

Japan Alumni Global Network Newsletter

December 2024 issue

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Looking Back at Hot Topics of 2024 in Japan

Japan 3rd in Gold Medal Count at the 2024 Paris Olympics

The Olympics and Paralympics, which opened in July 2024, brought excitement across Japan as athletes representing the country gave it their all. Japan secured 20 gold medals in the Olympics, ranking 3rd in the world, and 14 gold medals in the Paralympics. The whole nation rallied behind the athletes, celebrating their outstanding performances.



First New Banknotes Released In 20 Years



For the first time in 20 years, Japan has redesigned its banknotes. The new designs enhance anti-counterfeiting measures and incorporate features to make the notes easier to identify.

The ¥10,000 note features the "Father of Modern Japanese Economics," Shibusawa Eiichi. The ¥5,000 note honors Tsuda Umeko, Japan's first female international student, who studied in the United States. The ¥1,000 note depicts Kitasato Shibasaburo, the bacteriologist who developed treatments for tetanus.

Japan's First Successful Lunar Landing

SLIM ("Smart Lander for Investigating the Moon"), a small lunar lander, was designed with three objectives: to demonstrate pinpoint landing technology, reduce the weight of landing systems, and explore the moon's origins. Launched in September 2023 from Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima Prefecture, SLIM successfully touched down on the moon in January of 2024, marking a significant milestone in Japanese space exploration.



Here are alumni testimonials!

Here are some testimonials from research and other alumni who job-hunted in Japan!



■Profile

Name: Lian Sabella Castillo

Nationality: Philippines



Challenges faced during job hunting, or difficult times

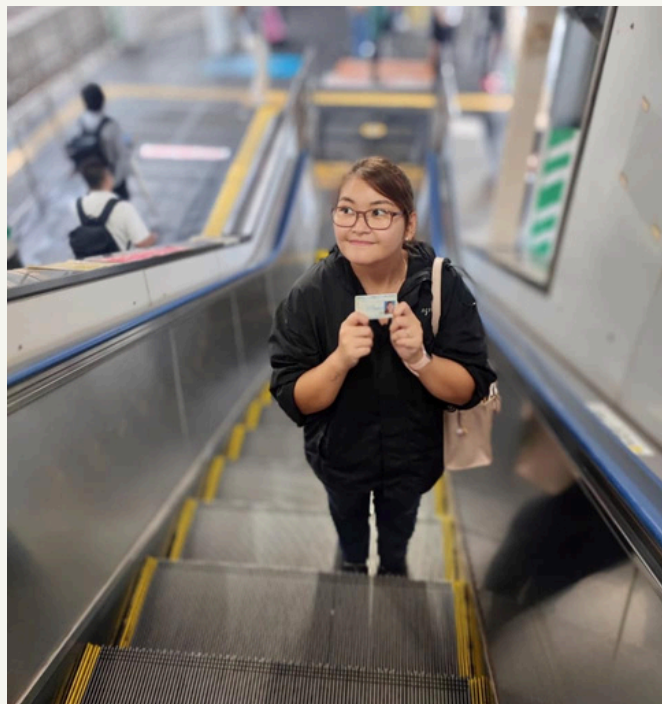
My name is Lian Sabella Castillo (33/F), from the Philippines. I had a JASSO scholarship for the Winter Semester of 2015 and returned to the Philippines for socially relevant projects. I am currently an infrastructure engineer and was hired as a mid-career hire. I had around seven years of IT experience prior to job hunting. I returned to Japan as a MEXT scholarship in July 2021 and began job hunting in February 2023. I received an offer of employment in June 2023, after five months.

It was very stressful, particularly because I wasn't prepared for the five to seven rounds of interviews per company (A global corporation even had ten!). I had heard this is the norm in Japan and that you would need at least six months to job hunt full-time as a student. I was doing one or two interviews every day for five months. I once did three interviews in one day, which proved to be too much, so I decided to schedule my calls with more intent. Back home in the Philippines, the average is one to three interviews and you are usually offered a position within one or two months. However, I believe the protection of employees in Japan is much more comprehensive and I understand why companies are as selective as they are.

Another surprising point in Japan is how common recruiting agencies are. Due to this, it is also common to encounter dispatch-type work (“haken”), and I was offered this type of arrangement more than once. There are many other job categories in Japan, such as part time jobs (“arubaito”), contract work (“keiyakushain”), dispatch type work (“haken”) and direct employment (“seishain”) so please practice due diligence to make sure that you are comfortable with the agreement between you and your employer as the conditions may often vary based on the status of your visa or on each company’s policy.

