JAPAN YEAR

MID-TERM REPORT

Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC)

スイス日本商工会議所

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FOREWORD

First and foremost, I want to thank the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce for giving me this opportunity to fulfill my dream of moving to Japan. Japan had always been in my mind since I was a teenager. Before my graduation I decided that I wanted to come to Japan, not temporarily, but to live there long-term. Only this way could I truly experience the culture, the people and their mentality.

To give a brief summary on how I came to Japan – In 2016 I read about the SJCC scholarship on the internet and then decided I want to apply for it, not only for the financial support, but also to connect with other like-minded people that share my passion of Japanese culture. Early 2017 I received a positive response from Martin Stricker, chairman of the SJCC scholarship fund, and it was one of the happiest moments in my life. Suddenly the world seemed larger. I would step out of my Bernese bubble and tackle challenges on my own. I decided to delay my trip for a year so that I could wrap up my work at the Swiss insurance company, Die Mobiliar, and save up money for the upcoming journey.

Now after half a year of living in Tokyo, this is my mid-term report for the SJCC and any persons who might be interested in pursuing the same dream like me. I hope you enjoy this read.
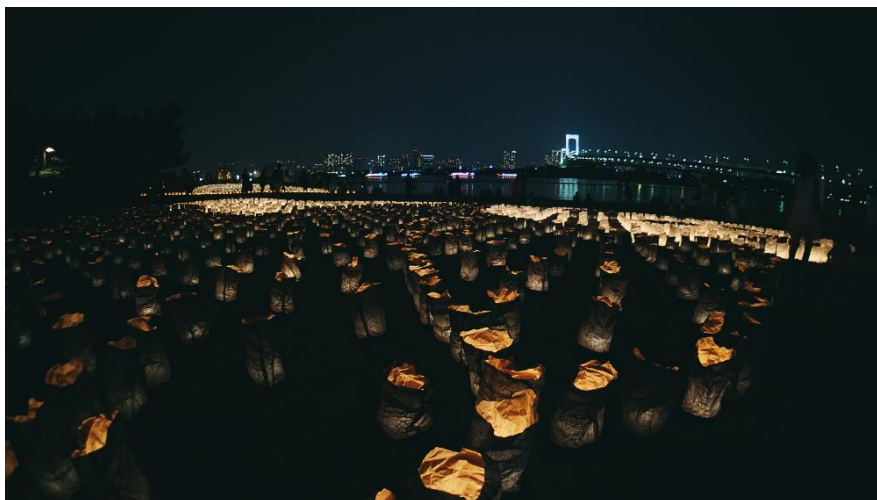
Figure 1: Lantern festival in Odaiba

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

For the start, I would like to give my reader some background about me as person. I was born and grew up in Thun which is a relatively small town with 44'000 habitants in Switzerland. In the twenty-eight years of my life, I had always been living in Switzerland. Even though I have travelled quite a lot in the recent years (to around 15 countries so far). When I finally decided to move to Japan and went to a first network event by the SJCC, my mind was blown away by the ambitious, talented and successful people I met. The world suddenly seemed much larger and I have never experienced this part of the world before. This professional side of the world has somehow always been hidden from me. That made me realize, I had been living in my Bernese bubble all my life. If I wanted set foot in Tokyo, I had to adapt my mindset. Having spent only half a year in Tokyo, I have already learned a lot, especially about trying to break into this international fast-paced environment.

I am writing this mid-term report to the SJCC to show my appreciation for their ongoing support, but also to share insight to anyone who is considering making the same move to Japan. Reading the previous SJCC report helped me to make an informed decision and set my expectation to a realistic level. I hope this report will provide you with some insight on how to approach this once-in-a-life-time experienced.

Figure 2: Cup noodle museum

Motivation

For my first six months in Tokyo, I have set myself a few goals. Before I had travelled to Japan twice; in 2016 and 2017, each a month long. Therefore, as I had already seen a lot of Japan and I didn't want to explore the popular tourist sites. Instead, I wanted to engage deeper in the culture, experience events that are only in certain times of the year, limited to Japanese culture. I wanted to interact with Japanese people through culture exchange, become fluent in Japanese, experience living in an international city. In short, I wanted to break out my shell and experience something new.

