

## **The Year of Renovation: From Special Public Institution to Independent Administrative Institution**

As we look back over the year 2003, the war in Iraq and the subsequent world situation had a grave impact not only on the diplomatic issue of Japan but also on public opinion and our lives as well.

Stability in post-war Iraq is a global issue. While multinational cooperation efforts have been made on humanitarian relief and support for recovery, the Japan Foundation promptly established for Office for Middle East Programs in January 2003. One of the operations of this Office was implementing the course “Learning about the Middle East” that explains the conditions of the Middle Eastern Region from the multiple aspects of politics, economy, society, culture and history. The Japan Foundation also dispatched the “Middle Eastern Region Cultural Exchange and Dialogue Mission” consisting of a team of specialists of outstanding academic achievement to the Middle Eastern Region to hold symposiums with local scholars, and supported international friendship soccer matches inviting the Iraqi soccer team to Japan. These events have contributed to mutual understanding of each other’s culture and offered opportunities to experience the culture through various exchange programs between the people of Japan and the Middle East. These types of efforts will continue to be important projects for the Japan Foundation.

Large-scale cultural programs were seen one after another in the year 2003. The major programs were those related to “Japan-ASEAN Exchange Year” and the “150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan-US Exchange”, and a variety of exchange programs were conducted throughout the year in a broad range of fields of culture, arts, sports, education, economy and exchange in communities. The compound event of “Humans and Robots: From Dreams to Reality” held in the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris was the talk of the town. This exhibition demonstrated that even a robot, an inorganic, universal-looking machine with no personality, has deep roots in the cultures of the countries and regions where the robot was born, and a large number of visitors were enchanted with the experience.

On the other hand, the year 2003 was a year of significant change for the Japan Foundation as well. The Japan Foundation was established as a “special public institution” under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972 and had served as a specialist agency to promote international cultural exchange programs in Japan, and in October 2003, we made a fresh start as an “independent administrative institution”. Now that we are self-governing, we are conducting a major reorganization to be able to conduct our projects more effectively and efficiently and to become a familiar, accessible institution to all.

As the various environments of the international community continue to change, the conditions of cultural exchange also change rapidly. It is our duty to conduct projects that correctly and effectively reflect such currents, and our role as the only public institution dedicated to executing international cultural exchange through such activities will gain further importance. Although the budget continues to be tight, we shall manage our operations more effectively through further streamlining, expansion of funding sources and the input of criticisms and advice through evaluations by outside experts.

We look forward to and appreciate your continued support and advice.

**Kazuo Ogoura**

**President, The Japan Foundation**