



# Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation

## A Collaborative Program by Japan's Rotary Districts



The Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation is a scholarship foundation jointly supported by all the Rotary districts in Japan. To date, the Foundation has awarded scholarships to more than 17,000 students (Yoneyama Scholars) from 121 countries and regions to support their study in Japan. Providing a matrix for heart-to-heart communication, the program also seeks to help the young scholars understand and emulate the Rotary spirit.

### The Foundation's Scholarship Program

The Rotary Yoneyama Scholarship Program uses funds donated by Rotarians across Japan to provide scholarships to overseas students who self-finance their educations in Japan. The program's mission is to foster a large cadre of young people who, imbued with the Rotary spirit, will play active roles in international society while building bridges of understanding and cooperation between their countries and Japan. In sum, the program's goal is the same as the Rotary's—to advance international understanding, goodwill and peace.

### Japan's Largest Private-Sector Scholarship Program for International Students

With approximately 700 students receiving \$12 million worth of scholarships each year (FY2012 figures), the Yoneyama Memorial Scholarship Program is the largest private-sector scholarship program for international students in Japan. As of July 2013, a total of 17,545 students from 121 countries have received

scholarship support under this program.

### Creating Heart-to-Heart Understanding between Scholars and Rotarians

In addition to the financial assistance provided to Yoneyama Scholars by way of their scholarships, the program

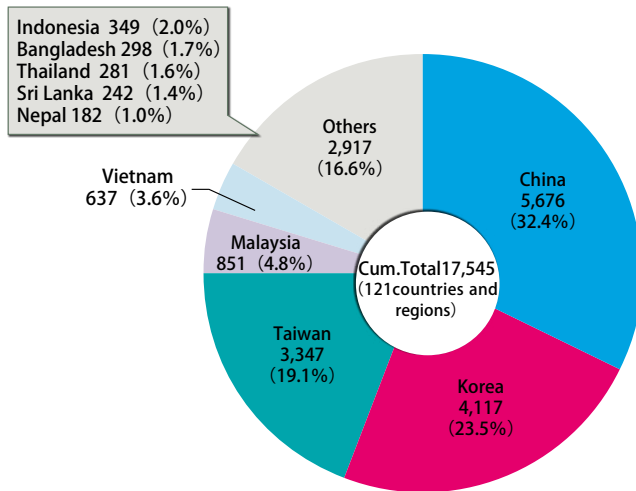


has another uniquely Rotarianesque feature: a system of *sewa* clubs (host clubs) and counselors that gives the scholars moral support and caring assistance during their tenures. Each Yoneyama Scholar is assigned a *sewa* club chosen from among the Rotary clubs in his/her area. One member of the host club serves as the scholar's counselor, who helps to deepen the relationship between the scholar and the club members and endeavors to make the scholar's stay in Japan a rich and rewarding experience. While imbuing the scholar with the Rotary spirit of service, the system also works to deepen the Rotarians' own understanding of the role and value of the Yoneyama Memorial Scholarship Program. For further information, see the foundation's website at <http://www.rotary-yoneyama.or.jp/>



## Yoneyama Alumni in the World Today

### 1. Countries and Regions Yoneyama Scholars to date where are from



※ Total of Yoneyama Scholars for 2013:  
724 students from 45 countries and regions

### 2. Number of alumni obtaining PhDs: 3,386

By country or region

1. South Korea 1,265
2. China 1,185
3. Taiwan 609

(Total number of alumni as of July 1, 2013: 16,821)

### 3. Clubs established centering around Yoneyama alumni

- Rotary Club of Taipei Tokai (D-3480)  
Chartered: January 31, 1995
- Rotary Club of Taichung Wen Shin (D-3460)  
Chartered: March 16, 2007
- Rotary Club of Tokyo Yoneyama Yuai (D-2750)  
Chartered: March 16, 2010
- Rotary E-Club of District 2750, Tokyo Yoneyama  
Chartered: June 21, 2012

## Brief History of Rotary Yoneyama Scholarships

The first Yoneyama Scholar, Somchard Ratanachata of Thailand, arrived in Japan.



Somchard Ratanachata at a meeting of Rotary Club of Tokyo.

Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation was established receiving authorization by Ministry of Education.

Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation received an award from the government for its commitment to strengthening ties with foreign students studying in Japan.

Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation received a status of Public Interest Incorporated Foundation by Japan's Prime Minister.

1952 Dec.

The Rotary Club of Tokyo launched an international scholarship program to commemorate the achievements of Umekichi Yoneyama, "Father of Japan's Rotary."



1954 Sep.

1957 Sep.

The Yoneyama Memorial Scholarship Committee was formed as a joint undertaking among all the Rotary clubs in Japan.

1967 Jul.

1998 Oct.

Scholarship program extended to students from all nations regardless of whether their own country has Rotary clubs or not.

2001 Oct.

2004 Nov.

The Rotary International Board of Directors commended the Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation for its contribution to world understanding and peace through its granting of scholarships to deserving recipients.

