

Interim Progress Report: SJCC Scholarship Fund



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Preliminary Remarks: Motivation and Planning of my 'Year in Japan'

Before delving into the details of my journey in Japan, it's important to provide some context regarding my decision to embark on this adventure. Having arrived in Japan at the end of June 2023, my intention is not to recount the process of obtaining a visa or acclimatizing to life in Japan, as my case is also different from other applicants. Furthermore, these aspects have been well-covered in many previous reports. I feel it would then be redundant to talk about it again. Instead, I aim to focus on my personal experiences and the specific motivations behind my return to Japan through the SJCC Scholarship Fund.

My connection with Japan dates back to my time as an exchange research student at Tokyo University from 2019 to 2020. During this time, I had the chance to go to Todai in order to gather the data needed to write my master's thesis on Japanese environmental economic diplomacy. I also took it as an opportunity to challenge myself with intensive Japanese language courses. Every day, from 8:00 AM to 12:30 PM, I was writing, speaking and *eating* Japanese kanjis, grammar and, vocabulary. Initially drawn to Japan for academic pursuits but never really imagining myself staying for more than two academic semesters, I found myself captivated by the country's culture and way of life. Despite intending to stay only a year, my experience in Japan left an indelible mark, instilling in me a desire to stay for a longer period. That's why, at the end of my year, I committed myself to looking for a job that would allow me to stay in Tokyo, while also fulfilling my professional expectations. By this time, I had already been in contact with the Swiss Embassy in Japan, applying for a job, but also with companies in the private sector, particularly in the luxury world, applying for a job at Bulgari Japan.

However, circumstances intervened, and I found myself back in Switzerland amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, finding a job in Japan, especially as a foreigner, proved complicated. What's more, my language skills weren't yet good enough. Nevertheless, determined to fulfill my promise of returning to Japan, I returned to my hometown, Neuchâtel, and pursued opportunities that would allow me to reconnect with the country. After a few job applications, I managed to secure a one-year internship at Switzerland Global Enterprise, in the office in Western Switzerland (Renens-based). That experience provided me with valuable experience in Japan-related projects and solidified my commitment to fostering Swiss-Japanese business relations. Indeed, I was able to work on a number of Japan-related mandates, under the chaperone of my direct supervisor, but also in close collaboration with the consultant dedicated to APAC in Romandie.

In October 2021, I joined the SJCC Young Professionals as board member and representative for the Romandie. I feel extremely grateful for the trust the at-the-time President gave me. Creating this network of young professionals from scratch in the Romandie proved to be challenging but extremely exciting. During my tenure of approximately two years, I organized numerous events, ranging from company visits (Japanese companies with European HQ located in Switzerland or Swiss enterprises active in Japan) to networking and cultural events, I was able to further solidify my skills and expand my professional and private network.

Applying then for the SJCC Scholarship Fund presented an opportunity to fulfill my goals of enhancing my Japanese language skills and gaining firsthand experience in Japanese business environments. Selected for the scholarship, I was in the meantime given a unique chance to join the Swiss Business Hub Japan as a Trade & Investment Advisor, marking the beginning of my "Japan Year."

In summary, my return to Japan was fueled by a combination of personal and professional motivations, underpinned by a desire to immerse myself in Japanese culture and contribute to bilateral cooperation between Switzerland and Japan.

Role and Responsibilities as a Trade & Investment Advisor

Before delving into my role as a Trade & Investment Advisor, it's essential to provide context about Switzerland Global Enterprise and the Swiss Business Hub Japan, as they serve as the foundations for my professional activities.

Switzerland Global Enterprise:

Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE) is the official Swiss organization responsible for promoting internationalization, export, and investment. As the national agency for promoting foreign trade and investment, S-GE supports Swiss companies in their global expansion efforts by providing comprehensive services, expertise, and networks. Whether it's facilitating market entry, connecting companies with international partners, or providing strategic advice, S-GE plays a pivotal role in helping Swiss businesses thrive in the global marketplace.



Within the framework of S-GE, the Swiss Business Hub Japan (SBHJ) serves as the local representation in Japan, focusing on promoting Swiss exports and facilitating investment opportunities for Japanese companies in Switzerland. With its office located inside the Embassy of Switzerland in Japan, the SBHJ is led by a team of experienced professionals (6 people in total before in joined) with in-depth knowledge of both Swiss and Japanese business environments, and acts as a bridge between Swiss companies and Japanese counterparts, offering tailored services and support to facilitate business development and growth.



