

# **Interim Report for the SJCC Scholarship Fund**



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# Introduction

## Preface

Already more than half a year has passed since I arrived in Japan in the end of August last year, and it is time to reflect on my experiences up until now. To begin with, I would like to make a short introduction as to why I applied to the SJCC Scholarship Fund and the planning of my “Japan Year”. As I have already been to Japan before several times – for travel, meeting friends and for 1-year studies at a Japanese University – my report will not go into details about how to get a visa or alien resident card and first impressions about Japan and life here. Previous reports from other scholarship recipients have already covered these subjects in great detail and I think it doesn’t make much sense to repeat this all over again. Therefore, I will focus and talk in-depth about my specific situation and purpose I came to Japan this time.

## Motivation and Planning of my “Japan Year”

When I applied to the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce, I had already applied for a job offer mentioned on the homepage of the Embassy of Switzerland I was interested in. The offer was a 4-month internship as political trainee under the Deputy Head of the Mission and would give insight into diplomatic work and Japanese politics. This sounded very challenging and interesting and as diplomacy is one of many possibilities that I am considering for my future, I applied for the position – and in the end got accepted.

It was then when I decided to apply to the SJCC Scholarship Fund and to stay in Japan after the internship at the Embassy. I reckoned it would be helpful for my career to add one more year in Japan to my experiences. My biggest motivation was to get some first-hand experience about Japanese working-life and at the same time to further improve my Japanese language skills. As I had already passed level 1 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Exam at the end of my exchange year at Meiji University in Tokyo, I decided to take on a new challenge and take a course in Business Japanese. Japanese is a very difficult language, not only due to its writing system and grammar, but mostly due to situational change in the usage of the language. Japanese people tend to change the way they speak and also the words and expressions they use according to whom they are speaking to, their position and also the situation they are in. Therefore it is very difficult to speak Japanese „fluently“, even if one might have mastered all the grammar and the Kanji. Especially while doing business in Japan or with Japanese people, the right usage of language can be crucial. Therefore, my aim was – and still is – to deepen my understanding and knowledge of these nuances and reach a higher level of the Japanese language during a three month course.

With this, I had “only” 7 months of my minimum 12 months covered for the program, which is why I would have to search for another internship for the remaining time once I was in Japan. I figured that this might be easier once I actually was in the country and could go to interviews on location, rather than searching from Switzerland.

My final plan therefore was to first do my 4-month internship at the Embassy and then either do a second internship right afterwards in case I already found a position or, if not, first do my language course and search for an internship during these 3 months.

# Internship

## Diplomatic Trainee at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tokyo

I started my first internship on September 1<sup>st</sup> at the Embassy of Switzerland, which is located in Minami-Azabu, a rather rich neighborhood in Minato-ku, close to Roppongi. On my first day, I was greeted by the ambassador and my future boss, Minister Edgar Doerig, who introduced me to all the employees. For the first 3 months I shared an office with one of the Embassy's secretaries, Miss Matsumoto. This was very beneficial for my Japanese as I could learn firsthand from listening to her calls how to answer the phone in Japanese, what fixed terms and expressions to use etc.

My task was mainly to write about Japan's relations to other countries and report back to our government in Bern. I wrote on the state visits of the Vietnamese and also the Philippine presidents, Japan Prime Minister Noda's visit to South Korea, as well as Japan's relations with Indonesia and Russia. I also had the chance to visit some international Symposia, for example on Human Rights in North Korea, which was very interesting and also quite emotional. Another very interesting symposium I had the chance to attend was on Japan-Russia relations, especially in regard to their territorial dispute on the Kuril Islands, as well as prospects for future collaboration, in particular regarding natural sources, notably natural gas. Germany acted as a mediator at this symposium, as it was in a similar position as Japan after World War 2. Whilst Germany managed to solve territorial disputes, apologized for its actions during World War 2 and has recovered good economical relations to most countries, Japan is still stagnating in post-war condition and does not seem to agree to a compromise. Although there was no agreement reached, the different opinions and positions were indeed very interesting. Furthermore, I went to a lot of briefings at the Foreign Ministry, including the weekly briefings on the status of the Fukushima Daichi Power Plant and its influence on the soil, sea, food, drinking water etc. Aside from the weekly briefings, there were several other, one which was about a discussion between a Japanese and a Chinese delegation on Human Rights. Representatives from several Embassies, especially European, were invited to this important briefing and experience and opinions in regard to China's Human Rights Policy were shared as well. Additionally, there were two long reports I was writing in collaboration with Minister Doerig; the first one was about the environmental policy in Japan, which was especially of interest in regard to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio in June 2012, for which we went to meet several people of the corresponding section at the Foreign Ministry. The second report was about the "Global Platform for Business and Biodiversity", which was attended by non-profit organizations, Embassy representatives etc. from all around the world.