Figure 3: Sightseeing in Shikinejima

PROGRESS OF JAPANESE LEARNING

Two years before I moved to Japan, I started doing self-study on my own. I learned the necessary hiragana and katakana and delved into the never-ending world of kanji. I focused my study mostly on grammar and kanji as I thought once I am in Japan, I could use the time there to improve my hearing and speaking as there would be more opportunity. I also took a three months lower-intermediate Japanese course at the Bern university in 2017.

For the scholarship, before I come to Japan, I had to decide which language school I wanted to study at. My requirement was an intensive language school that does not occupy all my free time, so I could complement my study with social activities to apply the theoretical knowledge I learned at school. I have read many times that this is the best method to improve language skills. In school you learn the fundamentals, but Japanese in reality, as with any other language, is very different. The skills required to apply language in real life can't be learned directly from a textbook.

After much consideration I chose "ISI Language School" in Takadanobaba. The students in this language school are mostly Asians (Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese). They usually have an advantage to learning Japanese due to similar grammar or using the same Chinese characters. As I wanted push myself, I found the class to be quite slow; the learning pace did meet my expectation. However, the school provided students who study at their institution for more than six months with a student visa. This was very important to me, because unlike other SJCC recipients, I wanted to work full-time after my studies. As I had taken the apprenticeship education path in Switzerland and have worked since I was eighteen, I did not want to "waste" time by doing internships when I can work full time and earn more money. Having a student visa not only allowed me to work part-time, but it made it easier to convert to a working visa afterwards. This is because you do not need to apply for a "Certificate of Eligibility" again, which takes about three months.

So how were my studies at ISI Language School? On the most part, I found them to be satisfactory. The lessons were well structured, and the teachers are well-trained. They used the "Minna No Nihongo" for the beginner lessons. For the intermediate class, we switched to "新完全マスター文法 N3 and N2" for grammar, 漢字マスターN2 for Kanji and 中級学ぶ日本語 for the

listening and reading. The pace was modest, they gave out homework almost every day to keep your mind on task. The school houses a lot of student and therefore the class size is quite high, usually around 21. That means there was some down-time in the class and your engagement would decrease. But by being proactive, and sitting in the front of the class, you definitely could get more out of the lesson. Another bad point is that I found it hard to socialize with my Asian peers. The Koreans and Chinese mostly kept to themselves. Though I must note, that I found it generally hard due to my age difference. My peers were all in their early 20s.

Finally, half of my share house members are Japanese. I was lucky to have found my share house as I feel most of my roommates are mature but also very socially engaging. There is a lot of opportunity for me to speak Japanese with my roommates. This has helped me tremendously in improving my Japanese.

Figure 4: Festival participant waiting for the next step

Conclusion

Would I recommend this school? Yes, I think so. The positive points for the school I would summarize it as follows:

- They provide a student visa
- Learning materials are included in the tuition
- Teachers and school staff are generally very friendly and supportive (helping you outside of class)
- Higher than average pace but not too much to occupy your whole free time

The negative points are in my opinion as follows:

- Class size is too big. Your engagement will be low
- In addition, there is some down-time during the class because of the size
- Socializing with Asian class mates is hard. Koreans and Chinese usually keep to themselves

Hearing these points, you must make a decision for yourself. But choosing for ISI would not be a bad choice. From what I've heard, if you start at the beginner level, it usually doesn't matter too much which school you attend. I think the difference will be apparent from the intermediate levels to advance levels.

