that the world-famous Japanese *zangyō* (overtime) became part of my job, I could approach the situation as a challenge and hence a positive learning experience rather than the life-long obligation it is for most Japanese. With it came the appreciation of Swiss standards in view of the obvious negative consequences, such as stress-related health problems, fatigue, or reduced recreational time. On the other hand, my colleagues’ work ethic has taught me a lot about commitment and attitude in such situations, and has put into perspective one’s own perceived busyness.

2.2 Of Lights and Shadows



At the end of September, seven days before the start of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the STS *forum*, we basically moved our whole office from Tokyo to Kyoto and pitched our tents in the International Conference Center (ICC) located in the north of the former imperial capital. Finally, all the processes we had been involved in came together. Adding the final touches to the program, documentation, the participants’ list, and all organizational matters meant putting in all resources available. Everything – except for sleeping hours – intensified, but thanks to the great team and in anticipation of the big event, I was highly motivated. The STS *forum* 2007 was held under the overall theme of “Lights and Shadows of Science and Technology” and the main themes of “Harmony with

Nature” and “Innovation”. The program was even more ambitious than in the previous year. One more track had been added to the concurrent sessions, now comprising seven parallel sessions in each of the three series. These concurrent sessions were held in a very interactive workshop format, with experts of the respective fields sharing their views and laying the foundation for general discussion. Topics included environment and energy, gene technology, information and communication technology, education, the role of the media, and innovation. The main frame was provided by plenary sessions, in which a panel addressed broader themes such as sustainable development, infectious diseases, and the dialogue between scientists and policy makers.

The Fourth Annual Meeting of the STS *forum* took place from October 7 – 9, 2007, and gathered over 600 participants from all over the world, among them leaders from the scientific, political, and business landscape, and several Nobel laureates. Being able to attend certain sessions, mostly as a summary writer, offered me the chance to catch up with the latest state of affairs in the scientific world and to finally meet the speakers with whom we had corresponded mainly via e-mail. It was very rewarding and satisfying to see how our efforts paid off in fruitful discussions, content faces, and the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received from all sides.

Having lived in Kyoto for several months while attending language school in late 2006, the fact that the STS *forum* was held in the former imperial capital meant returning to where everything had started. Exactly one year had passed since I arrived in Japan, curious and excited to find out what this country had in store for me. With my internship coming to an end at the end of October, I could not have been happier with how things had turned out. I left the STS *forum* with mixed feelings, sad because of the good-byes, but pleased with what I achieved.

3 Language Studies

3.1 Coming Full Circle



Working for a Japanese company in an open-plan office assured great exposure to the Japanese language. It was particularly good training for my ears, and my oral comprehension improved noticeably. In order to turn this acquired passive knowledge into active knowledge, I decided to attend school again before returning to Switzerland. Moreover, I had registered for level 2 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) held in the beginning of December, but had put grammar and *kanji* studies somewhat on hold at the same time due to my demanding work schedule. After a quick survey of the most popular language schools listed in other SJCC scholarship reports, I contacted KAI Japanese Language School, the Tokyo School of Japanese Language (Naganuma School) as well as Sendagaya Japanese Institute (SJI). While the first two mentioned schools did not have an appropriate class, SJI offered me two different courses I could join despite their start in October. Both specifically prepared for the JLPT. On November 1, I visited the school in Takadanobaba (2 stops north of Shinjuku on the JR Yamanote Line), took the placement test, observed the every day course's two hours and then immediately registered for the rest of the month (the other class would have been once a week only). I give SJI a lot of credit for their flexibility and courtesy in this matter. Thanks to their kind cooperation, I was able to meet my ambitious goals.

The class provided a great basis for knowing what exactly and how to prepare for the JLPT and gave my days structure as well as the necessary discipline. Four hours (= two days) were dedicated to grammar, another four hours to reading and understanding, and two hours consisted of listening and *kanji* practice. Four different teachers were assigned to our class. We used *Kanzen Masutā 2kyū Nihongo Nōryoku Shiken Bunpō Mondai Taisaku*, a grammar book containing all patterns needed for level 2, and received copies from previous tests for all other subjects. Naturally, the class was completely aiming at the proficiency test, but finally resolved my problem of not knowing what kind of

materials to use for further studies after having finished *Minna no Nihongo II*. The master series for level 2 proved to serve me very well as textbooks.

