



SINGAPORE - JAPAN
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
1966 - 2026

JCCI Scholars

SHARING FROM 2024 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS FOR 2025-2026 PROGRAMMES

1. Among the courses you've taken at your university in Japan, which have been the most meaningful to you, and how have they shaped your learning or perspective?

The Words and Picture Books course taught by Endo Yuko Sensei at the Centre for Japanese Language has been the most interesting and meaningful for me. My view of the Japanese language has widened further after taking the course. Despite picture books being primarily aimed at young children, there was still so much more to the Japanese language that I was unaware of.

Moving beyond the usual classroom-based learning with a fixed textbook and workbook, it was enlightening to learn Japanese through other means, such as analysing various Japanese picture books. Through reading and creating our own picture books, we learned Japanese onomatopoeia, techniques for making an engaging picture book, and even the use of words not found in the dictionary that mimic sounds we hear in our everyday lives.

Alfred Tan

One-Year Waseda
Scholar
Sep 2025 – Jul 2026

The course has broadened my perspective on learning Japanese as a language. There are so many diverse and fun ways to learn the language, and even children's picture books can deepen our understanding of it. I even had the opportunity to introduce some picture books to my Singaporean friend who had just started his exchange in Osaka, and he was enlightened to start furthering his knowledge through picture books.



2. How has your time in Japan deepened your understanding of its culture, people, and society? Were there any moments or experiences that particularly shaped your perspective?

During my time in Japan, I deepened my understanding of the significance of flowers and plants in Japanese culture. Before coming to Japan, I was only familiar with the well-known sakura season. I knew that it was an important time for many, as it is a special opportunity to enjoy cherry blossom viewing with friends and family. However, I soon realised that flowers and plants play a much broader role in Japanese culture and are closely connected to the changing seasons.



Mount Fuji with blooming sakuras at Nishihirabatake Park, Matsuda City

One experience that shaped my perspective was trying Ikebana, the traditional Japanese art of flower arrangement, at Waseda University. It was my first experience with Ikebana, and I was introduced to its basic principles.

Despite the short trial session, it was meaningful to learn how flowers and nature are appreciated, as well as how beauty can be found in imperfection. I was fascinated to discover a unique traditional Japanese art form centred around the use of flowers. This experience helped me appreciate the deeper cultural significance of flowers beyond their visual beauty.



My first Ikebana experience at Waseda University

Another experience that particularly shaped my perspective was participating in the Setsubun festival at a nearby shrine at the end of winter to welcome the arrival of spring. Through this experience, I learned that seasonal transitions are not only observed but also celebrated in Japan. It was fascinating to see roasted soybeans being thrown while people chanted "Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi," meaning "Demons out, good fortune in." I learned that this tradition is believed to drive away evil spirits and bring good fortune for the coming year.

Roasted soybeans were also distributed to visitors, and as part of the tradition, we ate the same number of beans as our age to wish for good health in the year ahead. Although soybeans may seem simple, this experience helped me understand how beans are also involved in seasonal traditions and everyday life in Japan. It also deepened my appreciation of the Japanese culture.

Through experiences like Ikebana and Setsubun, I came to see that flowers, plants, and other natural elements are not only appreciated for their beauty but also valued as an important part of cultural traditions.

"The beautiful nature and flowers in Japan are what I will miss the most."



The Setsubun Festival at the Inari Kioi Shrine where soybeans were thrown into the crowd.

3. As Singapore and Japan mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations (SJ60), how has your experience in Japan shaped your view of this long-standing relationship?

It was delightful to learn that Singapore and Japan share such a positive and long-standing relationship, and this was clearly evident in my experience in Japan. There were two moments in particular that made me realise how meaningful this relationship is.

The first was when I was travelling in Izumo City, Shimane Prefecture. I happened to walk past a clam soup restaurant and was offered a bowl by one of the staff members. When I mentioned that I was from Singapore, she was delighted and told me that she had learned about Singapore in school. She spoke about popular attractions such as Jewel, Gardens by the Bay, and Marina Bay Sands, as well as Singapore's reputation for being a clean and green city and its well-known restrictions on chewing gum. She also shared that she hoped to visit Singapore one day. This brief interaction showed me how positively Singapore is viewed in Japan, even in the countryside, and how connections between our countries can extend to everyday people.

