Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce Scholarship Program Final Report

Submitted by Lucas Kruettli in September 2013



"Beginning is easy - continuing hard" - Japanese Proverb "Every beginning is hard" - Swiss Proverb

FOREWORD

The following report describes various aspects of my "Japan Year" sponsored by the Swiss Japanese Chamber of Commerce Scholarship Fund. In the service of cultural exchange between Japan and Switzerland, the fund offers financial and other pertinent assistance to qualified students, graduates and professionals who are willing to add a year in Japan to their curriculum. Parts I and II of this report were written at a mid-term stage while I was still residing in Japan. I added part III almost two years later, when I was already back in Switzerland.

I was living in Japan from 2010 to 2011. Without a doubt, the Tohoku Earthquake of March 2011 was the most significant event during my stay in Japan, as it was to the Japanese Nation since the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, after answering the question of why I wanted to go to Japan, I will start with by recounting this experience in more detail than other passages of this report. The second part is a more factbased account of how I prepared and organized every-day life in Japan. In the third part, I will try to draw some conclusions from my experience.

Unlike most scholarship recipients I went to Japan together with my girlfriend, Rabea Emmenegger. Naturally, we share some of the same experiences and Rabea is mentioned in various parts of this report.

WHY GO?

Obviously, spending one year in Japan is in no way comparable to George Mallory's ultimately fatal decision to climb the highest mountain in the world. As a matter of fact, living in Japan is in many ways a very easy thing to do. Japan is a very prosperous and advanced nation. Consumption is endless, trains are on time, the streets are clean, there are no major threats from disease, harassment or crime. The real challenge is quite simple: Japan is very different from our Western culture and experience.

Few countries are as unique and mystical in the minds of western people as Japan. Most feel estranged by some practices of modern-day Japanese and there only a few people who have absolutely no opinion, impression or feeling about Japan. There are some very distinctive attributes linked to Japanese lifestyle ranging from admiration for its technological innovations or its elegance in arts and culture to downright disapproval or even disgust of its conservatism and some forms of Japanese culture.

These views are often of an extreme nature and many people either adore or hate Japan. In the midst of this confusion there is one thing that holds true for everybody who actually visits Japan as a traveller for whatever occasion: the country and its people will create lasting and unique memories which will last for a lifetime. I knew virtually nothing about Japan when I applied for the SJCC's Scholarship Program. I guess it was the desire for the unknown, quite simply for an adventure, which was my main motive to go.

Would I be able to organize my life in one of the most foreign cultures without speaking Japanese? Would I be able to make friends and find some interesting work? Which other difficulties lay ahead? What more did I not know, what more was to be discovered?

Japan was a Pandora's box I was tempted to open. The more I got informed and prepared, the more I was eager to go and find out.

"Because it's there."

Reply of George Mallory to the question why he wanted to climb Mount Everest

PART I THE GREAT TOHOKU EARTHQUAKE

INTRODUCTION

As noted before, due to its significance and influence on my Japan-Year I would like to start off with the Great Tohoku Earthquake of March 2011 not only because it resulted in such a drastic change in everyday life for everybody in Japan but also out of respect towards the countless lives that were lost.

Living with the threat of destructive earthquakes is part of life in Japan and is reflected in many parts of Japanese culture. Most Japanese will experience at least one major earthquake during their lifetime. There have been many similar catastrophic events which unfolded in recent history such as the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident in 1986, the Kobe Earthquake in 1995 and the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean. But the striking fact is that after the Great Tohoku Earthquake of 2011 a whole series of individual events unfolded which not necessarily surpassed but certainly matched these single catastrophic events in many perspectives. The tsunami claimed over 15'000 lives, left thousands homeless and destroyed entire cities. The consequent nuclear catastrophe in and around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant forced thousands to leave their homes, left wide stretches of land permanently inhabitable and destroyed parts of the local economy for an uncertain length of time, possibly for decades to come. Unknown still are the long-term effects to the health of people living close to the Fukushima Prefecture and to their unborn children.

I had to make important decisions under a lot of pressure. I will try to give an accurate statement of the course of events that I have personally witnessed and leave speculation about the long-term effects to others, since - quite frankly - these still remain unknown.



