

FINAL REPORT FOR A 'YEAR IN SWITZERLAND'



By Mariko Kanaji

Appreciation

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the SCCIJ and the SJCC, as well as their respective members for this generous and once in a lifetime scholarship opportunity. Furthermore, I would like to extend my special thanks to Ms. Jacqueline Tschumi for her counsel, Mr. Nik Dillier and my colleagues at AST Turbo AG for giving me many opportunities to grow, and Mr. Roman Hunziker for the motivation and support that made it all possible.

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Picture 1: An amazing view from Fronalpstock

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Introduction

Welcome to my final report on the scholarship program offered by the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC) and the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (SCCIJ). It is split up into two main parts: Part 1 describes my job search during the middle of my journey, whereas Part 2 delves into my internship program during the second half of the year and beyond. Lastly, I report on what came after finishing my scholarship program and deliver an outlook toward the future. The purpose of this report is to show what I did during my scholarship program, but even more importantly to offer recommendations for future applicants and grantees.

1. Job search

1.1 Job hunting in Switzerland

After completing the A1 and A2 level of German studies at the language school, I started to focus intensively on the search for an internship while continuing my German studies on the B1 level. One big change from Japan is that the Swiss job market does not have any specific time for changing jobs (e.g. the start of the new financial year in Japan each April). This allows anybody to do job-hunting anytime. My first approach was to redesign and update my CV for a Swiss audience. The same applied to my pre-existing LinkedIn profile, the latter being important because LinkedIn and Jobs.ch are some of the most common recruiting tools in Switzerland. To tailor my application to a Swiss audience, I translated my documents and profiles into English (and/or German), and also made sure to emphasize my ability to speak Japanese and my understanding of Japanese working culture, as this is my greatest stand-out asset in the Swiss job market. Another important aspect to highlight was my professional and academic experience abroad, as this reflects my adaptability to work across the globe. In a second step, I looked up companies in my field, checked if they have suitable positions, and documented my efforts and the status of applications in a useful list that allowed me to keep an overview of my efforts. This list was also shared with the SJCC to ask for possible introductions. Thirdly, I invested in my personal and professional network. Through SJCC members, the SJCC Young Professionals, the parliamentary group Switzerland-Japan, as well as friends and family of my partner and my own friends and contacts, I made more connections to get useful job-hunting advice and check the availability of positions.

Internship Applications Year in Switzerland					
Company	Source	Status	Position	Location	Contact
	Direct contact with the company				
	Sent resume				
	Negative response				
	Positive response				
1	Nippon Express Switzerland	SJCC	Negative response: Jacqueline san checked	Grindelstrasse 19 CH-8303 Bassersdorf	nech-global.sales@nipponexpress.com
2	Yusen Logistics	SJCC	News letter/ direct message by SJCC	Steinackerstr. 28 CH	https://www.yusen-logistics.com/ch_en/
3	Reishauer AG		Philip-san-checking News letter/ direct message by SJCC	Industriestrasse 36	https://www.reishauer.com/unternehmen
4	Ricoh Switzerland	SJCC	News letter/ direct message by SJCC	Otto-Stadler-Strasse	https://www.ricoh.ch/en/about-us/careers/career-opportunities
5	Canon Schweiz		Negative response: Philipp san checked	Richtstrasse 9 - 830	Search Results (peopleclick.eu.com)
6	Hitachi Energy	personal contact J	Negative response: Jacqueline san checked	Riedmühlestrasse 16	https://www.hitachienergy.com/ch/de/careers/open-jobs
7	Sony Europe	personal contact J	Negative response: Jacqueline san checked	Marketing Intern Sclieren, Zurich	https://www.sony.ch/de
8	Takeda		Negative response	Global Supply Chain Excellence Thurgauerstrasse 13	https://jobs.takeda.com/job/zurich/end-to-end-supply-chain
9	Swiss international airline		Negative response	Internship in Event and Sponsorship Zurich	https://apply.lufthansagroup.careers/index.php?ac=jobs
10	Kintetsu World Express (Switzerland) Ltd. - Zurich		News letter/ direct message by SJCC	Grindelstrasse 9 - 83	https://www.kwe.com/
11	Sunstar		Negative response: Wieland san checked	Wagistrasse 23, 895	https://www.sunstar.com/
12	MM Automobile Schweiz AG	SJCC	News letter/ direct message by SJCC	Lischnatt 17 4624 H	https://www.mitsubishi-motors.ch/services/impressum/
13	Richmont		Negative response	International communication Intern	

Picture 2: Internship list (Source: Mariko Kanaji)

1.2 Support from the Japanese community

Throughout my efforts I received most of the positive responses resulting in interview invitations through my growing network. I was fortunate to receive a letter of reference from the SJCC, thanks to the support from Ms. Jacqueline Tschumi and also received support from Mr. Martin Herb, President of the SJCC, who sent a message via the mailing list of SJCC members that the

scholarship student is looking for a job. These actions have provided me with valuable opportunities to meet the people who work for Japanese businesses in Switzerland.



