

Thank you Felix, thank you Dominique + Board of the Alumni Association, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As of end this year I shall terminate my activities as Chairman of the SJCC Scholarship Fund after having managed it for 15 years after my return to Switzerland in December 2000 when I retired as Head of Novartis Japan. Having been a member of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce & Industry in Japan (SCCIJ) for many years - twice as its president - I was looking forward to join SJCC in some useful activity. It was the time of financial restructuring of our Chamber suffering from unprecedented debts!

Quite unexpectedly, on one of my previous business trips to Switzerland, Dr. Michael Schmidt, President of the Mercator Foundation, approached me with the proposal that he would donate CHF 200'000 annually if, upon my return to Switzerland, I would revive, reorganize and manage the Scholarship Fund which was hibernating since 1998/99 when its first Chairman, Mr. Graf together with Ms. Lehmann, retired. With the consent of the SJCC Board I agreed.

Thus, in 2001 I started my most enriching retirement activity as a member of the Executive Committee of the SJCC Board and Chairman of its Scholarship Fund with a starting capital of exactly CHF24'778, i.e. the remainder of the sponsoring money when its activities ceased 2-3 years earlier. Enriching in the sense, that I could pass on my Japan experience to students and young professionals willing to add a year of intensive Japanese language study and training as interns in a Japanese or local international company.

From 2001-06 the Scholarship Fund financially thrived with the funds from Mercator and I could concentrate on the qualitative aspects of selecting and supporting scholarship candidates and recipients. An example is the 2002 establishment of the Alumni Association for new and former scholarship recipients, hoping that it will serve as another platform for promoting and deepening bilateral relations between Switzerland and Japan. Alumni will simultaneously become members of SJCC and benefit from its net-work in order to strengthen their own professional and personal development.

Pro Memoria: Since its establishment in 1988 our Scholarship Fund has granted scholarships to 225 qualified candidates (175 as from 2001) totaling approx. CHF 2'900'000 (average CHF 12'800 per capita). Our today's finances are healthy with a current Balance of Accounts amounting to + CHF 117'720 and estimated liabilities (i.e. still outstanding but committed scholarship payments) of approx..CHF24'000.

My deep thanks go to Dr. Schmidt and his Mercator Foundation as well as further sponsors such as Credit Suisse, Julius Bär, UBS, Hilti, Sika and not the least our Chamber and yes, many of its individual members who with their farsightedness and generosity were instrumental to the Scholarship Fund's development. They supported me with advice and financial contributions. Thank you all!

No retirement though from an honorary assignment without arranging for a motivated and active successor! Martin Stricker, after 8 or more years in Japan will be the new Chairman of the SJCC Scholarship Fund.

Apart from his previous professional experience as entrepreneur and one time president of SCCIJ (among many other things) he is most qualified to successfully manage the Scholarship Fund in future. Once again welcome and best wishes to you, Martin!