For me personally it was certainly one of the most difficult times of my life where I

THE EARTHQUAKE

When the earthquake hit in the afternoon of March 11 2011, I was at work in the office building of Hilti Japan in Yokohama. At first people were joking and did not bother to act or stop working. The intensity gradually increased and suddenly everyone fell silent. I could tell by the reactions of my Japanese collegues that this was something exceptional. Some people were taking cover underneath desks, some folders were falling out of bookshelves and the lights went out since the electricity was cut. Out of curiosity I had been to a public earthquake simulator a couple of weeks before and the real earthquake felt quite similar to that simulation. Unfortunately, unlike in the simulator I did not move an inch, just sat at my desk not knowing what to do and simply waited to see what was going to happen. After about two minutes the worst was over and subsequently the building was evacuated.

NOW WHAT?

Luckily, since Tokyo was far away from the epicenter no buildings around us collapsed. All employees were assembled in a nearby playground. They were told to go home or look after their children who were still in school. Since the electricity was down, no train or metro was running, in addition, there was no water-supply and the phone network was busy. For me walking home was not an option, traffic was a mess and even if it was to clear up before nightfall I had too little cash on me to take a taxi (and could not withdraw any money from of the ATM since there was no power). I went over to a convenience store to get some food and witnessed the first of many memorable scenes of how disciplined, polite and graceful Japanese people behaved even in times of great danger. Whereas my assumption would be that in most countries stores would be looted, people would grab what they can and run, the situation I encountered was quite different. Since there was no power there was no light in the store and obviously the cash registers did not function either.





Nevertheless all employees kept on working, running back and forth to check the prices that were indicated on the shelves. They wrote the prices down on sheets of paper and calculated the total balance of each customer using a pocket calculator. Of course this took forever but everybody stayed totally calm. Nobody complained and nobody was pushing. People were standing in a line that went all the way out of the store in order to get to the register and pay. Not a single person left without paying.

After this astonishing encounter I decided to go over to a school that was located just across the street. At the time Andrea, a friend from Switzerland, was working there as a teacher and also living in the area. The school was running an emergency program and Andrea was busy calming down students and their parents who were concerned about whether their children were safe.

Since the problem was unlikely to be solved in the next couple of hours she invited me to spend the night at her place. Up until then I always assumed that this had been a medium magnitude earthquake with an epicenter near Tokyo. Gradually small bits and pieces of information and rumors were spreading that in fact the epicenter was located in the far north of Honshu and that the magnitude had been enormous.

WHAT HAPPENED?

As things cooled down, the school principal allowed Andrea to leave and by the time we got to her house the electricity system was running again so we turned on the TV. It was not until then that we saw the devastation and began to realize the full scale of the problem. People from Switzerland had already tried to contact us hours ago, had posted comments on facebook and flooded our mailboxes. Since the landlines were back to normal Andrea started to call people in Switzerland and told them that we were safe. I called Rabea who in the meantime made it back in our apartment after walking for two hours from Akasaka Mitsuke to our home in Nakameguro. Since there was nothing else we could do other than wait, Andrea and I just silently sat in front of the TV and watched the news. To add to the bizarre scene, the newscasters were wearing safety helmets. I then did the only thing that seemed reasonable at the time. I got a drink.

LEAVING JAPAN

The earthquake hit Friday afternoon and the following morning was very quiet. We woke to great weather, clear skies, the sun was shining through the window. I got up and since Andrea wanted to buy some additional food in the supermarket so she accompanied me to the train station. I said good-bye, expecting to see her again the next week as usual. The trains were running on an emergency schedule so I got on a train to Meguro which was the closest station to Nakameguro served on that day. I met up with Rabea and we had some coffee. There was no sign of the difficulties in the days ahead and we thought the worst was over.