Since I had joined the class mid-way through its two-month period, I had a lot of catching up to do in the first few days if I wanted to fully benefit from the teaching at school. Fortunately, my ambition had taken over and I was highly motivated. I nearly bought up the stock of word cards at the local 100 Yen shop and started to write down basically every unknown word or character I came across in texts and exercises. I reviewed those cards during my daily commuting to and from the school and for once was actually thankful for the 40-minute ride. As school hours were from 11:15am – 12:50pm, I did not have to deal with rush hour any longer and usually spotted an empty seat. The *kanji* were, as expected, the toughest. Enter my *Tuttle Flash Cards*, vol. 1 and 2, making up nearly 1000 *kanji* (the amount required for level 2). I decided on 50 *kanji* cards a day, including the example compounds listed, counting as vocabulary. I compromised on recognition only – reading and understanding but not writing, that is. First and foremost, learning *kanji* is a pure matter of diligence. Fortunately, the first few hundred characters did not pose a major problem and my systematic approach soon paid off in an intuitive feeling for the correct reading and the ability to gradually read and understand texts about graphs, environmental pollution, and, well, shoaling behavior of fish.

3.2 Found in Translation



Besides the materials and textbooks listed above, there are a few other tools that I have come to find very helpful for studying Japanese. Regarding online dictionaries, I can recommend the following two:

www.wadoku.de

Wadoku is an abbreviation for *wadokujiten* (和独辞典), meaning Japanese-German dictionary. It is the best online dictionary I have come across so far.

www.polarcloud.com/rikaichan

Rikaichan is a pop-up dictionary extension for Firefox and currently available for Japanese-English/German/French/Russian.

Every Tuesday, the print version of the Japan Times features a one-page language section. A current events article in Japanese with *furigana* and an English translation provides further information with a comment on grammar and expressions used. The same goes for a series of three or four brief dialogues in Japanese with *rōmaji* and English translations. Other language-related texts and exercises appear on the same page as well as an article discussing a particular Japanese word or phrase, not without some humor (“Bilingual”, also available online).

Small-sized books like *The Handbook of Japanese Verbs / Adjectives and Adverbs* (both by Taeko Kamiya) or *How to Tell the Difference between Japanese Particles* (by Naoko Chino) give a good overview of the most important concepts without appearing as daunting as many grammar books. They are also very handy and fit for daily commuting. Every now and then, I bought the *Nihongo Journal* (日本語ジャーナル), a monthly publication featuring bilingual articles with *furigana* as well as extracts from previous JLPTs, including a listening section with an attached CD and a script. If my understanding is correct, however, the journal was discontinued as of January 2008.

4 Leisure Activities

4.1 Summertime Train



Riding on a Japanese train can be both a joy and a pain, pretty much depending on the “squeeze factor”. When it comes to escaping the big city and the Tokyo rush hour, railway companies offer a great variety of tickets and deals, one of which is the *seishun 18 kippu*. This ticket is valid on five days that do not have to be consecutive and costs a mere 2300 Yen per day. It 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 <http://grace.hyperdia.com/cgi-english/hyperWeb.cgi> for the best connections,). Then, you are in for a fun ride.

After the rainy season, the notorious summer heat takes over in July. Together with a friend, I took the opportunity to travel north into milder climate and discover Japan’s largest prefecture. With a combination of cheap domestic flights, the *seishun 18 kippu*, and rental bicycles, Hokkaidō is well accessible if a rental car or a guided tour are not an option. The internet platform Japan Guide (www.japan-guide.com) offers comprehensive information on places of interest (and serves as a top address in general for all kinds of matters). We started our journey at the east coast in Abashiri, most famous for its floating ice during winter, and then headed to Akan National Park. There, we found ourselves in a sleepy hamlet with a train station, but not much else (including no grocery store). Even our *minshuku* (Japanese B&B) was “without”, without bathroom and warm water, that is. So off one goes every night to the local *onsen* (Japanese hot spring), which was tiny and simple and yet so much more authentic than the large and fancy ones (a visit to Odaiba’s *Oeno Onsen Monogatari* is definitely worthwhile, but does not compare in charms to the real deal). Having lived in Tokyo for half a year by then, I welcomed the break that the great green outdoors had to offer. On our hiking tours, we came by sulfur-smoking volcanoes, enjoyed fantastic views of mirror-like crater lake Mashū-ko, and met very friendly people willing to give us a ride when we had no bus connection. After nine