The second was a staff member working at a sushi store in Shinjuku who told me that she had spent her honeymoon in Singapore many years ago. She spoke fondly of her trip and shared many happy memories of her time there. Hearing about her experience made me realise

how meaningful it is to maintain the strong and positive relationship between Singapore and Japan, as it connects people from both countries.

These interactions helped me appreciate that the relationship between Singapore and Japan is not only reflected in diplomatic ties but also in the personal connections, experiences, and positive impressions shared by people in both countries.

4. Looking ahead, how do you hope to contribute to strengthening Singapore–Japan relations, drawing from your experience in Japan?

I hope to share my experiences in Japan, as well as the photographs I have taken, with the people around me. I would also like to introduce Ikebana, the traditional Japanese art of floral arrangement, to students at the National University of Singapore (NUS), as it was a unique experience that is not available at NUS. By doing so, I hope to promote a greater appreciation of flowers and Japanese culture among a wider audience.

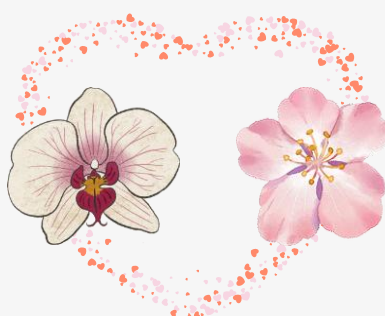
Furthermore, I plan to stay in touch with the Japanese friends and teachers I met during my exchange and continue building these relationships over time. Whenever I visit Japan, I hope to reconnect with them and participate in exchange

programmes that I once took part in, which can further strengthen our ties.

Looking ahead, I would be delighted to contribute to strengthening Singapore and Japan relations through my future career, whether by working in a Japanese company or being involved in business collaborations between the two countries. Drawing on the knowledge, friendships, and cultural understanding I gained during my time in Japan, I hope to serve as a bridge between Singapore and Japan and contribute to closer ties between both countries.



Enjoying the Sakura season at Matsuda, 2 hours away from the city centre



5. What is one aspect of life in Japan that you will miss the most, and why has it been meaningful to you?

The beautiful nature and flowers in Japan are what I will miss the most. It has been truly breathtaking to experience such serene natural scenery just a few hours away from the city by train. I could hardly imagine doing that in Singapore. The changing seasons have been especially memorable. Seeing the same landscapes transform throughout the year has been a sight to behold. Spending time in nature was always soothing and helped me relieve stress. I am also grateful to have been able to capture the beautiful scenery with my camera and share it with my Japanese friends and teachers.

Additionally, I will miss the weekly traditional floral arrangement (Ikebana) lessons at Waseda University. During my time in Japan, I joined the Ikebana club at Waseda University and deepened my understanding of the role of flowers in Japanese culture. As Japan experiences four distinct seasons, a wide variety of flowers bloom throughout the year. It was always exciting to see what flowers we would be arranging each week. Through learning the traditional art of flower arrangement, I came to appreciate how flowers are valued in Japanese culture not

only as a form of art but also as a means of self-expression. I was also fortunate enough to participate in an Ikenobo (池坊) exhibition and showcase my own flower arrangement. It was a wonderful experience to invite my friends and teachers to enjoy my work at the exhibition. The beautiful nature and flowers of Japan are especially meaningful to me because they have allowed me to connect with my Japanese friends, teachers, and Japanese culture.

Cheryl Lim

One-Year Waseda
Scholar
Sep 2025 –Jul 2026

1. Among the courses you've taken at your university in Japan, which have been the most meaningful to you, and how have they shaped your learning or perspective?

The most meaningful course I took at Waseda was 「働く人に聴く 6-8」, a seminar that encouraged deep reflection on personal values, motivations, and the kind of contribution we want to make to society. Rather than focusing on academic content in the traditional sense, the course guided us through a sustained process of self-examination where we looked back on the choices we had made, questioning the beliefs behind them, and connecting them to our future aspirations.