The real problems began when the first explosion caused by a hydrogen reaction blew off the roof of a reactor building at the Nuclear Plant in Fukushima. We were having lunch with out friend Rita at the time who was informed by her boyfriend in Germany that she should pack her things and leave Japan immediately. It is really a strange feeling when an extreme reaction like this suddenly becomes a reasonable option. At the time nobody knew if this explosion had effected the nuclear containment of the reactor so Rabea and I decided to accompany Rita to the airport. Our intention was that if the situation would not clear up we had the option of leaving (already being at the girport) and if it did, we would simply take the next train back home. We both expected the latter to happen and since we did not think that we would actually leave Japan we left our apartment with only some hand-luggage and our passports – just in case. The night we arrived and spent at the airport was amazinaly aujet. This situation changed drastically the next morning when the airport filled with people who all wanted to leave, since the situation in Fukushima had gotten worse.

My employer (the Hilti Group in Liechtenstein) quickly assembled a crisis team. They recommended that I leave the country and offered to cover all the costs. In the meantime Rita was in the process of booking a flight to Germany and was asking if she should book only one for herself or for the two of us as well. After discussing this with my direct superior and the General Manager in Japan, it was decided that I should return to Switzerland until the situation was under control. Rabea was not at all keen to leave but finally after a lot of fighting and argueing we bought two tickets to Paris and from there onwards to Zürich.

After we bought the ticktes things started to become hectic as more people tried to get out. When we passed all the security checks and got a re-entrypermit at the airport we tried to board the plane but were denied entry to the cabin. Accidentally, the tickets had been issued for the next day! Since we were only travelling with hand luggage we successfully persuaded the ground crew to change the tickets and finally boarded the plane. Never in my life have I felt the same mix of relief, guilt and shame as we took off the ground and headed for Paris.



STUCK IN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Prior to our return we only informed our families and a few close friends. After arriving in Zürich it first took us a couple of days to recount the past, to gain a complete picture of what happened up to this point and to get used to the idea of suddenly being back in Switzerland. After two weeks of waiting and retelling the same story over and over again Hilti decided to put me back to work and assigned me to the Corporate Legal Team at Hilti's Headquarters in Liechtenstein. Everything was extremly well taken care of, they arranged an apartment, transportation and additional pay for my expenses and the work there was just fantastic. I got to work on some interesting topics and the General Counsel, Nora Klug, and her team were very understanding and cared greatly about my case.

RETURNING TO JAPAN

Since Rabea did not have the opportunity to work from her base in Switzerland she quickly developped a strong desire to return to Japan as soon as possible. Ever since we had been back in Switzerland we constantly wondered whether to stay or to go back. Of course there were countless other options to evaluate. Going back to get our things, then leave for good, staying only until July, staying until the end of September, moving to other parts of Japan, moving to other places in Asia and so on. Although the environmental situation was still unclear we decided that we could not solely rely on the information provided by the media since obviously many reports were blunt exaggerations. We used all the information portals provided by the Swiss Federal Government who were quite helpful in assessing the risk of returning to Japan. Additionally we contacted a friend I went to school with who is now a nuclear scientist and who was extremely helpful providing the information we needed. By mid April we had discussed everything from worst case to best case a million times and finally decided that the risks were too low in comparison to giving up our Japan-Year and all our unfulfilled plans. Rabea left in mid April. I followed three weeks later in early May.

PART II EVERY-DAY PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

INTRODUCTION

Apart from dealing with the events caused by the earthquake organzing life in Japan prooved to be though enough as it is. The challenge of spending one year in Japan lies in solving problems that are out of the ordinary when living in Switzerland. This second section I will give an account of some of the core problems (visa, accommodation, work, language school and bank account) all SJCC Scholarship Recipients face and describe the way I came up with a solution to solve them. One important purpose of this section is to make life a little easier for all future scholarship recipients who can simply walk in the footsteps of their predecessors.





VISA AND IMMIGRATION

Overview

Permission for foreigners to come and stay in Japan is controlled by two separate processes and two separate administrative bodies: The visa is issued by the Japanese Ministry of Immigration and regulates the issues of tourists and immigrants on a national level. In other words, it permits you to stay within the Japanese boarders. It is merely a sticker in your passport.

Secondly you will have to register at the local ward office if you intend to actually live and work in Japan. For this the Japanese use the somewhat strange term "Alien Registration". This will give you a foreigner`s ID card, a so-called Alien Registration Card.

