

Message from the President

In September 2013 in Buenos Aires, the International Olympic Committee selected Tokyo for the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. Around the same time, UNESCO designated Mt. Fuji as a World Cultural Heritage Site and Washoku cuisine as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. The world is thus starting to recognize the worth of Japanese nature and culture which Japanese people have tried to preserve and nurture for generations. Japan is gaining more world attention with higher expectations.

The number of Japanese-language learners in the world also reflects international interest in Japan is increasing. In fiscal 2012, the Japan Foundation conducted a survey on Japanese-language education overseas and announced the results in summer 2013. The survey found that the number of Japanese-language learners increased by 300,000 at overseas educational institutions during the past three years. Japanese-language learners numbered 4 million in 136 countries and regions. Over half of them were junior high and high school students. We are delighted and encouraged that young people are taking interest in Japan and studying the new language. The Japan Foundation aims to meet their needs, further increase their numbers and improve the education quality based on the motto, "To build and provide an environment to make Japanese easy to learn and teach anywhere in the world."

Since the youth are our future, they are an important target in all of the Japan Foundation's projects. We hope to expand exchange activities to promote mutual understanding and friendship among young people beyond national borders. To this end, in fiscal 2013, we started the KAKEHASHI Project as a part of the Japanese government's push for youth exchanges with North America. This two-year project will see 4,600 Japanese and U.S. high school and college students visits. With fine sensibility and appreciation of cultural differences, young people are deepening their understanding through the Japan Foundation.

As for other regions, fiscal 2013 saw a major expansion of exchanges with Asian countries. Many events were held to mark the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. The Japan Foundation held a variety of cultural exchange events throughout the year: art exhibitions, cinema, Japanese speech contests, symposiums, workshops and so forth. Over 40 projects came to fruition during the year and they were very well received.

In December at the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in Tokyo, Japan's new Asia cultural exchange policy, called "WA Project –Toward Interactive Asia through Fusion and Harmony–", was announced, reaching a milestone in cultural bonds with Asian countries. To implement this project, the Japan

Foundation established the Asia Center in April 2014. With a seven-year budget of 30 billion yen until 2020, we will actively hold arts and cultural exchanges with Asian countries, exchanges in Asia, and support Japanese-language studies.

The times are changing. Since the financial crisis and the Great East Japan Earthquake, people's values and mindset have changed a lot. Also, thanks to advancements in technology such as social media, information can now be easily spread and shared in real-time around the world. Through building more adaptive organization with swift responses and implementing programs meeting wide range of social needs, the Japan Foundation shall continue efforts to attain understanding and cooperation from in and outside Japan.

We would appreciate your continued support and cooperation.

Hiroyasu Ando
President
The Japan Foundation
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