National Institutes for the Humanities

Japan's four Inter-University Research Institute Corporations make available to researchers at public and private universities and research institutes in Japan and overseas large-scale facilities and repositories of materials and information that would be difficult for individual institutes to maintain. Serving as "centers of excellence" (COEs) in their respective areas of scholarly research, they are in a position to facilitate effective collaborative research.

One of these corporations is the National Institutes for the Humanities. Founded on April 1, 2004, NIHU was initially made up of five inter-university research institutes in the humanities: the National Museum of Japanese History, the National Institute of Japanese Literature, the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, and the National Museum of Ethnology. On October 1, 2009, the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics became the sixth institute to join NIHU. While conducting basic research to fulfill their respective founding purposes, these institutes interact in a complementary fashion, transcending the frameworks of previous scholarship. They make up a comprehensive interuniversity research complex where study in the humanities is informed by the perspective of study of the natural environment.

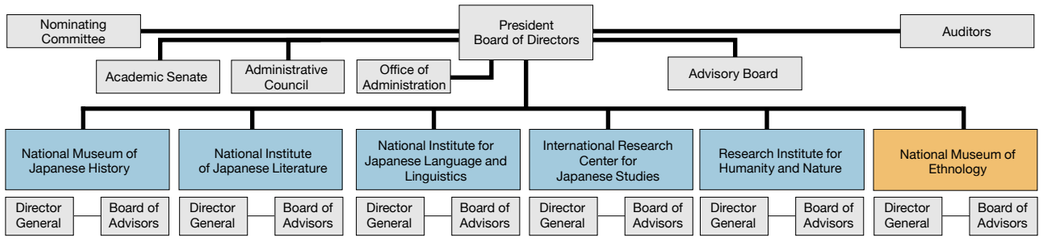
NIHU is dedicated to the advancement of basic research on culture and its extensions in time and space, including empirical study drawing on vast repositories of cultural materials and theoretical study integrating the perspectives of the humanities and social sciences. It also aims to be a global center for comprehensive scholarly research in the humanities, endeavoring to open up new research fields, including collaboration with various fields of the natural sciences.

The six member institutes, each serving as a center for nationwide research exchange, are kept accessible to the researcher community. They actively cooperate and collaborate with universities and research organizations and take initiatives in facilitating multifaceted joint research projects and shared use of research results.

Some of the NIHU institutes—the National Museum of Japanese History, the National Museum of Ethnology, and the National Institute of Japanese Literature—are equipped with museum functions and exhibit facilities. Taking advantage of their distinctive functions, they exhibit research data and achievements in a coordinated manner. The NIHU institutes also issue printed publications and make use of their information technology capabilities to make the information they generate available in and outside Japan, thereby contributing to the broader advancement of scholarship.

As we have entered the twenty–first century, the workings of nature and man are interacting with each other with great rapidity on a global scale, and many difficult problems have arisen as a result. In the face of these serious challenges, NIHU reaffirms the importance of humanities research, which is fundamental to all areas of learning.

Organization Chart



Governing Body as of April 1, 2012

Executive Directors

President KINDA Akihiro

Executive Directors NAKAWO Masayoshi, KURIKI Shigeo, ONO Masatoshi, ISHIGAMI Eiichi

Auditors KOMAGATA Kiyonobu, HIROWATARI Seigo

Promotion of Research in the Humanities

NIHU is Japan's largest research institution specializing in human sciences since the start of the modern age. Today, a significant paradigm shift is required in research on human cultures, in the face of the ever-complicated cultural and historical context of the 21st century.

NIHU is promoting the following projects to create new interdisciplinary genres in human culture studies and to encourage advanced international research activities.

Inter-Institutional Research

NIHU is promoting inter-institutional research with a view of "creating new perspectives for Humanities studies in the 21st century" and to ensure that research programs implemented by two or more member institutes complement one other and are developed accordingly. The research activities are designed to allow for the participation of scholars both inside and outside NIHU. In the first corporate term, we implemented three research topics based on the theme of "Integrated Reserch on Exchange between Japan and Eurasia", namely "Relationship between Eurasia and Japan: Mutual Interaction and Representation", "Comprehensive Research on 'Man and Water' in Monsoon Areas of Asia" and "The Back and Forth of Cultural Interaction". We also implemented eight research topics based on the theme of "Advanced Application of Cultural Resources".

In the second term, we are promoting new research topics based on the two core themes of "Comprehensive Research on Human Cultural Resources" and "Historical Synthesis of the Multitiered Relationship of Nature and Culture in Asia". FY2012 will also see the start of research based on the theme of "Humanities Reseach on Catastrophic Disasters" considering social conditions and needs in the wake of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Inter-Institutional Exhibitions

One of the objectives of the resource-sharing scheme pursued by NIHU is to put together, study, and make available to the public the abundant research materials and information held by member institutes. Results of joint research projects conducted by each institute will be put on display, in some cases in inter-institutional exhibitions.

In 2011, NIHU hosted the themed exhibits "Painting the City: Kyoto and Edo", "How to Feel the Earth: Passing on Nature and Culture to Posterity" as collaborative exhibits.

Resource Sharing

The member organizations of NIHU are committed to developing and sharing research databases that cover a wide range of cultural fields. As a result of the efforts to build on previous advances in database development and to ensure more effective use of the research data, a new searchable database was constructed and opened. This provides members with access to a centralized, comprehensive database of all research data held by each of them across borders, and contributes to a research environment more suitable for a broad, multidisciplinary approach than for a limited, exclusive one. The new system is also linked to the National Diet Library's NDL Search system.

International Collaborative Research on Japan-related Documents and Artifacts Overseas

In FY 2010, Japan's NIHU launched an international joint project to research overseas materials related to Japan. The goals of this research were to assess the relative weight given to research on Japan in Europe, the Americas and Asia and to clarify the significance assigned to Japanese culture from a global perspective. The Committee for Suvey and Research of Japan-related Documents and Artifacts Overseas was established as the first step to creating a unified research team for this purpose. Comprehensive research on a wide variety of materials was conducted and an international network of research and other institutions cooperating with this project was created. During the second phase of the project, research was focused on materials "exported" from Japan and materials "left behind" by Japanese who spent time overseas, from the start of the modern period to the present.

Area Studies

This is a new type of research project that promotes research by jointly establishing research hubs at affiliated universities and institutions thereby creating an inter-hub network. Following selection of the "The Committee for the Promotion of Area Studies," NIHU began research on "Islamic Area Studies" in 2006, "Contemporary Chinese Area Studies" in 2007, and "Contemporary India Area Studies" in 2010.

Being one of the new "Contemporary India Area Studies" study centers and maintaining active collaboration with overseas institutes, the Museum is promoting the investigation of religions and cultures in the Contemporary India Area, where remarkable changes are happening due to the effects of globalization. The studies are implemented under two themes, "Religions: Religious Movements and Transformations in Contemporary India" and "The Circulation of Contemporary Indian Cultures".

Public Lectures and Symposiums

NIHU holds lectures and symposiums in order to make scholarly achievements in humanities research as widely known as possible.

The 15th Public Lecture and Symposium
Understanding the Uprisings in the Arab World
Date: July 2, 2011
Venue: Miyako Messe, Kyoto

The 16th Public Lecture and Symposium
The Ryukyu Islands Chain as Viewed from Asia: Its Maritime People, Products, and Culture
Date: September 23, 2011
Venue: Osaka Museum of History, Osaka

The 17th Public Lecture and Symposium
Remote Forests and Local Forests: How They Are Linked in Global Era
Date: October 7, 2011
Venue: Kyoto International Conference Center, Kyoto