Visa

No matter if you visit Japan as a tourist or if you plan to live in Japan, you will need a visa to enter. The length of your visit will be determined by how long your visa is valid. The most common visa is the Temporary Visitor's Visa (= "Tourist Visa") which like in most countries is valid for three months and - for Swiss nationals - can be obtained upon arrival at the airport or port of entrance to Japan very easily. This visa can be extended at any immigration office once for an additional period of three months.

For longer stays there is a whole variety of "long-term" visas. What all long-term visas that are relevant for scholarship recipients have in common is that you need a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE) in order to get for one. A CoE is issued by the Japanese Ministry of Justice and serves as evidence that the foreign national meets the conditions for living in Japan, including that the activity in which he or she wishes to engage in requires a long-term visa. Only after receiving the CoE you are entitled to apply for a long-term visa.

Since I had secured my internship position at Hilti prior to departure from Japan I was able to profit from my employer's support after arriving in Japan. I therefore entered Japan with a Temporary Visitors Visa (= "Tourist Visa") which was sufficient for all formalities except opening a bank account which requires a long-term visa. Since I arrived in late September but would not start my internship until early January I decided to extend my Temporary Visitor's Visa. Hilti hired a German visa agency to take care of the formalities. I therefore sent all the necessary documents to them. They applied for the Certificate of Eligibility. The CoE was issued, sent to the agency in Germany and from there sent back to Hilti in Japan. Luckily I asked the agency to send me a copy by email as well.

According to the agency I was required to leave Japan, apply at the local consulate in Switzerland or anywhere else outside Japan and reenter Japan with the new Trainee Visa. I strongly disagreed with this point of view since I had been informed otherwise by the immigration authorities in Shinagawa when I went there to extend my Touris Visa. Additionally I was not eager to fly back to Switzerland or to the nearest Japanese Consulate (in that case the one in Seoul) without having a firm opinion that it was impossible to go through the process while staying in Japan. I checked back with the agency in Germany but they insisted on their point of view. Since I was still convinced that it was not necessary to leave Japan I contacted Hilti in Japan directly. My very helpful college at Human Resources, Yoko Kurihara, checked with the immigration authorities and confirmed my findings.

I decided to not leave Japan and went directly to the immigration office to file my papers in early January. I submitted the CoE and asked to change the status of residence from Touris Visa to a one year Trainee Visa. I had to fill in my address on a postcard which was to be sent to me as soon as I could pick up the new visa. Additionally I was given a form that Yoko had to fill out and send by mail to confirm that I was actually employed by Hilti Japan. Two weeks later the postcard was delivered by mail to my house which meant that my visa was ready so I went back to the Immigration Office to pick it up. Luckily, the german agency prooved to be wrong. Changing from a tourist visa to a long-term visa can be done without leaving the country.

Re-entry permit

If you hold a long-term visa, plan to travel abroad and would like to reenter Japan before your visa expires you will have to get a re-entry permit. This is a very important point since your visa will automatically expire if you leave Japan without such a permit and there are <u>no</u> exceptions. Not even people who left because of the Tohoku Earthquake and simply forgot to get one were allowed to maintain their long-term status but had to reenter Japan with a tourist visa instead. Luckily getting the re-entry permit is fairly easy and straightforward, as it can be obtained at the Immigration Office in exchange for a small fee. There are two types: the single and the multiple re-entry permit which cost 3'000 and 6'000 yen respectively. It is advisable to get the multiple re-entry permit in any case when travelling abroad since dates may change or some unforeseen events might require a second entry (such as earthquakes!).

Alien registration card

As mentioned before, the Alien registration card serves as a foreigner's ID for people who plan on living in Japan. Two weeks after arrival, I registered at the local ward office. I did not have a permanent address yet so I used the address of the hostel I stayed at instead which worked fine. Once I filed the inquiry I received a confirmation on a sheet of paper which served as a provisional ID until I was able to pick up the plastic card two weeks later.





APARTMENT

If you are by yourself and willing to stay in a guesthouse with other people, finding a place to stay in Tokyo is not a very complicated thing to do. There are countless agencies that will provide furnished rooms for virtually any budget. If you are by yourself it makes a lot of sense to just get a room at one of the countless guest houses unless you plan for an infinite stay in Japan. It's the easiest and usually most inexpensive way to live in Japan. Plus you get to meet countless people from all over the world who also live there which means you will make friends very easily.

