

LL.M. Programme “Asian Economic Integration and Law” at the Waseda University Graduate School of Law

I. INTRODUCTION

Since several reports on the English LL.M. programme at Kyūshū University have already appeared in this journal, we would like to take this opportunity to present our experiences with the still fairly new English LL.M. programme¹ at Waseda University in Tōkyō.

For the 2020 / 2021 academic year, both of us enrolled in the LL.M. programme “Asian Economic Integration and Law” at Waseda’s Graduate School of Law. The following report is to be seen in light of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic happening at that time. Just as the pandemic has affected everyone’s everyday life, the following report will refer to it here and there too, since an LL.M programme is of course not unaffected by such a pandemic.

But first, let’s talk about our motivations for doing this programme at Waseda. We both had already studied law at a Japanese university, having completed semesters there as part of our mandatory semester abroad at Bucerius Law School in Hamburg in 2016. Susanne Roth studied at Kyūshū University in Fukuoka, and Lars Kussmann went to Waseda Law School. After having passed our first state exams, we wanted to use the time before our law clerkships (*Rechtsreferendariat*) to change perspectives and live in Japan again for a longer period of time. The LL.M. programme at Waseda offered the perfect opportunity.

We had spent the last few years learning about the avenues for obtaining an LL.M. in Japan and therefore knew that Waseda offered a relatively new LL.M. programme. Since one of us had already studied at Waseda and had a very good experience there, the decision was kind of easy.

II. APPLICATION PROCESS

The application deadline for the LL.M. at Waseda is only about six months before the programme starts, and unlike Kyūshū University’s LL.M. programme, Waseda students can only begin in April.

¹ For those fluent in Japanese, Waseda offers an LL.M in intellectual property law in Japanese, too. Further information can be found on the Japanese website of the Waseda Graduate School of Law <https://www.waseda.jp/foiaw/glaw/about/4majors/>.

The application cycle started in July 2019 with the publication of the admission requirements for the next academic year. For entry in April 2020, the basic requirements were a bachelor's degree in law or a related field and English language proficiency. In addition, two letters of recommendation, university transcripts, a letter of motivation, and academic writing samples had to be submitted.

At the beginning of September 2019, an online application tool opened where we entered our data. We paid the application fee (5,000 yen if applying from outside Japan, 30,000 yen if applying from inside Japan²), printed out the confirmation pages, and sent them off with our compiled documents. The deadline here was very tight (one week for the documents to arrive at Waseda), so good preparation was needed.

After that, it was just a case of wait and see. In October, Waseda conducted interviews with some of the applicants – we were not invited to these – and announced the results of the selection process a few days later.

Successful applicants then received documents to apply for a visa and enrolment by the end of November. Tuition also became due at this time. We both had already applied for one of Waseda's numerous scholarships with our applications in September, but the application process for the scholarships is a little slower, so we did not receive the acceptance letters for our scholarships until July 2020. However, this may be different for external scholarships.

In mid-January 2020, we then received our certificates of eligibility for our visa applications. During our visit to the Consulate General of Japan in Hamburg, we were made aware of stricter entry rules for Chinese citizens at that time but were still hopeful that these would remain the only restrictions. Luckily the pandemic had no effect on our own visa applications: a few days later, we were able to pick up our documents and were permitted to enter Japan from then on.

III. ARRIVAL IN JAPAN AND HOUSING

After a relatively easy application process, the actual journey to Japan had become a little more difficult due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We had booked a direct flight from Frankfurt to Tōkyō Haneda for 17 March 2020. Haneda was preferable to Narita airport for the entry process and the issuing of identity documents as procedures there were much faster. In the days and weeks before, several countries had already started to close their borders to foreigners due to the pandemic. We were therefore serious-

2 An exemption from the application fee is possible for citizens of certain countries. Information is provided by Waseda in its application guidelines on the Graduate School of Law website.

ly worried that we would no longer be able to enter Japan. An attempt to rebook our flight to an earlier date failed due to the chaos at the airlines at the time. We hoped we could just take the flight as planned, and so we did: we flew on March 17 and landed in Japan on March 18. Our entry went smoothly as there were no quarantine or testing obligations at that time. Only two days later, Japan closed its borders to foreigners and declared all certified visa applications invalid. The borders would not open to foreign students again until six months later.

We stayed in a hotel for the first few weeks and looked for an apartment together with another friend from Germany who also studied in the LL.M. programme at Waseda.

There were several ways to find an apartment. On the one hand, Waseda has an office that can help you find a room in a student dormitory or a smaller apartment. However, we wanted to live in a shared flat (as is common among students in Germany), because you can get a much larger flat for your money that way. Unfortunately, this was not possible through Waseda. We also decided against a student dormitory as they could be completely quarantined in the event of a Covid-19 outbreak.

Next, we tried our luck on the Internet at various real estate sites (for example, Gaijinpot) aimed specifically at non-Japanese speaking foreigners. The apartments we were able to view via these sites were always overpriced and in poor condition. (We really can't recommend this as an option.) Finally, we turned to a regular Japanese real estate agent with an interpreter. He spent a whole day visiting apartments with us. In the end, we decided on a three-and-a-half-room flat just a five-minutes walk from the Waseda campus. This may not have been the cheapest option, because there are additional fees, like the real estate agent's fee; but as a foreigner, you stand a chance of getting a good apartment that meets your expectations. All in all, we would suggest renting a room in a student dormitory if you are renting solo (and there is no global pandemic) but contacting a Japanese real estate agent through an interpreter if you want to rent for two or more people.

And be aware in any case that renting in Japan is always associated with high initial costs: three to six months' rent for a deposit, "key money", fees and the like.

