

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2023 OF THE SJCC SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

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### **Executive Summary**

- Since its establishment in 1988 our Scholarship Fund has granted scholarships to 243 qualified candidates amounting to approx. CHF 3'000'000.
- In 2018, a new partnership agreement for the Scholarship Fund was concluded with the Swiss Chamber Commerce & Industry in Japan (SCCIJ). The partnership with SCCIJ over the last few years has been very good and beneficial for the Scholarship Fund and its recipients, enabling this big milestone. From now on the Fund will be referred to as “Swiss-Japan Scholarship Fund - powered by SCCIJ and SJCC.”
- In 2023, 15 individuals submitted the extensive formal documents required to apply for a scholarship. 5 were finally chosen to receive scholarships. The actual number of interested individuals is always much higher. However, many individuals refrain from applying after familiarizing themselves with the requirements. This especially applies for the Japanese side.
- The Scholarship Fund had an accumulated surplus of CHF 207,782 at year end.
- The surplus has been elevated compared to the norm because several recipients hadn't commenced their year in Japan due to Covid. As these recipients have now withdrawn, it has resulted in a reduced contingent liability.

## **1. Introduction**

In 2023, the scholarship fund received 15 formal applications, marking a decline from the previous year. Notably, three applicants applied from Japan for the "Year in Switzerland". This is a reduction to the previous year, especially on the Japanese side. This decrease is also evident in the number of scholarships awarded: five scholarships were granted for the "Year in Japan," while none were awarded for the "Year in Switzerland". The generally low success rate of applicants shows that the interview process remains thorough and confirms an unfortunate trend observed by the scholarship committee that the overall quality of candidates is declining. Particularly for Japanese applicants, the criteria appear to be demanding.

We registered two recipients from Switzerland who have not been able to start their exchange year since 2020 and who have withdrawn from the program:

- One recipient decided to further pursue his studies and to take the bar exam in June 2024. He has in the meantime surpassed the age threshold of 32 years and decided to withdraw.
- One recipient was not able to pursue her Japan year due to the pandemic and personal reasons. As her personal situation still does not allow her to start the program, she decided to withdraw.

On the positive side, we are happy to see that many recipients thrive both in Japan and Switzerland. Although finding an internship opportunity proves to be challenging in the beginning, all of them eventually find a position and start building up their career and network in a foreign country. I just learned today that one of the former recipients from Japan has now built her own business in Switzerland, connecting Swiss and Japanese culture.

We wish to thank our sponsors who are making all this possible and remain strong supporters of the program. A special thank goes to our partner school JSL and the two chambers and all its members! It is their continuous support that has laid the financial foundation to realize this important investment into future Swiss-Japan business relations!

## 2. Scholarship Applications

### Summary 2023

15 formal applications

5 scholarships granted

The actual number of interested individuals is always much higher. However, many individuals refrain from applying after familiarizing themselves with the requirements and all the documents that need to be prepared for this purpose.

## 3. Profiles of Scholarship Candidates / Recipients in 2023

### Pro Memoria: Typical profile of a scholarship candidate

- Female or male graduate from university or qualified professional with apprenticeship
- Age less than 32 years, resident of Switzerland or Japan
- Has already acquired good basic knowledge of spoken and written Japanese preparing for his/her Japan training. Candidates from Japan have acquired a good level of an official Swiss language.
- Highly motivated and committed to a year abroad in Japan or Switzerland consisting of 3-6 m intensive language study and 6-9 months internship in a company
- Well balanced and positive personality with clear goals and willingness to adapt to different customs and culture
- Displays an entrepreneurial spirit and risk tolerance

Four individuals were newly chosen for the scholarship program in 2023.

Their personalities, educational qualifications and, notably, motivation have been verified in two personal interviews. The respective conclusions and recommendations were then discussed in the Scholarship Committee which ultimately decided on scholarships. This procedure has over the years ensured a minimal failure rate, i.e. only eight scholarship recipients (out of 243) have not completed their "SJCC Japan Year". This figure does not include the five recipients who abandoned the scholarship due to the Covid travel restrictions in 2020 and 2021 and the two recipients outlined in the first part of this report.