A quote by 山田ブーニー that stayed with me compared our true 想い to magma beneath the earth's surface: present and powerful, but not easily brought to the surface. I found this idea especially meaningful because it made me realize that genuine self-understanding requires patience, honesty, and continuous reflection. Rather than quickly deciding on a career path based only on external success or practicality, the course taught me the importance of understanding the deeper beliefs and values that guide our decisions.

"The friendships I have built here have made my time in Japan truly meaningful"

One framework from the course that shifted my perspective was thinking about work through the lens of "profession × theme × worldview" (職業×テーマ×世界観). Instead of viewing a career as simply a job or a path to personal success, I began to see it as a form of social practice — something deeply connected to the people you want to help and the kind of world you hope to contribute to. This reframing moved me away from asking "what do I want to do?" toward asking "who do I want to serve, and why?". The final assignment where I interviewed a working adult in Japan was especially meaningful. Hearing him speak candidly about how his career at teamLab had been shaped

not by a clear plan, but by values, chance, and continuous reflection, was deeply grounding. What moved me most was the sincerity and sense of pride he held towards his work. It made me reflect more seriously on the kind of impact I hope to have through my future career.



Interview with a teamLab employee at Tokyo for this course!

Looking back, what made this course feel distinctly meaningful was its emphasis on humility and introspection over efficiency and outcomes. I also felt that the course reflected a uniquely Japanese approach to self-understanding and career exploration. In my experience, many educational environments focus heavily on achievement, efficiency, and reaching clear outcomes. In contrast, this course emphasized introspection, humility, continuous self-questioning, and the relationship between the self and society. Overall, this course had a lasting influence on the way I think about myself,

my future, and my relationship with society. It not only helped me better understand my own values and aspirations, but also taught me the importance of approaching work with reflection, sincerity, and social awareness. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have taken this class at Waseda University, as it became one of the most meaningful academic experiences of my time studying in Japan.

2. How has your time in Japan deepened your understanding of its culture, people, and society? Were there any moments or experiences that particularly shaped your perspective?

Before coming to Japan, I associated Japanese culture primarily with efficiency, orderliness, and technological advancement. However, living in Japan as a student has allowed me to experience aspects of Japanese society that are far less visible to outsiders. More than anything, I have come to appreciate the value that many people place on dedication, craftsmanship, and continuous self-improvement.

One experience that particularly shaped my perspective was joining the ceramics club at Waseda University. At first, I joined simply because I wanted to learn pottery, but it quickly became one of the most meaningful parts of my exchange experience. Pottery is a craft that requires patience,

concentration, and a willingness to learn through repeated practice. Progress is often slow, and mistakes are an unavoidable part of the process. What impressed me most was the attitude of the club members. Rather than focusing on quick results or recognition, they approached the craft with genuine care and commitment. They were willing to spend hours refining small details and continually improving their techniques, even when nobody else would notice the difference. Through observing and working alongside them, I gained a deeper appreciation for the Japanese concept of pursuing mastery through steady, incremental improvement. It taught me that excellence is often built not through dramatic achievements, but through consistency, discipline, and attention to detail over time.



Ceramics made by everyone displayed at the club room at Waseda!

This experience also changed the way I think about personal growth. In a world that often emphasizes speed and immediate results, I learned the value of embracing the learning process itself. The satisfaction came not only from creating a finished piece, but from the patience, persistence, and

self-discipline developed along the way.

Overall, my time in Japan has deepened my understanding of the values that underpin Japanese culture and society. Beyond the country's reputation for efficiency and order, I have come to appreciate the importance placed on dedication, humility, craftsmanship, and continuous improvement. These lessons have influenced how I approach my own studies, future career, and personal development. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have experienced them firsthand while studying at Waseda University.

3. As Singapore and Japan mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations (SJ60), how has your experience in Japan shaped your view of this long-standing relationship?