INTERACTION WITH SCCIJ

Figure 5: Cat resting on a stone

When I arrived in Tokyo, I contacted Liselotte Schneider, the executive director of the SCCIJ, as instructed by Martin Stricker. She suggested me to go to the "Swiss Experiences – Surviving, thriving in Japan – Thomas Meyer head of Science and Technology" presentation to get familiar with her and the other SCCIJ members. Thomas Meyer, the presenter, shared his experience of conducting business internationally, especially in China. The presentation was very informative and interesting. After the presentation there was time for networking with the other participants. I had just arrived in Tokyo three days prior, having not acquired an international mindset at this point, I was not used to this kind of networking at all. I thought that I did not have much to share with the members, but all in all it was a good learning experience. These events organized by the SCCIJ are a rare chance to meet the business players in Japan and you can make a lot of contacts, absorb a lot of knowledge if you know how to navigate in it. I also had the pleasure to meet the Executive Secretary Alberto Zanonato and the SCCIJ president Michael Mroczek. All the members were very accommodating and tried to assist me.

Next, I was given a mentor, Luca Orduna. As I was having difficulty finding work in Tokyo, I arranged to meet Luca for a coffee to get some help. We discussed my method for searching for employment, but it seemed that I was mostly on the right track. He suggested me to be persistent and keep doing what I was doing.

My last interaction with the SCCIJ was at the luncheon with Mr. Peter Fitzgerald, President of Google Japan G.K. It was held at the prestigious "The Peninsula Tokyo" and it was quite the experience rubbing shoulders with so many influential people.

Lastly Luca Orduna organized a dinner with former and current SJCC sponsorship recipient in Roppongi Hills. It was a great chance to meet my peers and get their experience.

PROMOTION OF E-GOVERNMENT

Introduction

Although being connected with the internet has been well established in our daily life, transforming government processes into digital has been an ever-present challenge. With rising technologies such as blockchain to help governments tackle the issue of security and authenticity of sensitive data, new opportunities have come out of this to make the merging of government processes possible. The following pages summarise the situation of the e-governments in Switzerland and Japan, also what challenges they are both tackling. Hopefully by the end, there is a conclusion that can be drawn by comparing both nations.

Swiss e-government

Goals

The Swiss e-government has defined four strategic goals:

1. E-government services are easy to use, transparent and secure
2. E-government created value for the general public, business and authorities and reduces work
3. E-government exploits innovations and promotes Switzerland as a business location
4. E-government seeks out solutions that are sustainable, aka. reducing redundancy and creating uniform solutions

If we look at the goals one can see clearly which direction the Swiss e-government wants to go. The first goal indicates the tedious processes in the government, the lack of access of information and nature of sensitive data. The second goal indicates that resources should be spent on solutions that are tackling current problems in society, businesses and (local) authorities. The third goal indicates the attraction of investors in the Swiss economy. The last goal indicates the creation of a uniform solution across all layers of government (local, regional, national).

Stakeholders

Figure 6: Swiss E-Government Organisation

The organization is managed by a strategic, operational and coordination/communication management. The Steering Committee, consisting all political representatives of all government levels, defines the strategy. The Planning Committee includes e-government experts who plan and controls the implementation of the strategy. The Programme Office takes charge of the coordination and communication. The implementation level includes the organisation for the projects and services. The subject leaders are giving indication/trends of the progress of the implementation as whole

Upcoming challenges

A national e-government study conducted in 2017 was the first of its kind. The purpose of the study was to produce a basis for review and an understanding of how best to update the strategy. One of the most important results is the significance of the search engine, as large percentage of the population (73%) and business (67%) are relying on it to find information from authorities instead going to the website itself. The online communication channel is also

established as only 29% of population and 23% of businesses are not using that channel at all. The best e-government service is the electronic tax returns. Among others such as, access of statistics, maps and use of electronic payment methods. An interesting result to note is the access of e-government solution by desktop is preferred over mobile. Among the most demanded services are e-voting, search for lost property and order a replacement driving license. Finally, even though the degree of satisfaction is high, the demand for more online services is higher. The authorities report the lack of human and financial resources to expand the services or optimize the processes. In conclusion, the base for the e-government (channel and most demanded services) are established but there is a lot of room for expansion, though the lack of resources is slowing the progress.