Last but not least, there was a very important visit during the first month of my time at the Embassy, which had to become the most valuable experience during my internship. Swiss Foreign Ministry State Secretary Maurer (Now Head of the IKRK) made an official visit to Japan for one week and I had the honor to be part of his delegation and accompany him to all the meetings and discussions which included a 6-hour meeting with the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Bessho, a visit to a Japanese Diplomat's office and a meeting with the American Ambassador to Japan. An official dinner was organized at the Swiss Ambassador's Residence with guests from the Foreign Ministry, as well as the newly appointed Japanese Ambassador to Switzerland, Ambassador Umemoto. Mr. Maurer's state visit gave me insight into Swiss and Japanese politics and what they have in common, but also problems and differences. It was very interesting to see political discussions first hand and observe

each person's reactions, how carefully they chose their words to not endanger the friendly relations.

All in all, the internship in the diplomatic section of the Embassy was very interesting, challenging at times, but mostly, it was tremendously educating. I am very grateful for this valuable and rare experience, which opened new horizons for me and also new perspectives for my future.

## Trainee for Export Promotion at the Swiss Business Hub Japan

As my internship in the political section of the Embassy of Switzerland was coming to an end, Roger Zbinden, Head of the Swiss Business Hub Japan, which is also located within the Embassy, asked me if I would be interested in a 3-month internship in the Export Promotion Section of the Swiss Business Hub as he needed somebody for a special project. After discussing the details and some consideration, I took on my second internship under the same conditions with a prolonged contract for 3 months.

The project I was working on was regarding the Swiss cleantech sector. The March 11 earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan and following effects on the Fukushima nuclear power plants led to a rethinking in Japan's Energy Policy with a focus on renewable energies and sustainable technologies. This is a big chance for Swiss cleantech companies who wish to further develop their market in Asia and the Swiss Business Hub Japan offers to support these companies at best efforts. Therefore, in a first step, I was conducting a survey targeting Swiss cleantech companies to gain a deeper understanding of the interest and needs, but also experiences, of Swiss companies regarding the Japanese market. Another goal of the survey was to get detailed information on how many companies have already entered the Japanese market and which companies would be interested – and which not. The survey was a success and we got reply from several big and also small and middle sized companies. Some were already successful in the Japanese market and others needed our support, which is why we invited them to the Osec Country Consulting Days, which are being held in Zurich several times a year. After finalizing the survey, I added the gathered information into a database, which gives an overview of Swiss cleantech companies active – or starting to get active – in Japan.

Another project I was working on was the Swiss Green Technologies Seminar, which was hosted by the Embassy of Switzerland at the PV Expo in March. It was collaboration between the Science and Technology Office Tokyo and the Swiss Business Hub Japan, with speakers from Universities and companies active in the cleantech sector, such as ABB, Hilti, Swiss Building Components etc. and of course the governmental supported export platform Cleantech Switzerland.



The internship at the Swiss Business Hub Japan gave me insight into a completely different part of the Embassy than my previous internship. The Hub, which acts in cooperation with Osec, is in charge of a lot of different projects and a rather busy and bustling place. I got involved into a lot of administrative work, but was on the other hand also working on my own project. It was the first time I conducted a professional survey and had to start from zero, which means to think about how best to conduct it, target audience, what questions to ask to get useful replies etc. I am happy that my online survey was a success in the end and that it brought some future projects for the Hub, which will again contribute to the Swiss economy.

Again, I am very grateful to have been given this opportunity, which let me have insight into the work of Swiss Business Hubs and the interesting and vast world of Export Promotion.



## Future Prospects

After having finished my two internships, I will start my 3-month Business Japanese course at Naganuma Japanese Language School in Shibuya in April. Furthermore, Mr. Zbinden praised my work and offered me to continue working for the Swiss Business Hub on a freelance basis for two afternoons a week. Naturally, I was more than happy to hear that my work was appreciated and gladly accepted his offer. Therefore, starting from April, I will be taking Japanese language classes in the morning five times a week and additionally continue working at the Embassy twice a week. I am looking forward to improve my Japanese skills and make friends at the Japanese language school, as well as to adopt my newly learned skills during my work at the Swiss Business Hub.



## Afterword

I can't believe how fast these seven months since I arrived in Japan in August last year, have passed. I have made a lot of new experiences, gained insight into two new and at the same time very different worlds – the world of politics and the world of business and export - and I have had a lot of interesting encounters. I am grateful to all the people I have met and who have been mentors and friends and accompanied me on my way – some only for a short time, some for a long distance. My time here in Japan is not at its end yet though and I am positive that a lot of new challenges are still waiting for me on my further path.

In the meantime, I would like to thank all the employees of the Embassy of Switzerland for their helpfulness at all times. In particular, I would like to thank Ambassador Bucher for giving me the opportunity to do two internships at his Embassy, as well as Minister Doerig and Mr. Roger Zbinden for choosing me for these traineeship positions. Last but definitely not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Dudler and the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce for accepting my application to the Scholarship Fund and for their continued financial support during my year in Japan.



どうもありがとうございます。  
これからもどうぞよろしくお願ひ致します。