As Singapore and Japan celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations (SJ60), I find myself reflecting deeply on the meaningful connections I have forged during my time as a JCCI scholar at Waseda University. My journey in Japan has transformed the Singapore-Japan relationship from an abstract concept of history and diplomacy into a vibrant, living experience that I encounter daily. The opportunity to study in Japan, learn from Japanese

<https://www.jcci.org.sg/>

professors, and build friendships with local students is itself a reflection of the trust and goodwill that Singapore and Japan have cultivated over the past 60 years.

What struck me most was the warm regard in which Singapore is held in Japan. Whenever I introduced myself as Singaporean, I was met with smiles and familiarity; people spoke fondly of my country. These conversations made me realise that the Singapore–Japan relationship is sustained not only by political and economic ties but also by the goodwill and mutual respect fostered between our people.

My experience also highlighted the importance of educational and cultural exchanges in strengthening bilateral relations. Through studying alongside Japanese students and sharing perspectives from Singapore, I came to appreciate how international exchange fosters greater understanding between people from different backgrounds. In many ways, students who study abroad become informal ambassadors of their countries, helping to build connections that complement official diplomatic efforts.



A picture of me and my closest friend I made in Japan, enjoying Yokohama's Christmas market!

As Singapore and Japan celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations (SJ60), I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to witness and participate in this unique friendship. My time at Waseda University has broadened my academic and cultural horizons, but more importantly, it has shown me how meaningful people-to-people connections can be in strengthening ties between countries. As a beneficiary of the JCCI scholarship, I am thankful for the opportunity to be part of this long-standing relationship and hope to contribute to even stronger Singapore–Japan connections in the future.

4. Looking ahead, how do you hope to contribute to strengthening Singapore–Japan relations, drawing from your experience in Japan?

My experience in Japan has shown me that strong international relationships are built not only through government policies and business partnerships, but also through meaningful people-to-people connections. As someone who has had the privilege of studying at Waseda University as a JCCI scholar, I hope to contribute to strengthening Singapore–Japan relations by serving as a bridge between the two countries in my future career and personal life.

Living and studying in Japan has given me a deeper appreciation of Japanese culture, values, and ways of thinking. At the same time, being abroad has made me more aware of my own Singaporean identity and the strengths of Singaporean society. This experience has taught me the importance of cultural understanding and effective communication across different backgrounds.

In the future, I hope to work in an international environment where I can facilitate collaboration between Singaporean and Japanese individuals or organisations. Whether through business, cultural exchange, education, or other forms of international cooperation, I would like to help create opportunities for people from both countries to learn from one another and build lasting connections.

I also hope to share my experiences with future students who are considering studying or working in Japan. Having benefited greatly from educational exchange myself, I would like to encourage more Singaporeans to engage with Japan and experience firsthand the valuable lessons that come from living in another culture.

My time in Japan has shown me the importance of mutual understanding in building strong relationships. I hope to carry forward the perspectives, friendships, and experiences I have gained here and contribute, in my own way, to the continued friendship between Singapore and Japan.

5. What is one aspect of life in Japan that you will miss the most, and why has it been meaningful to you?

One aspect of life in Japan that I will miss the most is the friendships and connections I have built during my time here. When I first arrived in Japan, everything felt unfamiliar. Over time, however, the people I met transformed Japan from a place where I was studying into a place where I felt a genuine sense of belonging. Through classes, extracurricular activities, and everyday interactions, I formed friendships with people from different backgrounds who became an important part of my experience abroad. My favourite experience was participating in a three-day, two-night

stargazing trip to Shizuoka with members of my circle.

What has been particularly meaningful is the opportunity to share not only special occasions but also ordinary moments together. Whether it was having meals after class, exploring different parts of Tokyo, studying together, or simply spending time talking about our lives and aspirations, these experiences created memories that I will always treasure. What left the strongest impression on me was not any single event, but the countless small moments of laughter, support, and companionship that gradually turned acquaintances into close friends.