Taken from the strategic plan 2019, they have laid out the 12 objectives for the coming year:

1. The uniform registration procedure for e-government services on portals at various federal levels will be possible by 2019.
2. The ten most frequently requested electronic government services for the general public and businesses will be integrated in the national e-government portals by the end of 2019.
3. The most important e-government standards will be identified on an ongoing basis and developed or updated.
4. A joint organisation will be established by 2018 for the procurement, operation and maintenance of joint e-government solutions.
5. An electronic identity (eID) that is valid nationally and internationally will be established by 2019.
6. The areas of application for the electronic signature will be identified by 2017.
7. The allocation of data to a specific person in the electronic exchange between information systems will be ensured by 2019.
8. By 2019, it will be possible to seamlessly report changes of address (arrival and departure) electronically throughout Switzerland.
9. The Confederation and the cantons will continually push ahead with extending electronic voting to more voters with the aim of seeing two thirds of the cantons use electronic voting by 2019.
10. Seamless electronic reporting of VAT will be possible by 2019.

11. A systematic transfer of legal knowledge between the public bodies will be established by the end of 2019.
12. National address services will be created by 2019.

Creating an electronic identification (eID), making e-voting national wide, unifying government procedures, operations are many of its targets.

Innovation

In line with strategic objectives of innovation and promoting the Swiss economy, the following four innovations projects are currently approved:

- Chatbot for the public administration (city of St. Gallen)
- Electronic identity and signature based on blockchain technology (Canton of Geneva)
- Simple eSign (canton of Fribourg)
- Development of an e-participation module for public bodies (commune of Moosseedorf)

Japanese e-government

Goals

According to Japan's strategic plan 2014 named "Declaration to be the world's most advanced IT nation," Japan has laid out a five years strategy with two basic principles:

- Eliminating gridlock and rejuvenating Japan
- Becoming an IT utilization society at the world's highest levels

Because of emerging issues in Japan – such as shrinking labor force, rising of social insurance benefit expenditures – they want to "rejuvenate" Japan's growth like in the past with IT strategies. That means connecting the utilisation and unification of data across all levels in the economy.
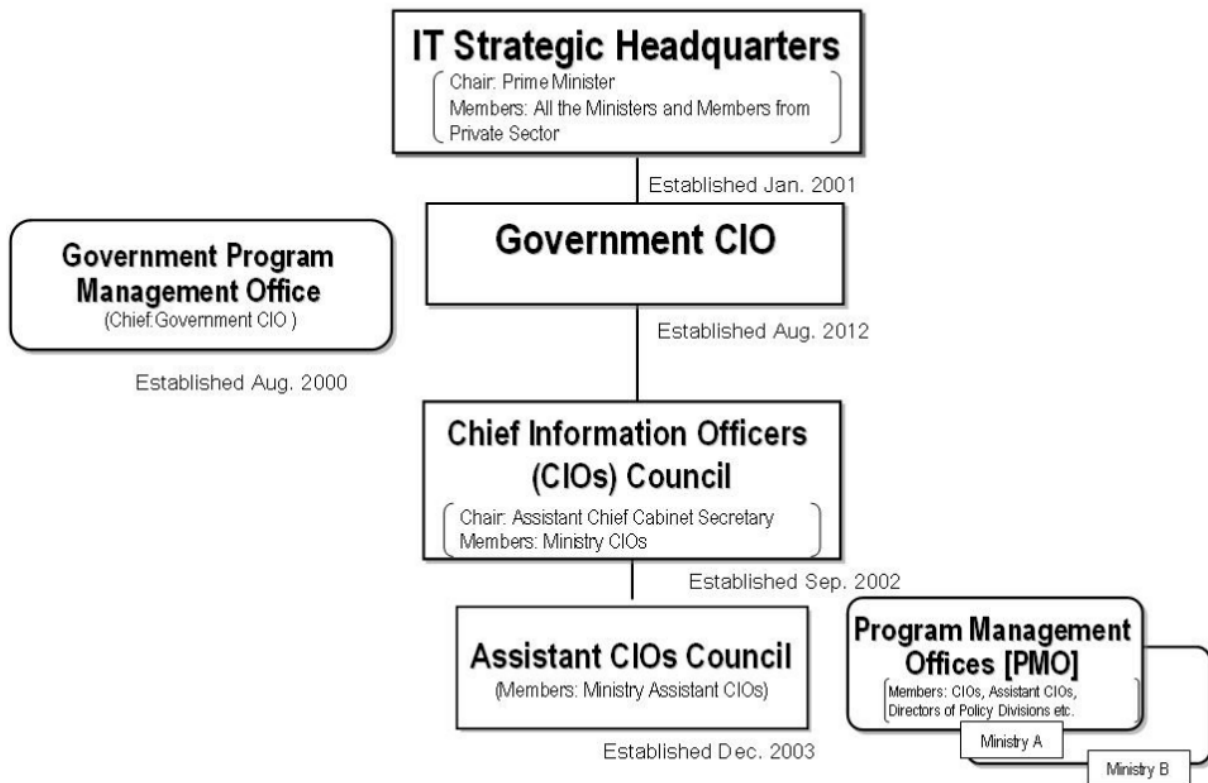
Stakeholders