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Embassy of Switzerland
Swiss Business Hub Japan

The primary objectives of SBHJ include:

- **Export Promotion:** in collaboration with S-GE's local consultants in Zurich, Renens, and Lugano, the SBHJ assists Swiss companies in entering the Japanese market by providing market insights, facilitating business connections, and offering support for trade fairs and promotional events. Whether it's providing market intelligence, facilitating B2B meetings, or offering regulatory guidance, SBHJ plays a crucial role in helping Swiss companies establish and grow their presence in Japan.
- **Investment/Innovation Promotion:** the SBHJ promotes Switzerland as an attractive investment or R&D destination for Japanese companies seeking to expand their presence in Europe. By highlighting Switzerland's competitive advantages, including its business-friendly environment, innovation ecosystem, and skilled workforce, the SBHJ aims to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), create jobs, and foster long-term partnerships between Swiss and Japanese businesses.

Overall, S-GE and the SBHJ play integral roles in promoting Switzerland's economic interests on the global stage and supporting Swiss companies in their internationalization efforts. By providing tailored services, expertise, and networks, S-GE and the SBHJ empower Swiss businesses to seize opportunities in foreign markets and contribute to Switzerland's economic prosperity.

As a Trade & Investment Advisor at the Swiss Business Hub Japan, my role is multifaceted and entails a diverse range of responsibilities aimed at promoting Swiss business interests in Japan and facilitating investment opportunities between the two countries. Through strategic initiatives and collaborative efforts, I am humbly trying to strengthen bilateral relations and foster economic growth.

Export Promotion (EP)

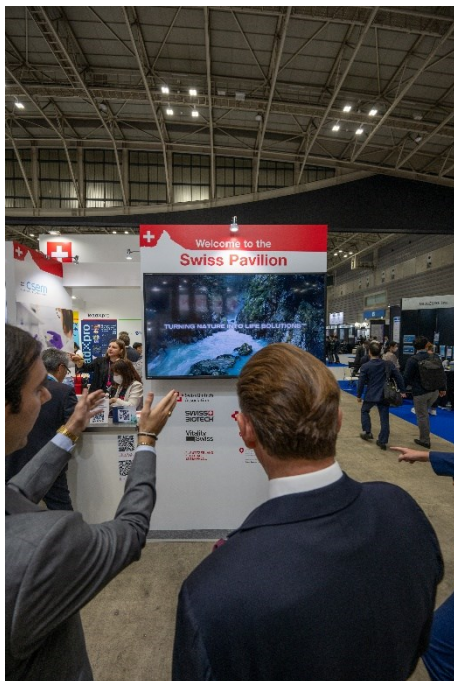
A significant portion of my responsibilities revolves around Export Promotion, where I serve as a key point of contact for Swiss and Liechtenstein SMEs seeking to expand their presence in the Japanese market. Central to this role is the provision of export inquiries and consulting services, where I offer guidance and support to companies navigating the complexities of international trade, with a focus on the Japanese market. Whether it's assisting with market research, regulatory compliance, or market entry strategies, I work closely with SMEs to address their unique needs and challenges.

In addition to providing direct assistance to companies, I also contribute to broader EP initiatives aimed at promoting Swiss exports in Japan. This includes organizing trade delegations, managing events (in-house or external), and providing support for trade fairs, where Swiss companies can showcase their products and services to a Japanese audience. I am actively involved in the coordination of Swiss Pavilions at major trade events, ensuring that Swiss exhibitors have the necessary resources and support to maximize their visibility and impact.

Furthermore, I engage in trend spotting, business opportunity scouting, and market intelligence activities, helping Swiss companies identify emerging opportunities and navigate market dynamics. By staying abreast of industry trends, regulatory changes, and consumer preferences, I assist companies in making informed decisions and seizing growth opportunities in the Japanese market.

Another aspect of my role involves relationship management with key stakeholders, including bilateral chambers of commerce and industry associations. I collaborate with these organizations to foster strong ties between Swiss and Japanese businesses, facilitating networking opportunities, knowledge sharing, and collaborative initiatives.

Marketing and communication also play a vital role in EP activities, where I contribute to content creation, website management, and social media communication efforts. By sharing success stories, industry insights, and market updates, I help raise awareness of Swiss capabilities and promote Switzerland as a trusted partner for Japanese businesses.



Investment/Innovation Promotion (IP)

In addition to EP activities, I am also involved in Investment Promotion initiatives aimed at attracting Japanese investments to Switzerland. This involves marketing and communication efforts to promote Switzerland as an attractive investment destination, leveraging digital channels. These initiatives are mainly done through content creation, content planning, and content management of publications on the SBHJ's social media accounts, helping to showcase Switzerland's strengths and investment opportunities to a global audience. Through compelling narratives and engaging content, I aim to capture the attention of potential investors and highlight the unique value proposition of investing in Switzerland.