Advice for exchange students preparing for job hunting

My number one advice is definitely to learn Japanese. If you can get certified for your language ability, please do that also. I encountered a lot of postings that required a certificate in order to proceed to the interview stage. I took the NAT Test as it is scheduled more times throughout the year compared to the JLPT. It was my colleague in my master’s program who recommended that I do the same. He took the JPT which you can take more ad hoc. Even if you don’t have certification, it definitely still helps to be able to speak a little bit even if you just show effort during the interview stage. At the very least, prepare a “jikoshoukai” (self-introduction).



Check out what current international students are doing!

Stay informed about research that current international students are doing at universities!



■Profile

Name: Juan Carlos Neira Almanza

University of Tsukuba

Nationality: Colombia



About the research that you are doing in Japan

Hello everyone, my name is Juan Carlos Neira Almanza. I'm writing again after the warm reception of my last Facebook post, "What to do after graduation? My Job Hunting and Internship Experience in Japan." Thank you all for your kindness and support—I hope it encouraged you to explore internships or jobs in Japan, even if you're concerned about the language barrier.

Today, I'd like to share more about my research, which focuses on applying machine learning to analyze EEG (Electroencephalogram) sleep recordings. If you're unfamiliar with these terms, don't worry—I'll break them down for you.

There's a lot of buzz about AI these days, especially among companies and organizations seeking a competitive edge. However, what many people refer to as AI is actually machine learning—a specific branch within the broader AI field. This trend gained significant momentum with the rise of ChatGPT in January 2023. Masayoshi Son, the founder of SoftBank, emphasized this shift in a speech last October, stating, "It's either utilizing AI or being left behind."

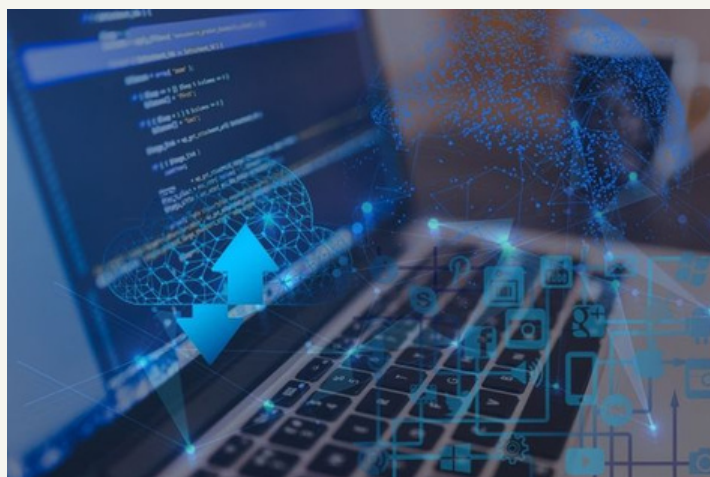
But AI isn't just for companies. Many individuals have also discovered the power and versatility of tools like ChatGPT—not just for generating text, but also for creating images and videos. Personally, I'm an avid ChatGPT user, both for work and as a hobby. I use it to refine my writing, improve my source code (for such as computer programming), solve general questions, and even for roleplaying. I believe it's an incredible tool, and I encourage everyone to give it a try.

While ChatGPT is a well-known example of AI's utility, it's just one type of model. ChatGPT belongs to a family of models known as Large Language Models (LLMs), which are specifically designed to analyze and generate textual information based on extensive training with large datasets. Other models, such as Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), are used for analyzing images and signals.

In my research, I've been developing a model based on CNNs for the automatic analysis of EEG (Electroencephalogram) sleep recordings. These recordings capture the brainwaves produced by patients during sleep. While these wave patterns might appear random to the untrained eye, they actually contain valuable information about specific sleep stages and can even reveal anomalies, such as arousals.

The application of machine learning to sleep analysis isn't new—it's been studied for at least 20 years. However, the innovative aspect of my project lies in demonstrating that multitask learning—the simultaneous training of a model for multiple tasks—can improve the detection of arousal disorders in EEGs obtained from portable devices.

I've achieved promising results, which were recently published in a paper presented at the 12th IEEE International Conference on Healthcare Informatics (IEEE ICHI 2024) .



Currently, I'm working on further improving my model and exploring other architectures, such as RNNs.

In this article, I wanted to introduce you to my project while explaining some concepts of machine learning and sleep analysis. I hope it sparked some interest in learning more about these fields.

Before I conclude, I'd like to share two articles that I think can help you understand more about machine learning and EEG:

1. [Machine learning:Trends, perspectives, and prospects](#)

2. [100 Years of EEG](#)

We are standing at the dawn of the AI era. While some may view this as the prelude to the war against machines, I see it with hope. I believe AI is as revolutionary as the internet has been, accelerating the exchange of information and driving progress for years to come.