Figure 7: Japanese E-Government organisation

Challenges and initiatives

In 2001, Japan has set the e-government strategy to become the world's leading IT nation. As of today, they have achieved the highest level in infrastructure and implemented policies that emphasized the use of IT. On the other hand, Japan failed to achieve satisfaction from the general public due to it merely adopting the technology without sufficiently understanding of the user needs. In addition, each government ministry has invested in IT independently thus creating redundant solutions. Also, many nations have surpassed Japan as an IT nation. Approaching the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics 2020, Japan wants to create solutions that are adoptable outside of its country, present models that also contribute to international society. For the future, it recognised data as an important asset and will focus on big data and open data. Priority is placed on unifying and utilization of data in eight fields:

1. E-Government
2. Healthcare, medical and nursing care
3. Tourism
4. Finance
5. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries
6. Manufacturing
7. Infrastructure, disaster prevention and disaster mitigation
8. Mobility

In addition, the Japanese e-government has listed 7 initiatives on their website for promotion of e-government in Japan:

1. Comprehensive government decisions on e-government
2. Promotion of online use of administrative procedures
3. Promotion of electronic provision of government information
4. Promotion of activities to publicize and disseminate e-government
5. Promotion of optimization of work and systems
6. Improvement of government procurement related to information systems
7. Promotion of information security measures
8. Promotion of local e-government

Through the collection of all this data, with the implementation of AI, drones and robots, it should help across the afore mentioned fields to offset the size of the production-age population. One part of it is to standardise data to enable cross-sectoral linkage. The second part is the utilisation of data for example for providing dynamic maps for automatic driving and reducing traffic jams. Diving into each field and initiative and giving all examples would be out of the scope of this report. But to give a few examples:

- Japan is working on "Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)" to enhance safety, transport efficiency and comfort of road transport. That includes the utilization of automatic driving
- Improving healthcare by utilizing AI to provide better health-related advice based on individual's daily lifestyle and physical fitness
- Increase productivity in agriculture by using automatic farm machinery

Comparison

If I compare both e-government strategies, the first thing that becomes clear is how both strategies have been formulated. The Swiss statement feels very pragmatic where as the Japanese feels more like an aspirational call to action.

> *"At this time, if Japan is unable to reinvigorate its economy, put an end to the 'lost two decades,' and deal with the various problems that it's facing, it will inevitably experience a 'lost three decades' and lose its status as an economic developed country. Now is truly an historic time that will determine Japan's future."* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2014)

> *"Now is the time for Japan to unreservedly recognize that there are other countries forging ahead of it, and as a developed country with emerging problems, Japan must position IT as an engine of economic growth to contribute to economic recovery and declare that it will aggressively and boldly use IT as a key tool for solving issues including pressing matters such as recovery from the earthquake disaster. To do this, it is necessary that Japan strive to become an IT society at the world's highest levels in terms of IT use and immediately begin taking specific measures."* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2014)

> *"The Confederation, the cantons and the communes are all pursuing a joint e-government strategy. By implementing the strategy, they are striving to implement the following mission statement: 'eGovernment is a matter of course: transparent, cost-effective and seamless electronic government services for the general public, businesses and the administration.'"* (E-Government Schweiz, 2018)

Comparing these two quotes, the difference becomes apparent. The Japanese emphasise their past failure to catch up with other nations and their desire to become the "the world's most advanced IT nation". The Swiss are focused on the practical approach and what needs to be done.