hours on local trains, we arrived in the very center of Hokkaidō, Furano. The area is well-known for its lavender fields and colorful rolling hills. It was also the best place to taste lavender ice cream. Food in general is very important in northern Japan. Countless guidebooks for Hokkaidō are entirely dedicated to eating. We were told that there are three essential dishes: sushi, Genghis Khan (lamb barbecue), and soup *karē* (as in curry). We came across the latter while stopping in Sapporo for lunch on our way to Otaru at the west coast. There, we arrived just in time for the three-day Ushio Festival when the loudspeakers play one song (and one song only) in an infinite loop. Since 19 years, apparently. Our ears were still ringing when we boarded the plane to Sendai in the northeast of Japan's main island to visit Matsushima, one of the three scenic views of Japan. After a last stop in Nikkō, the Tokyo heat soon had us in its grip. We returned on August 1 and coincidentally, Yokohama hosted its summer fireworks festival the same night. But that is a different story.

松島や
あ松島や
松島や

4.2 À la Japonaise



Mount Fuji (富士山 *Fujisan*) is often wrapped in clouds. When the veil is lifted, the spectacle is guaranteed. It is a little bit ironic that in some way, I saw the least of the mountain when I was closest – the characteristic exceptionally symmetrical cone is best visible from far away. However, when climbing the highest peak of Japan, the mountain itself gives up the spotlight in favor of the frenzy surrounding it. I took the last chance to climb Mount Fuji during the official climbing season (July – August). While the fact that thousands of other people had the full intention to do the very same thing resulted in major hold-ups, avoiding the crowds in general deprives one of the most Japanese things to do: standing in line. The most popular base to start out for the summit is the Kawaguchiko 5th Station (at 2300 m), easily accessible in two hours by Kejo Highway Bus from Shinjuku. I took the last bus to arrive shortly after 10pm. A fairly wide path zigzagged up the mountain, and the lights of the next station were always visible. So were

the lights of the city of Hakone on the foot of Mount Fuji as the weather was perfect with hardly any wind, the sky starlit. While I had advanced quickly during the first hour or two, the crowds caught up with me between the 7th and 8th station as people started to pour out of the huts along the trail. Fluorescent sticks were waved, oxygen canisters opened, and bells from hiking poles jingled. To make a long story short: From half-way up the mountain to the very top, I basically stood in line. Instead of the anticipated 4.5 hours, it took me nearly 6.5 hours to reach the summit. In fact, Mount Fuji was so packed that at some point, I was afraid that I would not make it to the top in time for sunrise. Luckily, I passed through the *torii* gate indicating “I made it” at exactly 5am, literally seconds before the sun broke through the horizon – 御来光 (*goraikō*)! Once on top, there is still plenty to do, even if the clouds quickly obstruct the fantastic view. I encountered a small village, including vending machines, souvenir shops, rest houses... Quite a different concept than a Swiss person has when it comes to mountains. I must admit my regret, however, that of all things, the post office had shut down earlier in the year. Walking around the crater takes another hour (and the altitude becomes noticeable with every uphill step) and brings one to the observatory half-way through, the highest point of Japan (at 3776 m). When I started my descent in mid-morning, the stream of people to the summit had still not ceased. Descending Mount Fuji only took a couple of hours, but was not so pleasant anymore due to the rather unattractive trail compared to the night-time experience and all the volcano dust covering me from head to toe – nothing though that a shower could not cure!

5 In Retrospective



It was quite a ride. My sojourn in the land of the rising sun exceeded my expectations by far and left me pinching myself every once in a while to see whether I was really not just dreaming vividly. In a nutshell: The challenge of studying the complex language Japanese is, the excitement of settling in Kyoto and later in Tokyo, the good feeling of having a new home, the satisfaction of contributing to the success of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the STS *forum*, the fulfillment of being in charge of and advancing the *Goethe-Treff* at the Goethe-Institut Tokyo, the discovery of new places, tastes, and customs, the changing colors and festivals of the seasons, and, most importantly, the contact with many inspiring people made living in Japan an unforgettable and incredible experience. Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce for making all this possible.