#### **4. Finances**

Our Balance Sheet remained very healthy with an accumulated surplus (cash at banks) of CHF 207,782 CHF at year-end. Contingent Liabilities, i.e. outstanding but committed scholarship payments amounted to the following amounts (split between Year in Japan and Year in Switzerland):

- Year in Japan: JPY 7'500'000 to be carried forward to 2024
- Year in Switzerland: CHF 0 to be carried forward to 2024

The total contingent liabilities in CHF are 43'300.

We are very glad and encouraged by the continued support of our sponsors and the strong partnership with the SCCIJ.

#### **5. SJCC Young Professionals (formerly SJCC Alumni Association)**

Our alumni association, founded in April 2002 with activities in Switzerland and Japan primarily serves scholarship recipients as a platform for further developing their knowledge and experience of Japan. On December 5th 2016, the SJCC Alumni Association has been renamed to "SJCC Young Professionals". Foremost to welcome and include young people who may not (yet) be scholarship recipients but have professional interest in Japan or simply would like to network with like-minded people.

The SCCIJ has introduced the Young Professionals Chapter even earlier and it is a "home away from home", supporting new arrivals in various administrative procedures, recommending internship opportunities, contacts with the Embassy of Switzerland, the Swiss Business Hub Japan, the Swiss Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Japan etc.

Upon return to Switzerland, all registered alumni of the SJCC Scholarship Fund are automatically a member of the SJCC Young Professionals and as such of the SJCC. The President of the SJCC Young Professionals serves on the Executive Committee of the Chamber.

#### **6. Strong partnership with SCCIJ**

Due to the excellent cooperation between the SCCIJ and SJCC, it was decided in 2017 to create a joint working committee to come up with a working proposal to establish a joint fund. This work was successfully concluded in 2018 and a new partnership agreement has come into effect. The partnership with SCCIJ over the last few years has been very good and beneficial for the Scholarship Fund and its recipients, enabling this big milestone. From now on the Fund will be referred to as "Swiss-Japan Scholarship Fund - powered by SCCIJ and SJCC."

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The SCCIJ provides excellent personal support to the new arriving scholarship recipients and even offers a free membership as well. Two Board Members represent the SCCIJ in the Scholarship Committee and actively participate in the work and discussions.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

On behalf of the SJCC, the Scholarship Fund and myself I wish to extend our gratitude to

- the Japanese Embassy in Bern, H.E. Ambassador Yoshinori Fujiyama
- the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo, H.E. Ambassador Dr. Andreas Baum
- the Swiss Business Hub Japan, Fabian Stiefvater
- our sponsor, JSL Academy, Tokyo & Okinawa
- our strong, joint partner the Swiss Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Japan (SCCIJ) in Tokyo, its BOD and its former Presidents Michael Mroczek and André Zimmermann and its new President Thomas Brodbeck. Naoko Koyama, Ayako Nakano and Luca Orduna from the SCCIJ have made outstanding contributions to the successful partnership through participation in the joint working committee, interview process, and implementing a very professional support program for recipients once they arrive in Japan.
- all current and former donors
- the BOD of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC) in Zurich, its President, Martin Herb and its former Managing Director Dominique Ursprung
- the SJCC Young Professionals in Switzerland and their President, Kevin Frey
- Philipp Saurer, who elevated the scholarship fund to new heights during his tenure as chairman, notably enhancing the interview process, and executed an excellent transition of his responsibilities in 2023

for their continued interest in our activities, their support and guidance. As previously mentioned, the SJCC Scholarship Fund is solely dependent on its sponsors for financing its scholarships. All donations without deductions are exclusively being used for funding scholarships, thus, helping to develop a growing pool of well-educated young professionals with an international mindset, a strong rooting in the Japanese business environment and, likewise, a familiarity with Japan's culture, social and business practices. They serve the needs of our industry (Japan being the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest export market for Switzerland), educational institutions and government administration with their professional qualifications and enthusiasm.

**SWISS-JAPANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (SJCC)**  
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