My case was a little more complicated because Rabea and I wanted to stay in our own apartment. Since we had no personal contacts and did not know our ways around the city at all we had to contact various housing gaencies and evaluate the criteria for selecting an apartment. By order of importance we narrowed them down to location, rent, layout, furniture and size. Keeping in mind that we would only live there for one year, the location was our priority since we wanted to live in an area where we could really enjoy all aspects of the big-city-life we were looking for. After defining the acceptable parameters we decided to contact various agencies of which Ichii Appartments and Hikari Homes are particularly recommendable. Apart from the agencies that were simply too expensive, we encountered troubles with Fontana.com (shabby apartments and poor service) and leopalace21.com (annoying and inefficient service) and therefore would not recommend those two. Hikari Homes was the first agency we contacted. Our agent was very friendly and tried relentlessly to find a suitable place. On the same day we were able to see three different apartments. As we expected, all of them were very small and none of them really were in a central location, which was our most important point. The same held true for the offers made by Ichii Aparments so we kept on searching. After some time we came very close to sealing a deal with Hikari Homes for a place in Koto-ku.

You live – you learn: in addition to the monthly rent, most landlords will demand a deposit, usually two month's rents. This deposit sometimes is a real deposit in the sense that after termination of the contract the money will be refunded. Sometimes though – as it was in our case - the deposit is non-refundable. On top of that, some landlords will demand "Key Money", usually one month's rent. To date I have been unable to find out the exact purpose of this fee. Of course the agency also wants to get their share of the pie so they often charge an "Agency Fee" usually another month's rent. More surprisingly, there are hidden costs like a monthly "Handling Fee", sometimes adding 10% or more to the rent, one-time cleaning fees - ground 1/3 of one month's rent, fire insurance and so on. Of course this will only give you an unfurnished apartment and does not include all the costs of furniture, kitchen-, bathroom-utensils or the monthly costs for gas, electricity, water and internet connection. Note that Japanese homes do not have a washing-machine or a fridge, sometimes they do not even have an AC included. To make a long story short: the initial costs for moving in would have been way too high. What looked to be affordable at first turned out to be way too expensive. All costs combined, the real monthly rent, calculated over a oneyear period was roughly 1.5 times the original rent and would have required us to pay approx. 5 to 6 month's rent before even setting a foot into the apartment. That was not an option, we had to start over.

Living in a hostel gets old very quickly so we needed a different short-term solution until we found something suitable. We therefore turned toward contacting guest house agencies as well. There have been many different opinions voiced by former scholarship recipients about Sakura House. It has been called "the Mc Donald's of guesthouse agencies", some think their apartments are cheap, far away from the city center and some say their rents are too high. All of this is partly true but these are good reasons why I would still recommend the agency. Sakura House is probably the easiest way to find a place to stay if you do not know the city or your Japanese is poor. There are no hidden costs, the deals are very transparent and what you see is what you get. Their service is multi-lingual and fast responding. Everything works, their apartments are simple but clean, moving in and moving out is very easy and they refund the deposit - even though they show truly bad taste with the interiors.

We contacted Sakura House and two days later we moved into one of their apartments. The apartment wasn't great and located in Nerima, somewhat far from the city center, but as a provisional place to stay it had all we could ask for. This way we also got to know the laid-back suburbs of Tokyo where most Japanese people live which otherwise we probably would have never discovered.

About six weeks later we found an add for an apartment on craigslist.com that would be available the next month. Judging from the pictures, the place was very small but nicely furnished and even though it was located in the up-scale neighborhood of Nakameguro it was still affordable. At first we were a little skeptical, since the price seemed to be somewhat low for that part of town, the landlord was a westerner and the place was only advertised on craigslist.

Nevertheless we decided to give it a try. We arrived at Nakameguro station the following week and instantly felt at home. This was exactly the kind of neighborhood we were looking for. A great mix of vibrant city-feeling, stylish little boutiques, cafes and restaurants and excellent connections to other parts of Tokyo. Or as the tenant who lived in the place at time correctly put it: "You have the advantage to be very close to Shibuya, without having to deal with Shibuya." We looked at the apartment and were not surprised to see that it was small. Very small. Still, the interior was quite lovely in comparison to what we had seen so far. Ith ad everything that we needed and the landlord seemed trustworthy. The only downside was the size.