Picture 3: Annual event of the Parliamentary Friendship Group Switzerland-Japan (Source: Mariko Kanaji)



Picture 4: SJCC YP Bonenkai (Source: Mariko Kanaji)



Picture 5: SJCC YP Meet-up (Source: Mariko Kanaji)



Picture 6: SJCC YP Bonenkai (Source: Mariko Kanaji)

1.3 Visa situation

Through the young professionals program of the State Secretariat for Migration SEM, I was issued a so-called L-permit when coming to Switzerland in 2023. This L-permit was connected to my German studies at the language school during the first part of the scholarship program and was at first limited to a duration of six months. By fall, the time to look for a job was starting to run out. I knew that if I had to go back to Japan when the permit expires, it would be much harder to look for a job at a Swiss company from Japan. Also, since I was not sure when it was possible to find a job, I was starting to get nervous about the endurance of my savings. Fortunately, I was able to prolong my language studies and therefore also my L-permit by another few months, which allowed me to bridge the gap.

1.4 Interview process

Through a Swiss friend, I was finally able to find an internship. He works at AST Turbo AG - a Swiss company based in the town of Altendorf, Schwyz. AST Turbo is an independent service provided for heavy turbomachinery in the petrochemical and energy sector. Headquartered in Altendorf, the company has further subsidiaries, one in USA and one in Saudi Arabia. One day after the recruitment information for an 'Operations assistant' was posted on my contact's Instagram, I immediately messaged him and caught up with him at a café to share about my career and learn about the company.

After a while, the first interview invitation was officially received in the beginning of January, 2024. On the day after the German class, I went to the Altendorf office and took part in a job interview, mainly in English and partially in German to check my language level. A week later, the second interview invitation was officially received. At the second stage, I had the chance to learn more about the company's business and got to know the team members. Eventually, I was hired for an internship within the AST Engineering team.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Start your job search as early as possible, even before your arrival in Switzerland.*
- *Keep the SJCC up to date on your job-hunting efforts and use their kind support to reach out to potential employers.*
- *Be mindful of the visa situation. Make sure you keep everyone in the loop and prolong the permit before the expiration day approaches.*
- *Adapt your CV to the Swiss audience.*
- *Use LinkedIn and [Jobs.ch](https://www.jobs.ch) to scan for internship opportunities.*
- *Expand your community and build up a professional network. This greatly improves your chances to get useful connections with companies.*

2. Internship program

2.1 Preparation

The official message signaling the positive employment decision arrived at the end of January 2024. Since the young professionals program of the SJCC and SCCIJ, which enables young people to broaden their professional and language skills in Switzerland to obtain a work permit (not included in the first L-permit during my studies) for a maximum of 18 months, I first asked AST Turbo to prepare the necessary documents to proceed with the six month internship application process. Once they were prepared, I submitted the necessary application documents to the Embassy of Switzerland in Japan. After a while, I received a message from SEM, as well as an official letter guaranteeing my right to work in Switzerland just before the working start date. With this letter and my permit card, my residence status was successfully updated at the city hall of my place of residence. During the young professional permit application process, the following administrative tasks were also completed to allow for a smooth transition into my new work life in

Switzerland:

- Successfully terminating the B1+ course at German school
- Terminating the special Swiss health insurance for foreign students that I have used during the first part of the scholarship program
- Signing up for regular Swiss health insurance
- Checking if you have been signed up for pension fund contributions ('BVG') by your employer. These are part of Switzerland's three pillar pension system and they make you eligible - over time - to draw a higher pension in Switzerland.
- Checking with your employer how the tax system works in your specific case.
- Updating my transport pass to a [GA Travelcard](#), which can be paid per month or per year and allows for a ticketless commuting experience
- Updating my LinkedIn status to include my new position

2.2 Starting my internship

At first, my internship was set up for a duration of six months from 1 March 2024 until 31 August 2024. My position was called 'Operations Assistant' and I was assigned to the Engineering department of [AST Turbo AG](#). As my position was newly created, the first task began before I started working. It was the co-creation of the internship description, which was required for the permit application. After the details were hammered out, my first mission was to understand the company portfolio, the function of the department, the company system and all other basics during an introduction and training week. In the first part of the internship, as AST Turbo AG is a service provider of rotating equipment (turbines, compressors, etc.), I took study sessions with engineering colleagues to learn about the different machines and the industry. It was a combination of self-study and proceeding daily tasks as an assistant to absorb as much knowledge as I could about the internal system. In the second part of the internship, I started supporting Japanese customers, as well as colleagues who needed commercial and administrative support, mainly in the Japan business.