Introducing "Job Hunting Guide for International Students"

JASSO publishes "Job Hunting Guide for International Students" every year. When international students start job hunting in Japan, they may be confused by the activities and recruitment schedule unique to Japan. The number of employment of international students is increasing, but you may wonder when to start preparation? What is the required Japanese level? How do you prepare for the interview? There would be various questions.

Understanding the current situation of job hunting for international students, and above all, knowing the needs of Japanese companies for hiring international students are indispensable for job hunting. This guide book provides detailed and easy-to-understand explanations of the challenges faced by international students.

For example, when and what to do, research in industry / company and applying for a position, preparation for employment examination, changing status of residence, stories of others' experiences, etc., you can cover information related to job hunting with this one book.

Main contents of "Job Hunting Guide for International Students 2026"

- Before Starting to Job Hunt in Japan
- Preparation for Job Hunting Activities
- Applications
- From Screening Tests and Job Offers to Joining a Company
- Changing Your Status of Residence
- Job Hunting Reports

You can download the PDF version of "Job Hunting Guide for International Students 2026 (Japanese Version)" at the following URL (the booklet version will be sent from the end of February 2025).

https://www.jasso.go.jp/ryugaku/after_study_j/job/guide.html

In addition, the PDF file of the 2026 English version can be downloaded from the same URL from around the end of February. So please take advantage of it.

<https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/ja/job/employment/>

Job Hunting Guide for International Students 2026 (Japanese version)



If you are looking for a job in Japan, first consult with the career center or the international exchange center of your university (school).

Introducing support programs for international students and former international students.

JASSO also supports international students who have returned to their countries. This time, we would like to introduce the "Follow-up Research Fellowship" . The recruitment for 2025 has been closed, but reports of former participants might be helpful.

■ Follow-up Research Fellowship

This is for students who have completed study in Japan and are active in the fields of education, academic research, or administration as they return to their home country. By subsidizing travel expenses and stay expenses to Japan, this program allows you to come back to Japan and conduct short-term research at a Japanese university with your former faculty members.

- Number of members in 2024: 27
- Number of members in 2025: App. 25 (projected)

Here for the report of the Follow-up Research Fellowship
https://www.jasso.go.jp/ryugaku/after_study_j/tanken/report/index.html



The Power Learned in Japan, Expanding Across the World

Read about how former international students are applying their experiences in Japan to make an impact in their home countries!



■Profile

Name: John Sinti Musere

Nationality: Kenya



About My Study Abroad Experience in Japan

My Name is John Sinti Musere. Formerly JASSO scholarship recipient 2013-2014 Nagasaki University. I would like to share my experience while I was a student in Japan. Alongside fellow students from different Nationalities, it was an incredible experience to join them and study with them in a different cultural and social environment from my Native setup.

It took some time to adapt new normal, new cross-cultural setup, and new learning environment. For three months I was not able to prepare Japanese food in my house but I walked into a convenience store and bought Milk and snacks. which I found to be convenient to consume and healthy, and sweet. After three months I was able to be introduced by my fellow students and friends to Japanese food. I began to have a taste for them. Noodles and pork soup I found to be extremely delicious and healthy. My menu was rice, beef, and others. Milk was exceptionally sweet which made me not miss my traditional food in Kenya.

While I was studying Humanities and Social Sciences in Nagasaki, as an exchange student, I learned a lot. What was particularly impressive was the statistical data analysis using the software SPSS by one lecturer and his lecture was excellent. I wish I had advanced that program after 2014.

Nagasaki University is an exceptional leader in knowledge dissemination. I was exposed to wide areas of studies by having personal learning and classroom-taught programs. I was exposed to use tools available to research, and understand a variety of disciplines. Using Computer was an eye-opener for me since I have never had experience in using a computer to learn. The information I obtained gave me the opportunity to have a different view of the world which enhanced my career and personal development.

Staff at the university were kind, professional, and astute in their work. Nagasaki University enjoyed modern learning facilities that helped me gain insight into many areas of learning.

Nagasaki University and it's city are safe places to live. At no time have I ever doubted my safety. Nagasaki cityscape has high standards. Walking within the city provides a good shopping experience, interacting with people who love to speak English or Basic Japanese language to me was good experience.

The transport system was super. Tram and bus in and out of the station are always on time.



After Completing My Study Abroad in Japan

After I completed one year I returned to Kenya to complete my Fourth Year of study to be conferred Degree of Science and began to hunt for jobs eventually. After I made applications and demonstrated that I am equal to any challenge emanating from the work environment, supervisors were so excited to learn I studied in Japan. They were so enthusiastic to learn from my experience and were admired by many.