2012 Jan.

## Sri Lankan Youth Comes to Japan



Mr. Suchiththa Gunasekara came to Japan to study without having learned any Japanese beforehand. Seeing his friends struggling with the language and finally giving up their dreams and returning home, Suchiththa decided that he would build a Japanese language school in Sri Lanka. The school was built using his savings and other funds as capital, and named the Beppu Japanese Language School after the city he loved so dearly. Students study not only language at the school, but also learn how to use chopsticks, how to take a Japanese style bath, as well as other features of Japanese culture that will enable them to begin life in Japan immediately upon arrival.

### If Only They Could Speak Even a Little Japanese

The first Japanese I came in contact with was our volleyball instructor in junior high school. He was very well mannered, and I felt extremely grateful that he had come all the way from Japan to teach us. At that time too the Japanese television drama “*Oshin*” was being televised in Sri Lanka, and I was moved by the little heroine who bravely faced the world in spite of living in poverty. Thus having an interest in Japan, I came to the city of Beppu in Oita Prefecture in 2003 after graduating from high school.

I couldn't speak a word of Japanese at first, and I couldn't even go shopping for everyday necessities. Many of the friends who had come to Japan with me to study were unable to cope with life here and returned to Sri Lanka in frustration. Watching them depart with slumped shoulders I remember thinking, if only they could speak, if only they had studied, even a little Japanese before coming, then they wouldn't have to give up their dream

like this...

I didn't want those students coming after us to go through the same hardships that we did. That was when the idea for creating a school for teaching Japanese in Sri Lanka first began to germinate.

### Founding a Japanese Language School in Sri Lanka

After completing a one-year Japanese language course, I began studying as an undergraduate at the University of Beppu. I specialized in Japanese language education and participated in a wide range of events, hoping to make many Japanese friends. At one of these events I cooked some Sri Lankan dishes and my curry was a great hit. In this way I gradually expanded my circle of acquaintances.

After moving on to graduate school I joined the International Exchange Circle and served as assistant head of a citizens group promoting global education, as well as engaging in such other activities as reading and performing Sri Lankan picture card stories for children.



Left: The appearance of the Beppu Japanese Language School.

Above: The Students of the Beppu Japanese Language School take part in a local festival where they give out ice cream.

Right: Suchiththa teaching a class.





**Left:** Signing ceremony pledging support for the school on the occasion of the Beppu's 60 th anniversary.  
**Right:** The Graduates of the Beppu Japanese Language School. They started to study in Japan in April 2013.

Somewhere along the way the loneliness and insecurity I felt when I first came to Japan had transformed into self confidence.

I did not, however, lose sight of my dream. It was to open a Japanese language school in Sri Lanka as soon as possible.

To help pave the way, I spoke of my dream to many people, including my parents, who were high school teachers in Sri Lanka. The greatest difficulty was funds. I used the money I had saved working part time, together with money borrowed from my parents, as capital to begin preparations. And finally on September 10, 2010 the long dreamed of Beppu Japanese Language School was opened, named after the city that is my second home.

We started out with eighteen students, but after two and a half years we have 38 people studying with us. We offer three courses: a course for students planning to study in Japan, a conversation course, and a course for kids. Thus far every student completing the study in Japan course has actually gone to Japan to study. I myself am still in graduate school here in Japan, but I use school vacations to return home and act as a school principal in Sri Lanka.

### **Backed by my Rotarian Friends**

I have managed to come this far through the support of many people, and I have a special relationship with the members of the Rotary Club of Beppu, the *sewa* club that hosted me as a Yoneyama scholar. In September 2012 the club celebrated its 60th anniversary, and as part of its commemorative activities it pledged support to the Beppu Japanese Language School over the next three years, and to help support students coming to study as well.

In addition to this they also donated computers, a copy machine, desks, chairs, educational materials and other supplies to the school.

To tell the truth, I didn't really understand much about Rotary during my time as a Yoneyama scholar. It wasn't until my scholarship was over that I came to learn more. I have escorted a group of rotarians on visit to a Rotary Club in Sri Lanka, and there I learned for the first time how Rotary clubs around the world work together to accomplish great things. This impressed me deeply, and I decided that after I finished my studies in Japan and returned home, I too would become a Rotarian.

Having decided as much, a rotarian said to me, "By operating your Japanese language school you are already engaged in serving others. And that's what Rotary is all about!"

Beyond a doubt my coming into contact with Rotary has helped to make me what I am today.

### **Fostering People to Link Sri Lanka and Japan**

Sri Lanka's long years of civil war ended in 2009. As a citizen of Sri Lanka I want to do all I can to help my country prosper.

At present more and more people in Sri Lanka are studying Chinese, but Japanese is still a big thing. My wish is to foster people with an international outlook who will become a force in strengthening ties between Japan and Sri Lanka. Also I want to make the Beppu Japanese Language School the number one school in Sri Lanka for teaching Japanese. How happy it would make me if one day one of our graduating students were chosen as a Yoneyama scholar!