2.3 Responsibilities (job description)

In the fifth month, I received a new dedicated role to support our Japanese customer's sales expansion in Europe as a project manager. At the same time, the company offered me an extension of my employment contract, which I gladly accepted. Since my main task was to facilitate communications and act as a primary contact between one of our main Japanese customers and their European customers, I started to use all my three languages (Japanese, English, German) daily. I especially enjoyed using my German with colleagues at work or with customers in German-speaking countries, even if

it was quite a challenge at first. Due to these opportunities, I slowly started to improve my understanding of business German and expand my vocabulary. To learn more about my main customer, I proposed to visit them in Japan, combining it with my first vacation back home more than one year after moving to Switzerland. The visit was very interesting since it showed me how the customer's operation worked, and I was able to establish face-to-face relationships with my counterparts. In turn, when our Japanese customers later came to visit our office during a business trip, I was spontaneously put in charge of preparing a one-day tour and showing them around Zurich and Lucerne. At AST Turbo AG I have greatly enjoyed my various tasks, because I was able to feel that I am a bridge between Japan and Switzerland. This was a major motivation for my application to the scholarship program.

2.4 Working culture

Comparing Swiss working culture to Japanese working culture, there are some similarities but most styles and systems are quite different based on my working experience at AST Turbo.

- **Punctuality and business manners**

Starting meetings on time / as scheduled is important in both countries, but finishing on time is sometimes not common in Japan. Also, respecting others is important. To make a good impression, approach the first contact with the utmost respect and good manners as previously learned.

- **Diligent work ethics**

Swiss co-workers put great value on responsibility and hard work just like Japanese workers. Due to this mentality, they assume to work effectively and plan well to finish tasks on deadline but also work extra hours if more work is needed.

- **Working hours and vacation / public holiday rules**

Depending on industry, position and of course your employer, Swiss employees can choose working hours and percentage based on your lifestyle. Here are typical options; 100% (40hours), 80% (32hours), 60% (24hours), 40% (16hours), etc. per week. Based on the Swiss labor law, a certain amount of break time during the working day is mandatory, and their duration depends on the total daily working hours:

Each minimum break of 30 minutes if working time more than 7 hours per day
Each minimum break of 60 minutes if working time more than 9 hours per day

One-day working hours is adjustable in Switzerland. If you work extra hours one day, it's possible to reduce working hours on another day if your task is completed. Also, depending on your employer, flexibility is given in the way you divide your 8 working hours over the course of the day. Compensation is mandatory if you work extra hours, which is not a common system in Japan.

Furthermore, five weeks of vacation are given per year in case of working full time and you have an obligation to fully take this time off. Most co-workers take at least one week or even a few weeks at once. This is very different to the Japanese working culture, where people only apply for one day or a few days combined with weekends as well as saving up vacations for later or letting them expire. Public holidays are numerous and are actually different depending on the cantons. Majority catholic cantons, like the one I work in, generally have more holidays than protestant cantons.

- Flat hierarchies, gender equality and diversity

The relationship between boss and colleague is more open and friendly compared to the hierarchically organized Japanese workplace. It enables us to proceed quickly and efficiently with decisions and discussions. Even though most of my colleagues are men in this industry and work globally, the respective characteristics of each gender as well as foreign co-workers equally create good collaboration and cooperation in a variety of languages.

- Communication

Inspired by German language and culture, Swiss colleagues call stakeholders by their family name, especially at first contacts. This is an important sign of respect and politeness. If you get permission to call them by their first name, this means that the business relationship is getting closer. During internal calls or meetings, the first name is used even for direct superiors or top management. Meeting in person, shaking hands with the right hand is a common greeting. Furthermore, active communication is key to work with colleagues. Whenever you require clarifications or support, instead of thinking too much in advance or asking them if they are busy, as follows Japanese working culture, I learned to launch my inquiry quickly and wait for their feedback to allow for an efficient use of everyone's time. If the meeting room is closed, it always means that interruptions are unwanted. However, if it is open, even during the meeting, it means that you can ask a quick question.

- Work-life balance

Having a good work-life balance is an important concept in Switzerland and people take it very seriously. This is quite a change compared to some of my previous working experience in Japan, where loyalty to the company sometimes meant drinking with co-workers or waiting to leave the workplace until my superior did so as well. At AST Turbo AG, I quickly learned to appreciate my colleagues. Besides fruitful collaboration, I also enjoyed the friendly atmosphere during common breaks or at company events. At the same time my private time was respected by my colleagues and superiors. They kindly supported me when I asked to leave early for a private event or to work from home.

