

Message from the President

The 2009 fiscal year was a year of change. Many transformational events and trends occurred in the political, economic and social arenas, both in Japan and overseas. Domestically, there was a change in government. Under the new administration, public projects came under the close scrutiny of the Government Revitalization Unit as their necessity, effectiveness and efficiency were assessed. This governmental move has inspired Japanese people to rethink what construes public interest and what roles public organizations should take. Against this backdrop, the Japan Foundation reviewed our international cultural exchange activities as a public organization and independent administrative institution, taking into account the issues discussed during the governmental budget screening and other reviews. As a result, it was decided that we pay back part of our funding to the government and place more emphasis on overseas activities involving our arts and cultural exchange programs.

Meanwhile, international interest in Japanese culture is as high as ever and becoming increasingly broad in scope. Contemporary Japanese culture — such as music, fashion, literature, and culinary culture, as well as manga and anime — enjoys great popularity abroad. Of course, many people are also interested in traditional Japanese culture and wish to have access to Japanese traditional performing and visual arts. An ethos of maintaining a harmonious co-existence incorporating both traditional and contemporary elements long held by Japanese people, along with an indomitable spirit that has led to the achievement of a safe and peaceful society can be considered another important aspect of Japanese culture, through which we can make positive contributions to the world. Indeed, operating cultural exchange activities based on the recognition of this broader sense of Japanese culture has become of greater importance in recent years.

To ensure we meet such international needs by introducing Japanese culture and promoting mutual understanding between Japan and the world in an effective and efficient manner, we at the Japan Foundation have also implemented many reform measures since October 2003, when we became an independent administrative institution, to enhance our program portfolio, organizational structure, and operational processes. To improve the program portfolio, we have become more selective about program implementation and more aggressive about overseas activities. Specifically, we have reorganized existing programs, improved and expanded our support for overseas Japanese-language education in order to meet greater demand, initiated theme-based programs such as “peace-building through culture,” among others. To improve our organization and structure, we realigned our organization corresponding to our three major activity areas: arts and cultural exchange, Japanese-language education overseas, and Japanese studies and intellectual exchange. We also established the Overseas Policy Planning Department to make our programs in each country and region more strategically effective. Our worldwide network has been expanded with the addition of new offices including the Japan Foundation, Madrid. For even better operations, we have also worked to reduce and streamline personnel expenses and other administrative expenditure and increase project-related income to

expand non-subsidized revenues. At the same time, we promoted partnerships with non-profit organizations, business communities and other contributors to international exchange activities to ensure greater project transparency. We will continue these efforts in order to realize greater achievements through even more efficient activities. We also intend to make our programs and activities more visible through active communication efforts.

Our activities in fiscal 2009 were guided by the aforementioned policies. In arts and cultural exchange, we continued to offer many events and programs so as to introduce Japanese youth culture and everyday life, such as manga, anime, and food, in response to strong international attention to these genres. We also organized many exhibitions and performances of Japanese traditional culture, which is the origin of modern culture, as part of commemorative events in association with the Mekong-Japan Exchange Year 2009, the Japan-Danube Friendship Year 2009 and others. As a program under the peace-building through culture strategy, we also invited the Chamber Orchestra of Balkans to Japan to perform. The orchestra members are all musicians from war-torn Kosovo, and representing different ethnicities.

In regard to Japanese-language education overseas, we launched two web-based learning tools, *Japanese in Anime & Manga* and the online version of popular TV program *Erin's Challenge! I Can Speak Japanese* to support learners inspired to study Japanese through anime and manga and for those who prefer learning online. To support teachers, we published the first edition of the “JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education 2010”. From fiscal 2009, the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) is held twice a year even at overseas test locations. As a result, the examinees of the JLPT in fiscal 2009 increased to approximately 770,000 people in 54 countries.

In Japanese studies, we hosted “the Global Japanese Studies Scholars Forum”, inviting leading intellectuals in this field from all over the world to Japan. The event provided an opportunity to discuss and share the opinions on the current situation of Japanese studies and the challenges the discipline faces in a changing international environment. As for academic exchange, we continued to offer forums for cross-border discussions to search for solutions to global issues, such as environmental protection and multiculturalism. We also continued to promote ongoing collaboration with other organizations both at home and abroad, aiming to contribute to peace-building efforts using the power of culture and cultural exchange.

In today's globalized world, it is obvious that Japan should maintain its social stability and prosperity through harmonious relationships with other nations and regions and contribute to advancing world peace and well-being. In this context, cultural exchange has a significant meaning, which helps Japan and its people play an even more active role and earn greater trust in the international community by enhancing mutual understanding between Japan and other nations and making a difference in the world through promotion of cultural activities. The Japan Foundation is committed to continuously contributing to this mission. We look forward to your continued support.

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