I didn't take long before I was employed may be 3 months after industrial attachment I secured a job opportunity at Kenya Revenue Authority as Data analyst and thereafter as Human Resource Management Specialist. I tried to apply for a scholarship to return Japan in 2018 but wasn't able to raise enough finance to study again in Japan at the International University of Japan studying Public Policy and Management.

Completing a short term study program remains an unforgettable journey for me. The experience of learning from world-class faculty who are not only knowledgeable but also approachable and genuinely invested in guiding my studies and careers was invaluable. The support from the dedicated staff ensured that everything ran smoothly. The diversity within my class was a significant strength; interacting daily with peers from over 27 countries enriched my learning and broadened my perspectives.

Living in a serene environment surrounded by nature made it easy to appreciate the beauty of all four seasons (spring, summer, fall and winter).

Nagasaki is indeed a place to learn and I believe the knowledge gained and the relationships built at Nagasaki have helped me to independently solve some critical problems, giving back to community by encouraging them to allow eligible school going children to enroll in schools rather than taking care of livestock and farming.

I took a Statistics course at Nagasaki which enabled me gain and appreciate the use of statistical data analysis tool (SPSS). I borrowed respect, honesty, and keeping time from Japanese society in Nagasaki. Environment management is one aspect I treasure and learned from Nagasaki. Very clean environment is critical for human health and development which I am striving to live with. Learning at Nagasaki University was very progressive and has enabled me to contribute positively to my Nation building.



International Student Associations in Japan

We're introducing several groups and organizations active in Japan for international students. If you're currently in Japan and find a group that interests you, feel free to reach out or take part in their activities!

■Singapore Students' Association Japan (Singapore)

Singapore Students' Association Japan (SSAJ) is an officially endorsed student group that seeks to provide a platform to connect with & support Singaporean students currently enrolled in Japanese educational institutions. We host a multitude of events throughout the year including celebrations of cultural holidays from Singapore such as Hari Raya, Deepavali and the Lunar New Year, and our biannual Senpai-Kouhai programme which pairs students which are new to Japan with more experienced seniors to help them with adapting to student life here. Other activities include collaboration with external organisations to provide opportunities for our students to work and learn more about different cultures. Feel free to visit our website at ssaj.net to learn more, or to contact us at general.ssaj@ssaj.net with any queries.

Web site



e-mail: general.ssaj@ssaj.net



■Pakistan Students Association Japan (Pakistan)

The Pakistan Students Association Japan (PSAJ) is a non-profit organization founded in 2002, dedicated to serving students of Pakistani ethnicity in Japan. The association is managed by an elected cabinet consisting of eight members: seven current students enrolled at various Japanese Universities and one alumnus who serves as a patron, providing guidance and support to the team.

Facebook



LinkedIn



Our Primary mission is to assist Pakistani students in Japan by:

1. Guiding prospective students on securing admission to Japanese Universities
2. Supporting newly admitted students in navigating their early life in Japan

In addition to this, PSAJ organizes webinars and sessions on monthly basis where distinguished speakers including professionals in Japanese academia, PSAJ Alumni, and other international graduates share valuable insights on:

Life and Career in Japan

Understanding the Japanese job market and preparing for it

Academic research

In the current fiscal year 2024, we have successfully organized a lot of helpful and informative sessions including Higher education opportunities in Japan, PSAJ research forum, and Career opportunities in which essential preparation for Japanese job hunting and adaptation to life in Japan was discussed, and yet much more is to come.

Feel free to reach us at:

Email: pakistanstudentsassociationjap@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PSAJ.Official/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/psajapan/>



Note from the editor

Thank you for reading the December 2024 issue of the Japan Alumni Global Network Newsletter.

JASSO publishes a newsletter once a year as part of our Facebook postings to provide useful information to current / former international students.

In this newsletter, we introduced news about Japan in 2024, information about finding a job and career in Japan, and activities and accomplishments of our former international students. Did they remind you of your study in Japan?

On the Japan Alumni Global Network Facebook page, we post the latest news about Japan / information on Japan, activities of former international students, and information about finding a job in Japan, in order to expand the network of former international students who studied in Japan and to maintain a long-lasting connection with Japan.

Comments from readers are also shown on posts, and we hope that they will help you remember your study abroad days and provide an opportunity to reconnect with your former university and old friends again.

Please take a look at our Facebook posts as well!



Publisher

Follow-up Services and Career Support Unit,
International Scholarship Division,
Student Exchange Department

Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO)

E-mail : alumni-newsletter@jasso.go.jp