As I look back on my year in Japan, I realise that it is not the places I visited or the activities I participated in that I will miss most, but the people who shared those experiences with me. The friendships I have built here have made my time in Japan truly meaningful, and I hope to carry these connections with me long after I return home.



Stargazing trip with my friends and I made in my circle!!

*Grateful,
Thankful and Blessed*

Clare Lin

One-Year
International Christian
University (ICU) Scholar
Aug 2025– Jun 2026

1. Among the courses you've taken at your university in Japan, which have been the most meaningful to you, and how have they shaped your learning or perspective?

Of the many courses I took at ICU, the most memorable would undoubtedly be Principles of American Studies (AMS101), taught by Claire Ravenscroft. While its title may seem unremarkable, the course took an unconventional approach by exploring key themes in American history through science fiction films. Through works such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Sleep Dealer* (2008), and *Get Out* (2017), we examined issues such as race, belonging, identity, and power in American society. During class, each film served as a lens through which we could better understand historical and contemporary issues in America and beyond.

I especially appreciated how the course frequently connected these themes to Japan, drawing parallels and contrasts that I would never have noticed on my own. This helped to reinforce the notion that history and culture

are not isolated national narratives, but intertwined with one another. This perspective felt especially relevant when considering contemporary social and political developments in both Japan and the United States. The class also encouraged open discussion, allowing everyone to share their perspectives without prejudice. These conversations challenged me to think more critically about how culture, identity, and history shape society.

2. How has your time in Japan deepened your understanding of its culture, people, and society? Were there any moments or experiences that particularly shaped your perspective?

A big part of what shaped my experience in Japan would be my daily interactions with the local community. Before coming to Japan, I had assumed that Japanese society was relatively reserved and that people tended to keep to themselves. However, living here has allowed me to engage with Japanese people from all walks of life and discover Japan's unique communal spirit and culture. While the way community is expressed in Japan often felt different from what I was used to, my interactions with dormmates, people in the dojo and strangers I met along the way revealed a warmth and hospitality that I had not expected.



My dormmates and I on our way to karaoke in early spring.

"Learning about the things we each grew up watching and learning felt like stepping into another side of Japanese culture."

In ICU, my classmates, clubmates and dormmates in the 4th Women's dormitory would often introduce different aspects of Japanese life, language and culture, which I thoroughly enjoyed learning about. Several times, my dormmates shared Japanese children's songs, television shows, and cultural references like the *ぴきひきぴき* (piki hiki biki) song and the children's series, *ピタゴラスイッチ* (PythagoraSwitch) that had shaped their childhoods. Learning about the things we each grew up watching and learning felt like stepping into another side of Japanese culture. My roommates were also happy to help me with Japanese, and through these conversations and countless small interactions, I always felt welcomed and included despite our different backgrounds. I will treasure my memories in the 4th Women's dormitory for a lifetime.

Joining a local judo club in Mitaka, 松前柔道塾 (Matsumae Judojuku), also allowed me to experience a side of Japanese society beyond ICU's international environment. I was able to train with both students from ICU's Judo club, alongside Japanese middle schoolers and working adults. Training there really enriched my stay, and gave me insight into Japanese 礼儀 (etiquette) as ICU had a relatively more relaxed international environment. While tough, every practice session helped me to see just how disciplined even the young children were, which I found extremely admirable.



My roommate, Yukie, made taco rice, a dish from Okinawa and we enjoyed it with rice and tacos



My first visit to Matsumae Judojuku in Mitaka





Friends from ICU's judo club

I will also miss the many small interactions I had simply with Japanese people I would meet on occasion. One encounter that especially changed my perspective was when I met two Japanese girls by chance on a street near Mitaka station. I was lost, looking for a cafe, and they were also lost, looking for a bakery. We started talking, exchanged LINE contacts. Weeks later, we even met for breakfast. Before this encounter, I had assumed that Japanese people were very reserved or that many social interactions were governed by 建前 ("public face"). When they suggested meeting again, I had initially thought it was merely a polite gesture, and was pleasantly surprised when they later reached out. While Japanese society may appear reserved on the surface, this experience taught me that reserve does not necessarily mean distance. People may express warmth differently, but genuine connections can still form unexpectedly. Through these experiences, I came to understand that Japan's sense of community is not absent, but rather expressed in quieter, subtler ways.