Market intelligence compilation is another essential aspect of IP activities, where I conduct research, analyze data, and compile insights to best inform Japanese companies on investment strategies and decision-making. By monitoring market trends, identifying investment opportunities, and assessing

competitive landscapes, I help position Switzerland as a preferred destination for foreign investment. Administrative support is also a critical component of my activities within this mandate, where I assist with accounting, compliance, contract management, and reporting tasks.

Additionally, in the realm of IP/Innovation, I provide information and consulting services regarding business and innovation locations in Switzerland, engaging in prospect generation, sales activities, and networking efforts. By showcasing Switzerland's innovation ecosystem, research capabilities, and business-friendly environment, I aim to attract innovative companies and entrepreneurs to Switzerland, fostering collaboration and driving economic growth.

Stakeholder management is also a key focus area, where I coordinate and cultivate relationships with cantons/regions and the Switzerland Innovation Park's network to support investment promotion efforts. By collaborating with local partners and leveraging their expertise and resources, I help create a conducive environment for investment and innovation in Switzerland.

In summary, my role as a Trade & Investment Advisor encompasses a wide range of responsibilities spanning both Export Promotion and Investment/Innovation Promotion activities. Through strategic initiatives, collaborative efforts, and a focus on stakeholder engagement, I strive to promote Swiss business interests in the market, facilitate investment opportunities for large Japanese conglomerates, and strengthen bilateral relations between Switzerland and Japan.



Outlook

Looking ahead, I approach the future with a great sense of anticipation regarding my role at the SBHJ. Following constructive discussions with my superior, I got the guarantee that my current contract will be extended, reaffirming my position in the team. This not only acknowledges my contributions but also reflects my ongoing dedication to fostering bilateral relations between Switzerland and Japan.

Furthermore, the possibility of an increased pensum – moving from 80% to 100%, also leading to an open-ended contract, marks a significant progression in my professional journey. This expansion of responsibilities will allow me to further engage with ongoing projects and leverage my skills in new and impactful ways. I am prepared to embrace these developments and continue contributing meaningfully to the objectives of the SBHJ.

In addition to my primary responsibilities, my involvement with projects related to the Swiss-Japanese Chambers of Commerce, both in Japan (as primary contact) and in Switzerland (involved in various projects with regards to IP) offers avenues for collaboration and growth. The upcoming Expo Osaka 2025 will also present many opportunities to strengthen partnerships and explore potential avenues for trade and investment between our two countries.

On a personal level, my commitment to improving my Japanese language proficiency remains steadfast. While I encountered challenges during the JLPT N2 exam, particularly in reading kanji, I am determined to overcome these obstacles through dedicated self-study and continued language classes.

In summary, the coming months present opportunities for both professional and personal development. I look forward to deepening my understanding of Japanese business culture, fostering relationships within the Swiss-Japanese community, and contributing positively to the objectives of the Swiss Business Hub Japan.

Closing Reflections

As I reflect on my journey thus far, I'm grateful for the unexpected turns that have led me to where I am today in Japan. While my initial expectations were different—envisioning a period of intensive language study rather than a professional role at the Swiss Business Hub Japan—I've found great satisfaction in the path I've chosen.

Key to my sense of fulfillment has been the consistent support and guidance from my employer, personal supervisor, and coworkers. Their encouragement has allowed me to navigate new challenges with confidence and adaptability, contributing to both personal and professional growth. Working alongside my talented colleagues at the SBHJ is a rewarding experience. Each day presents new opportunities to learn and develop myself, and I appreciate the trust placed in me, evident in the decision to extend my contract. This acknowledgment reinforces my confidence in my abilities and inspires me to continue striving for excellence.

Furthermore, my time in Japan has allowed me to significantly improve my Japanese language skills, surpassing my initial expectations. While there is always room for improvement, especially in reading, I'm eager to continue honing my language proficiency and I know that with lots of effort, constant dedication, I will achieve my objectives.

I'm grateful to the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce for granting me the scholarship that has facilitated this transformative experience. As a former board member and founder of the SJCC Young Professionals program in the Romandie, I highly value the chamber's contribution to my professional journey. It not bolds mentioning that without the SJCC; I would not be where I am today. Additionally, collaborating with the SCCIJ has further enriched my experience in Japan, fostering valuable connections and collaborative projects.

Looking ahead, I approach the future with optimism and readiness to tackle new challenges. With gratitude and determination, I remain committed to making a positive impact in the Swiss-Japanese business landscape and continuing my journey of growth and discovery in Japan. I'd like to encourage everyone to try this challenge. It's a great way to grow as a person. To conclude. I would also like to remain available to anyone who would like to ask questions and try to humbly share my experience. Feel free to reach out anytime and let's share our experience!