Eventually we decided that since we would only stay there for one year this negative point was minor in comparison to the overall value of the place and signed the contract the next day. So far we are very happy with this decision. Especially the fact that it takes only three minutes by train from Shibuya is quite appealing every time you get squeezed on the last train. There have been no major problems connected to housing ever since.



Naka-Meguro 中目黒

"You have the advantage to be very close to Shibuya, without having to deal with Shibuya."

SCHOOL

I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL! I HATE SCHOOL! I'D RATHER DO ANYTHING THAN GO TO SCHOOL!



As many of my predecessors I decided to go to language school before starting to work. I had absolutely no idea which school to choose so I checked the ones which were recommended to me by the SJCC Alumni and Mr. Dudler. I narrowed my search down to three schools of which the Kichijoji Language School seemed to me to be the best choice since they offered a good schedule, were to be oriented towards Asian students which somewhat reduced the risk of using English all the time and was rather inexpensive compared to the other schools. Unfortunately I only stayed there for three months which is very short and gave me just a basic knowledge of Japanese. Most of my fellow students were Korean who spoke little or no English so my plan worked well from that perspective. The downside was the pace. Since the Korean and the Japanese language share some similarities the pace was very fast and I had trouble keeping up with my Korean classmates who already spoke some Japanese before coming to Japan. Especially on the grammar-side there was a clear gap from me to the rest of the class. This proved to be a little frustrating and I am not sure if the fast pace was actually a good thing. I therefore recommend the KLS for people who already have some knowledge of Japanese, for bare beginners it might be a little fast-paced.

WORK

To be frank: finding an internship position in Japan is very difficult and for undetermined people more close to impossible. It is most advisable to get things settled prior to your departure from Switzerland. Of course old ties and connections always help, so the first step would be to assess all (!) personal connections and get in touch with former SCJJ scholarship recipients, something that can easily be done by accessing the SCJJ's helpful alumni network. If stepping in the footsteps of former recipients is not successful and all the personal connections have not helped either there is no other choice than to look for a job the traditional way - looking online, making phone-calls, writing applications, going to interviews and so on.

I started looking for a job early using a very broad approach. Soon I realized that contacting Japanese companies out of the blue was not a feasible way, since my Japanese language abilities were too low and English is rarely used in Japanese business life, not even in large international Japanese companies. I therefore narrowed down my search to roughly fifty large Swiss companies that had a regional office in Tokyo and as a first step explained my situation to the Swiss HR personnel in charge. In most cases, they were interested in the project and checked with their Japanese colleges to see whether there would be a possible placement. Some even took a great deal of effort and actively supported my case. On this occasion I would like to issue my gratitude to Dr. Hermann Escher, Mr. Maurice Hartenbach and Dr. Urs Jaisli for their exceptional efforts to find a placement in their respective fields of profession.

Most Swiss companies I contacted had offices in Japan that were operating autonomously and offered no exchange program for their employees or none that people who were not already employed in Switzerland had access to. The ones who sent expats to Japan often did so exclusively for higher-ranking management functions. Since my academic background is law, I also contacted various law firms based in Tokyo. In two cases (Baker & McKenzie and Arqis) I was successful and was ultimately offered a placement but since their internship positions were both unremunerated I had to turn down these offers. It turned out that unrenumerated work was standard for law firms. Since I had to earn money I tried to focus on different business areas.

Of course I also contacted the Japanese Embassy in Bern as well as the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo, the Swiss Business Hub in Japan. I even had the chance to meet former delegates of the Swiss Mission to Japan who offered a great deal of support with additional personal connections. I also attended the Annual General Meeting of the SJCC in Zurich. In the end I realized that I was going in circles, since the same people were recommended to me who in return recommended the same people that I had contacted in the first place. Establishing contacts turned out to be the minor obstacle but at the end of the day none of these encounters led to a job offer. In addition, I searched the well known websites specializing in internship positions in Japan, applied to a couple using the websites' online application tools but in most cases received only a standard negative response or no reply at all.