3. As Singapore and Japan mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations (SJ60), how has your experience in Japan shaped your view of this long-standing relationship?

People often say that living in a country is very different from visiting it as a tourist, and my year in Japan has reinforced this notion. Before coming to Japan, I had assumed that Japan was more technologically advanced than Singapore in many aspects of daily life. However, navigating everyday life here made me appreciate how streamlined many administrative processes are in Singapore, particularly government services, banking and paperwork, much of which could be completed online. At the same time, Singapore has many things to learn from Japan, whether it be cultural preservation efforts, or revitalising different communities.

Experiencing both societies has hence made me more aware of how similar many of the challenges Singapore and Japan face are, from an ageing population and declining birthrates to the need for digital transformation. Reading about these issues was one thing. But living in Japan allowed me to see how they affect everyday life.

As Singapore and Japan celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations, my experience has deepened my appreciation not only of Japan, but also of the value of the Singapore–Japan partnership. Both countries have much to learn from each other's successes and challenges, and I believe this spirit of mutual learning will remain an important foundation of the relationship for many years to come.

4. Looking ahead, how do you hope to contribute to strengthening Singapore–Japan relations, drawing from your experience in Japan?

Having immersed myself in daily life in Japan, from dormitory life to peaceful countryside getaways, I have gained a much deeper appreciation of the country beyond its major cities. Originally, I planned to visit all 47 prefectures, and have visited 40 so far. Moving forward, I hope to share my experience as an exchange student with fellow Singaporeans and future exchange students and encourage greater interest in the Japanese countryside. Many of the places I visited had few foreign tourists. Yet they offered some of the most memorable and breathtaking experiences of my stay. By sharing these experiences, I hope to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation

of Japan among Singaporeans beyond the usual tourist destinations.



My first time seeing snow on the beach in Tottori's sand dunes

I also hope to keep in touch with the friends I have made in Japan, and maybe even bring them around if they ever visit Singapore. I look forward to returning to Japan in the future to reconnect with friends and experience different seasonal activities. My current roommate, Yukie, has even offered to show me around her hometown in Okinawa, which I hope to visit one day. In my own way, I hope to help strengthen the close ties between Singapore and Japan through these lasting friendships and cultural exchanges.

5. What is one aspect of life in Japan that you will miss the most, and why has it been meaningful to you?

I would miss cycling everywhere: to buy groceries, to the station, and to judo practice. I would miss the people, the random late night banter.

I would miss the abundance of fresh produce, the mouth-watering food. But what I would miss most is the ease with which I can escape into nature. In Japan, I can simply hop on a train or bus and find myself surrounded by rolling fields or vast mountain ranges just a few hours later.

One memory that captures this perfectly was a trip to Kawaguchiko in February. When I arrived for an afternoon class, a friend casually asked me where I had been, as I had missed Judo practice over the weekend. I told him that I had just returned from Kawaguchiko that morning. “えええ????”(“What????”) he exclaimed. His reaction was amusing, but it also made me realise how extraordinary that experience was. Never in my life would I have imagined that I could be at one of the most picturesque spots in the morning, and back in class the same afternoon.



My view of Fujisan that morning

While this is one of the more extreme examples, the ability to travel so easily to different parts of Japan and experience the distinct scenery, food, and culture unique to each prefecture has been a highlight of my life here in the past year. There was always something new to look forward to, whether it was autumn foliage, snow-covered peaks, cherry blossoms in spring or the festivals that have just begun. This is something I will sorely miss when I return to Singapore. More than simply “travelling”, Japan’s changing seasons have reminded me to slow down and appreciate the little things: things that are beautiful precisely because they are fleeting.



Beautiful shidarezakura in full bloom in Tokushima prefecture

Established in 1995, the JCCI Scholarship sends Singaporean students to study and live in Japan for a year. Thank you to all JCCI members whose generous support makes this possible.