- Flexible and efficient solutions

Swiss workers are often empowered or encouraged to make decisions. They are thus able to do business flexibly while keeping in mind the big picture. They are always looking for efficiency, so they are constantly updating and adapting their systems and methods.

2.5 Challenges

As the population of the canton of Schwyz speaks Swiss German, I have sometimes struggled to participate in workplace discussions. Swiss German is a dialect of German but sounds very different and has a separate logic to it. However, as some words are similar to German, I made sure to ask questions to stay in the loop. This allowed me to gain a rudimentary understanding of the language. Also, I tried to approach colleagues in German when talking about simple topics during breaks and working hours.

2.6 Opportunities

The Swiss working culture, especially at AST Turbo AG, creates a diverse working environment and a friendly and supportive atmosphere. My workplace mindset and values have positively developed during my internship. At the same time, I was able to improve my skills and enhance my experience as a bridge between Japan and Switzerland.

2.7 Program Ending

At the end of my internship, I was very fortunate to receive another job offer from AST Turbo AG, which prolonged my contract for another year. The reason for the limitation of the contract period was that the application for an ordinary working permit through the so-called 'Kontingente' system (limitation of working permits for non-EU third country citizens) is very difficult, as each canton only has a strictly limited number of permits to give per country. Therefore, we opted for a last prolongation of the L-permit, which reached its maximum extension.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *In the Swiss working culture it is key to adapt your mindset.*
- *Do not be afraid to ask questions! That way you can grow, avoid misunderstandings and efficiently use your time.*
- *Learn from your colleagues about work and Swiss culture.*

3. Free time in Switzerland

3.1 Networking and forming friendships

When you are moving to a different country, building a strong personal and professional network is key. The Japanese community in Switzerland is a great place to start. Thanks to the ability to freely join SJCC or Young Professionals events, such as the bonenkai and the shinnenkai, I was able to make friends and learn about Japanese companies in Switzerland. Besides that, I also met members of the Japanese community through social media. For that purpose, I created a separate account on Instagram. Events organized by the Embassy of Japan or events about Japanese culture also offer excellent opportunities to meet like-minded people. Through my Swiss partner I was also fortunate to become part of his family and made many friends from all over the country.

3.2 Hobbies

In my free time I practiced my German, ate and discovered great food and tried out a few hobbies. I went to play golf, swam in lakes and rivers, went hiking and joined a trial choir for an a capella group. Those were great opportunities to meet new people and gain unforgettable experiences. After receiving a stable income, I was able to discover more of Europe, travelling to wonderful places such as Malta, Alsace and Greece. It is always a pleasure to learn more about this diverse continent.

3.4 Returning to Japan

At the end of the internship program, I went back to Japan to see my family. During the stay, I noticed with curiosity that I was suddenly experiencing small culture shocks in my home country. And my family and friends got to know a more experienced me. This also meant that we had some interesting discussions about cultural differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Using the time after work and on weekends is important to grow and to create your own community.*
- *Join the SJCC events and become part of the Young Professionals.*
- *Opening a social media account to connect with local people or the Japanese community.*
- *If you want to try out new hobbies and connect to local people, go to the website of your city hall and look for a list of clubs "Vereine" located in the city.*
- *Use this scholarship program to explore Switzerland and to discover more of Europe.*

4. Final observations

After two years of living, studying and working in Switzerland, I have gained a wealth of new and valuable experiences, which opened many perspectives.

4.1 Professional perspectives

My experience at AST Turbo AG provides daily motivation to keep growing as a professional. Little successes keep my drive to improve my German skills high. Changes in the content of my position allow for a broadening of my horizon. I am able to gain valuable knowledge about engineering, a field that was completely new for me. I strive to further improve my understanding of customer needs, to contribute my knowledge of Japanese working culture and to take responsibility in coordinating and managing customer relations. Being a bridge between cultures requires patience and empathy, as well as an open mind. In the future I want to continue to build on my experiences to explain Switzerland to Japan and Japan to Switzerland.

4.2 Personal perspectives

In the more than two years that I have lived in this beautiful and fascinating country I was lucky to meet many wonderful people and gathered unforgettable memories. As my partner and I will get married in 2025 and my company has offered me a new contract, we are staying in Switzerland. Living here offers many advantages, and I greatly enjoy being part of society. In my private life I also strive to build bridges between the cultures: to show the unique beauty of Japan to a Swiss audience and to show the splendor of Switzerland to a Japanese audience.

4.3 Bottom line

I strongly recommend this program to all young Japanese professionals who want to challenge themselves by going overseas. The 'Year in Switzerland' offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to become fluent in a new language, followed by gaining valuable international work experience. But it is even more than that. It is a chance to meet new friends, to build valuable networks, to discover a beautiful country and - most importantly - to build bridges between Japan and Switzerland.