

ANNUAL REPORT 2025 OF THE SJCC SCHOLARSHIP FUND

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Executive Summary

- Since its establishment in 1988 our Scholarship Fund has granted scholarships to 253 qualified candidates amounting to approx. CHF 3'050'000.
- 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 2025, 26 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 157,685 at year end.
- The surplus has been elevated for several years 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 As these recipients have now withdrawn, it has resulted in a reduced contingent liability.
- There are several recipients that have not yet departed as well as two 2020/2022 where the midterm reports are pending and the scholarship has not been disbursed, leading to contingent liability of around CHF 48'000 at year end.
- Due to the surplus the SJCC and the SCCIJ took the decision to stop donations from the chambers since 2023.

1. Introduction

In 2025, the scholarship fund received 26 formal applications, representing an increase compared to the previous year. Notably, 13 applications originated from Japan for the “Year in Switzerland,” marking a continued upward trend. In total, three scholarships were awarded for the “Year in Japan” and two for the “Year in Switzerland.” While the selection process remains rigorous, the increased interest from Japan is encouraging and reflects strong promotion by the SCCIJ and its partners, as well as improved applicant preparation.

Most recipients perform well in both Japan and Switzerland, building strong professional networks, with some extending their stay beyond the programme. However, there are also cases in which recipients face challenges in securing internships. Further consideration should therefore be given to how the SJCC and SCCIJ networks can provide more structured and systematic support in this area.

The scholarship is disbursed in two instalments: the first upon arrival in the host country, and the second after submission of the mid-term report. Recipients are also required to submit a final report at the end of the programme and to engage with the SJCC community upon return.

In recent years, several cases have been observed in which recipients failed to submit both mid-term and final reports, resulting in an increase in contingent liabilities. In addition, some recipients did not inform the SJCC of their status and returned to Switzerland without prior notice. Despite repeated follow-ups, several individuals remain unresponsive. While two recipients completed their reporting obligations in 2025 and received the final payment, and one further recipient is expected to do so in early 2026, others remain non-compliant, particularly with regard to the final report.

This indicates a need for additional measures to ensure compliance and reduce future risk. A key step already implemented in 2025 was the revision of the scholarship agreement, including clearer reporting obligations, structured update requirements during the scholarship year, and defined submission timelines.

Furthermore, limited post-program engagement highlights the need to strengthen expectations around alumni involvement. Consideration should be given to introducing more structured engagement mechanisms, such as mandatory or formalised presentations of programme experiences at board meetings or similar SJCC events, as well as defined post-return touchpoints to reinforce long-term commitment to the SJCC network.

The scholarship programme was established over 30 years ago, and the context in which it operates has evolved significantly. The SJCC has therefore decided to establish a working group to review and modernise the framework, including candidate profiles, programme

structure, the issues outlined above, as well as funding and sponsorship. The working group is planned to be launched in 2026.

2. Scholarship Applications

Summary 2025

26 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 2025

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 cultures
 - Displays an entrepreneurial spirit and risk tolerance

Five individuals were newly chosen for the scholarship program in 2025. 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 ten scholarship recipients (out of 253) 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.

4. Finances

Our Balance Sheet remained very healthy with an accumulated surplus (cash at banks) of CHF 157,685 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):

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- Year in Japan: JPY 4'300'000 to be carried forward to 2026
 - Year in Switzerland: CHF 26'500 to be carried forward to 2026
- The total contingent liabilities in CHF are 48'000.

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."

The SCCIJ provides excellent personal support to the new scholarship recipients arriving in Japan and offers free membership for them. Two Board Members represent the SCCIJ in the Scholarship joint working committee and actively participate in the work and discussions.

7. Acknowledgements

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

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- the Japanese Embassy in Bern, H.E. Ambassador Yoshinori Fujiyama
- the Swiss Embassy in Tokyo, H.E. Ambassador Dr. Roger Dubach
- the Swiss Business Hub Japan, Fabian Stiefvater
- our strong, joint partner the Swiss Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Japan (SCCIJ) in Tokyo, its BOD and its former Presidents André Zimmermann, Thomas Brodbeck and its President Michael Mroczek. Ayako Nakano and Luca Orduna who have made outstanding contributions to the successful partnership through participation in the joint working committee, interview process. Andrea Nava and Yasuko Taniguchi are supporting the joint working committee and have implemented a very professional support program for recipients once they arrive in Japan.
- the late Mr. Erich Stuhlraeger, a long-standing SCCIJ member, and his spouse for their generous donation to the scholarship fund upon his passing, with a further contribution received in 2025.
- all former sponsors and 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, Fabian Antonatos
- All former Chairmen of the scholarship fund, namely Paul Dudler, Martin Stricker and Philipp Saurer, for their efforts and valuable contributions.

for their continued interest in our activities, their support and guidance. The SJCC Scholarship Fund relies entirely on its sponsors to finance its scholarships. All donations, without any deductions, are used exclusively for this purpose. The operation and management of the scholarship programme—carried out by the Chairperson, the joint working committee, as well as the SJCC and SCCIJ—are undertaken on a pro bono basis and are essential to the functioning of the fund.

Both the financial support and the dedicated efforts of all parties involved contribute to the development of a growing pool of well-educated young professionals with an international mindset, strong roots in the Japanese business environment, and a solid familiarity with Japan's culture, as well as its social and business practices. These individuals go on to serve the needs of industry, educational institutions, and public administration with their professional qualifications and enthusiasm.

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