Help came from Liechtenstein. The Hilti Group's Hilti Foundation Exchange Program offers one Trainee position every year in their Japanese office. I sent my application to the Hilti Foundation and was invited for an interview at their Head Office in Liechtenstein. A couple of days after the very pleasant interview I was informed that I had been selected for the following year's position starting from January 2011. My first visit to Hilti's office in Yokohama was in late October 2010, a couple of weeks after my arrival, while I was still attending language school. I was introduced to my colleges, who informed me about possible projects I could work on and enjoyed dinner with my future supervisors. In January I received a very warm and friendly welcome by all my colleges. I was very well integrated in the team and my stated preferences on the subject of my future work were very well received. I had the chance to contribute to a alobal compliance project focusing on corporate social responsibility. This assignment changed somewhat due to the Tohoku earthquake. Since I was temporarily transferred to the Head Office in Liechtenstein (see Section "Earthquake" for details) I later mostly worked for the Corporate Legal Department and it's Chief Compliance Officer which of course gave me insight to some very interesting fields of Legal work. This can be viewed as one good thing that was a direct cause of this memorable day. Besides this, I was involved in the HR recruiting process in Japan which also meant that I travelled to London as a member of a team to represent Hilti at the London Career Forum.



BANK ACCOUNT

For all scholarship recipients opening a bank account in Japan is crucial. Most Japanese companies will require for their employees to hold a bank account by a Japanese bank in order to transfer the monthly salary. Contrary to some discouraging reports, opening an account turned out to be a really convenient process in my case since I had sufficient funds to last through the Temporary Visitor's Visa-period of my stay.

The following criteria were key: easy handling of the account (opening the account, online banking, international transfers, helpline), no minimum balance and no maintenance fee and easily accessible ATMs, free of charge.



I first tried to open an account while attending the language training course, roughly six weeks after coming to Japan. Since it is the largest bank in Japan I tried the Mitsubishi Bank. As expected I was told that it is impossible to open an account with a Temporary Visitor's Visa, despite the fact that I showed them a confirmation of my internship position which would entitle me to a CoE and consequently to a long-term visa. Nevertheless I did not bother to try again to open an account until I aot my Trainee Visa. In the meantime I did some additional research, which bank would be most suitable to meet my criteria. Mr. Dudler recommended me to try Shinsei Bank. Indeed it turned out that this was the best choice. They provide a very efficient, foreigner-friendly service, offer foreign currency deposits and do not require a personal seal to open an account (personal seals are still used frequently in Japan to sign formal documents). All information is available in English, they run an English website, offer English online banking and all the staff I encountered in person and on the phone were perfectly bilingual. They require no minimum balance, charge no maintenance fee and offer free money withdrawal from their own ATMs and in 7/11 or Daily Yamazaki convenience stores. Shinsei Bank is not one of the large Japanese Banks, therefore they do not have a branch or ATM machine on every other corner but finding a 7/11 or Daily Yamazaki convenience store to withdraw money is pretty easy.

In sum, the process with Shinsei Bank would be: Get a long-term visa from the Immigration Office (for Tokyo it is located in Shinagawa). Register the change of immigration status at the local ward office, they will add a remark on the back of the Alien Registration Card - the bank checked the Alien Registration Card, not the passport! Open the account. Mail your documents or go to the local branch and be stunned to find a flawless English service and 26 different colors for your bankcard to choose from. Wait for roughly one week to receive your online banking card, delivered by registered mail. A piece of cake by Japanese standards!

PART III TWO YEARS LATER

LOOKING BACK

Like many others who once lived in Japan I found it hard to readopt to life in Switzerland after I got back. I must confess that Western culture in comparison felt crude and unrefined. I miss the politeness in public life, the respect and liveliness of Japanese people, the buzz and the lights of Tokyo and last but not least the superb food.

It has been almost two years since I have been back in Switzerland. Without a doubt this was one of the most rewarding periods of my life so far. Also largely due to the huge amount of effort which had to go into it which makes it even more precious.