Both nations are pursuing a unification of data and processes, but in addition the Japanese extend their goal through all fields. The Swiss are focused on streamlining its three government levels and enabling services through its portals for businesses. The conclusion is that Japan seems more ambitious in its pursuit for e-government focusing on utilization of data across all fields. The Swiss recognizes its current state and is doing digital transformation where it is required.

> *"The use of IT and data is the key to success in global competition. A society that encourages the creation of services that generate new added-value and the creation of new and innovative industries and services as well as growth in all industries will be created through the strategic use of IT and data."* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2014)

The complexity of its nature makes it hard to make a detailed comparison in terms of progress and result between both e-government. A continuation of this study in the final report could be comparing specific initiatives such as digital ID as both nations are currently trying to solve this problem.
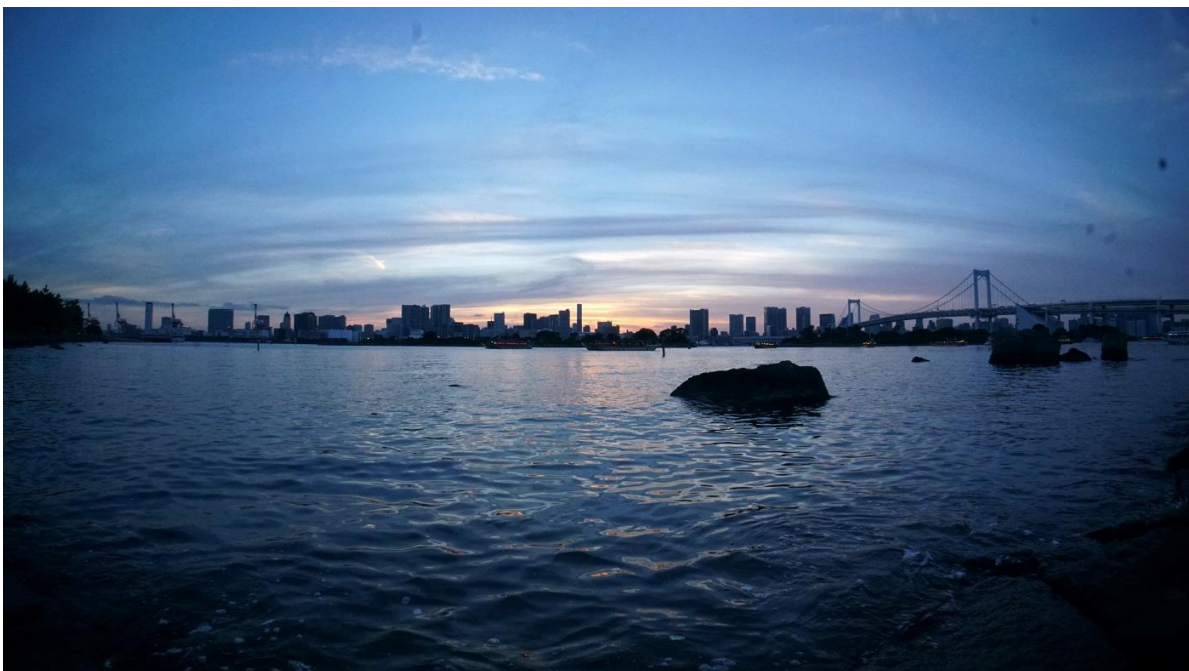

Figure 8: Sunset at Odaiba

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FIGURES