IV. CURRICULUM

In our year, we were able to choose from a curriculum of almost 30 courses. Of these, only three were compulsory; at least twelve others could be chosen freely. The courses were either about Japanese law with an international aspect (e.g., "Japanese Real Estate Law in a Globalized Market"), or they dealt directly with international law (e.g., "International Human Rights

Law”). Overall, the range of courses was quite broad, from torts to patents to environmental law.

One thing that was special due to the pandemic, however, was how the courses were held. First, the start of the semester was delayed from the beginning of April until the beginning of May. Furthermore, it was decided for the first semester that all courses would be online only, with the details left up to the respective lecturer.

Some courses resembled a normal lecture, only via a videoconferencing platform such as Zoom. Some courses consisted of recorded lectures; in others, there were only uploaded assignments to be “answered” with shorter weekly papers. From our point of view, the best of these was the video-lecture format via Zoom, because at least there could be a certain degree of interaction; seeing your classmates was a missing element in the other digital lecture formats.

The classes were also comparatively small, with only five to twelve students per course, which we really liked since it allowed the lecturer to interact more frequently with each student.

In all of the classes we took, no purchase of books or other course materials was necessary, because everything was provided by the professor.

Examinations were handled differently from course to course. Since taking an in-person exam was impossible because of Covid, most professors asked for papers in lieu of final exams. In some cases, papers handed in during the semester were seen as proof of performance; in other classes, final presentations had to be given.

V. THE MASTER’S THESIS

A master’s thesis had to be written by every student in the second semester. We were completely free to select a suitable topic for our master’s theses; the only demand was that the topic of our master’s thesis should refer to either Japanese law or international law. Since both of us had already specialised in the field of labour law while studying in Germany, we both went for a topic in labour law.

Every student was assigned to a professor specialised in the particular field of law in which they were writing their master’s thesis. Via online meetings and interim feedback, this advisor helped each student through the process of defining the topic, researching, and writing.

VI. LEARNING JAPANESE

Speaking Japanese is not required in order to apply to the LL.M. programme in Asian Economic Integration and Law. However, Waseda offers

numerous Japanese language courses for international students. If one is planning to take language courses, the university holds its own placement test a few weeks before the semester begins. Courses are offered at levels 0 (beginners with no prior knowledge) to 7 (advanced). We had very little previous knowledge and both opted for level 1 beginners' courses. Unfortunately, the grammar courses, which lay a foundation for courses like kanji or conversation, were not an option for us due to a time conflict with one of our compulsory courses. It would have been nice if there had been better coordination between the Graduate School of Law and the Center for Japanese Language.

It should also be noted that the language courses are quite intensive for beginners. They take place twice a week for three hours each and once a week for one and a half hours. The online-only format offered in 2020 required online vocabulary tests and preparation of vocabulary and grammar for the next lesson on the remaining days. The content of *Minna no Nihongo 1* (level 1 courses) or *Minna no Nihongo 2* (level 2 courses) is covered over fifteen weeks; if kanji or a conversation course is taken in addition, quite a lot of time will be consumed by the language courses. On the other hand, the language courses are also non-credit courses, so grades are less important here, and a vocabulary or grammar test can be skipped if necessary.

VII. GENERAL COMMENTS ON STUDENT LIFE IN TŌKYŌ

One of the main reasons to do an LL.M. abroad is of course the opportunity to live in the country for a longer period of time. There is more to do in Japan in general and in Tōkyō in particular than in any other place in the world. Even during the coronavirus pandemic, most of the countless restaurants and cafés were open without restrictions, at least during the day. Shops and malls were also open. Only the bars and clubs were closed from time to time in the evenings when a state of emergency had been declared.

Travel, on the other hand, remained possible at all times and without restrictions. It was even subsidised by the Japanese government through the “go-to” programme. Waseda also offers its students vouchers that reduce the price of tickets on long-distance trains, e.g., the Shinkansen, by 20%. We therefore had a unique opportunity to travel throughout Japan on holidays and weekends, seeing places like Kyōto, Ōsaka, Fukuoka, and Okinawa without a single non-resident tourist; none were allowed to enter during the pandemic. The diversity of Japan is definitely one of the reasons why doing an LL.M. in Tōkyō is so appealing. Where else in the world are there destinations for skiing and beach holidays, both within a two-hour domestic flight?

It is also worth mentioning that students were supported by the Japanese government during Covid-19 with both one-off and monthly payments without any red tape.

Otherwise, Tōkyō offers students everything they could possibly imagine in terms of leisure activities. Tōkyō is the safest and cleanest city we have ever lived in, and it is the city against which all other cities in the world must measure themselves.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In case it hasn't become clear enough: we were both amazed by our time in Tōkyō and at Waseda. We can only recommend Waseda's LL.M. programme to anyone who doesn't want to do a typical Anglo-Saxon LL.M. and wants to do something really special instead. The costs are significantly lower than in the USA, Australia, or the UK. At the same time, being outside the West shows Western scholars how small their own legal world has been and how severely limiting the focus on Europe and North America is.

In an increasingly interconnected world with a growing economic focus on Asia, the subject matter of this LL.M. programme could not be more relevant to any lawyer planning to work in any field with an international, an Asian, or especially a Japanese element in the future.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the professors and lecturers at Waseda as well as the entire office staff of the Graduate School of Law. In particular, we would like to thank Professor Christoph RADEMACHER, who was significantly responsible for organising the programme our year. Furthermore, we would like to thank Dr. Roberto GLOWER CARAPETO for such good supervision of the LL.M. students and for always being a helpful contact person not limited to university-related matters. Last but not least, we would like to thank the supervisor of our master's theses, Professor Hisashi TAKEUCHI, for always making time for us and helping us to gain deeper insight into Japanese labour law.

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