LESSONS LEARNED

I am convinced that my Japan experience has taught me some priceless lessons of life. I adopted a variety of Japanese attitudes and am trying hard to uphold some of the various positive Japanese traits such as discipline, endurance, admiration and attention to detail and of course the unsurpassed politeness towards other people which is commonplace in Japanese society. Apart from these blurry and abstract effects which are hard to grasp here are some more noticeable lessons learned.

Accept that all things must pass

The fact that all things come to an end is far more instilled in Japanese society than in our Western culture. The most obvious explanation is that catastrophic events in nature are much more frequent in Japan than they are in Switzerland. As mentioned earlier in this report this attitude is reflected in countless aspects of Japanese culture. One of the consequences is that Japanese people find much more joy in moments of happiness, as insignificant and small as they may seem from a distant view. Additionally, they seem to value personal encounters more and they pay greater attention to maintaining friendships and loyalties. The acceptance that all things must pass adds significance and weight to times of pleasure and makes times of discomfort much easier to bear.

Find true elegance in simplicity

The level of elegance in many aspects of Japanese society is astonishing. Be it the elegant and simple shape of an ordinary rice bowl which has been perfected hundreds of years ago and has remained virtually unchanged ever since or the simple and beautiful forms of Japanese architecture which are admired greatly all around the world. The fact that simplicity is the key element of elegance was one of my most useful findings.

Eat healthy food

Although this lesson might seem wired in comparison to the others it has proved to be an important one and therefore definitely deserves to be mentioned. Fish, veggies and rice make a much healthier diet than Zürigschnätzelts or Raclette (even though in my view all have an equal, delicious right to existence).

Stop complaining and spreading negativity

It is accepted and sometimes even encouraged to complain in Western societies. Negatives are to be exposed and dealt with immediately. While this view holds some truth it can also lead to negative consequences: to ignore that we live in an imperfect world, to believe that it is best to avoid negatives, pain or hardships and to follow the illusion that all negatives we experience are unrighteous and unjustified. Many Japanese try to avoid complaining. Unfortunately, taking this too far can lead to stoic behavior and mistakes being repeated again and again. Nevertheless when facing the choice of complaining or trying to change things without complaint I firmly believe it is best to choose the latter.

Aspire for perfection

I have never witnessed any incident in which a Japanese person was not trying hard to succeed in his or her profession. I do believe it is fair to say that the Japanese tend to be more focused and pay greater attention to their work than most other peoples.

One incident which serves as a perfect example took place in Shibuya. It is well known that there are numerous homeless people living underneath a bridge next to Shibuya Station. I once passed by this place and witnessed a homeless man cleaning his tent which was built out of nothing more than a few tarps held together by thread and wire. The thoroughness with which this homeless person went about his work was impressive. His place was spotless. The few belongings he had were neatly lined up and in perfect condition. He payed great attention to clean the place as best as he could with the means that he had at his disposal. Japanese attitude towards life: The willpower to stay focused, work hard and relentlessly aspire for perfection makes every situation more valuable. Whether you are leading a company to success or whether you are cleaning a tent underneath a bridge you call your home. I have been trying to apply this principle to whatever I do ever since. Without a doubt this lesson proved to be the most valuable one of them all.

THANKS AND FUTURE PLANS

My thanks go to Mr. Paul Dudler and the Swiss Japanese Chamber of Commerce Scholarship Fund for making everything possible in the first place. Mr. Dudler takes great efforts to ensure the survival and well-being of the program. He is an outstanding advocate for exchange between Switzerland and Japan and a most distinguished expert on Japanese life as well as all situations faced by foreigners in Japan. I would also like to convey my gratitude to all the people in Switzerland and in Japan whether they have been personally mentioned in this report or not who helped me along the way. It is truly astonishing how supportive some people are if you ask for their help uprightly.

My last thanks go to Japan as a country. I am thankful to have been fortunate enough to take a glimpse at this fascinating place and it's been a privilege to learn such valuable lessons of life, meet such great people and make so many new friends. I hope to be back in the future to live and work in Japan for an additional period of time. There is still so much to discover and still many questions to answer. Up until then I am only left with saying $\angle j = b = j = 2$ $\forall b = b = b = 1$

Looking back I see this incident as a perfect metaphor for one very typical



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