

Purpose

The National Museum of Ethnology conducts anthropological and ethnological research and aims to promote a general understanding and awareness of peoples, societies and cultures around the world through the collection and conservation of ethnographic materials and public exhibitions. Minpaku was established in 1974 as an Inter-University Research Institute under the “Law to amend part of the National School Establishment Law” (No. 81, 1974). In April, 2004 it made a fresh start as a member of the National Institutes for the Humanities, under the “National University Corporation Law” (No. 112, 2003).

Functions

Research Institute	The Museum functions as a research institute equipped with a museum. It serves as a research center for anthropology and ethnology, providing information and research results to academic communities and the general public through publications, exhibitions, and other means.
Joint Research	As an Inter-University Research Institute, the Museum supports and organizes joint research projects with researchers from other academic institutions. Materials collected and stored in the Museum are used widely by those researchers.
Information Center	Over the years, the Museum has collected and maintained a great variety of ethnological research materials. These include artifacts, audiovisual records, books and other forms of research data. The Museum is also a repository for the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF). Information about these materials is provided to researchers via computer databases.
Exhibitions	<p>The research results of the Museum are open to the public through exhibitions. Minpaku emphasizes the close-linkage between research and exhibition as a basic policy, and its academic staff participate in planning and organizing exhibitions. The main halls display regional and cross-cultural exhibitions. The former displays cultures and societies in major regions, such as Oceania and the Americas, whereas the latter emphasizes cultural elements such as music and language, which are shared across human societies.</p> <p>Thematic Exhibitions are also held occasionally. These focus on rapidly changing global situations and feature current research in cultural anthropology and ethnology. The Museum also presents, Special Exhibitions in spring and/or fall, in the Special Exhibition Hall.</p>
Social Contributions	Also with the objective of presenting its latest research findings to the public, the Museum offers academic lecture programs, seminars, the Weekend Salon, special lectures and performances, film shows, and various workshops. The Museum also organizes intensive courses on museology and various projects for other museums as part of its international cooperation activities.
Graduate Programs	The School of Cultural and Social Studies of SOKENDAI (The Graduate University for Advanced Studies), based at the Inter-University Research Institute, is located at the Museum. It has two courses: Regional Studies and Comparative Studies. These Departments offer research training programs leading to the Ph.D. degree with the aim of producing unique professional scholars. The Museum also cooperates with other universities in training graduate students enrolled in doctoral programs.



1935	A plan to establish an ethnological museum of Japan as an incorporated foundation is developed under the leadership of SHIBUSAWA Keizo and SHIRATORI Kurakichi.
1964	The Japanese Society of Ethnology, the Anthropological Society of Nippon, the Japanese Archaeological Association, the Folklore Society of Japan, and the Japanese Association of Ethnology jointly submit to the Minister of Education and other relevant authorities a request to establish a national ethnological research museum.
1972	A research council (chaired by KUWAHARA Takeo) conducts a feasibility study on the establishment of a National Ethnological Research Museum. A basic concept plan for the museum is submitted to the Minister of Education.
1973	A preparatory council for the establishment of a National Ethnological Research Museum (tentative name) and a preparation office are set up.
1974	The National Museum of Ethnology is founded under the “Law to amend part of the National School Establishment Law” (No. 81, 1974), with an Administration Department, an Information and Documentation Center, and five Research Departments. Collecting artifacts from overseas was started in Papua New Guinea.
1975	A collection of folklore reference materials (28,432 items) owned by the former Ministry of Education Archive were transferred from the National Institute of Japanese Literature.
1977	The Museum buildings (28,778m ²) are completed and the surrounding area is landscaped. An opening ceremony is held. Exhibitions on Oceania, the Americas, Europe, Africa, West Asia, Music, Language, Southeast Asia, and East Asia (Japanese Culture), as well as the Videotheque are opened to the public.
1978	Long-term and carefully organized “Special Projects” are started as key components of ethnological research.
1979	The fourth Exhibition Hall (1,272m ²), which accommodates an additional exhibition on East Asia (Japanese Culture), is completed and opened to the public. Exhibitions on Central and North Asia, and East Asia (Ainu [Aynu] Culture) are opened to the public.
1981	The Auditorium (3,704m ²) is completed.
1983	The eighth Exhibition Hall and other facilities (4,816m ²) are completed. The exhibition on East Asia (Cultures of the Korean Peninsula and Regional Cultures of China) is opened to the public.
1984	The tenth anniversary of the Museum's founding is celebrated. “A Ten-Year History of the National Museum of Ethnology” is published.
1987	The tenth anniversary of the Museum's opening to the public is celebrated.
1989	The School of Cultural and Social Studies (with the Department of Regional Studies and the Department of Comparative Studies) of the Graduate University for Advanced Studies is established within the Museum. The Special Exhibition Hall and the library stacks (5,292m ²) are completed. The first special exhibition, “The Great Andes Civilization: Inca, the Reviving Empire of the Sun” is organized to celebrate the completion of the Special Exhibition Hall.
1993	The main Museum building is expanded and a joint research facility (891m ²) is completed.
1994	The 20th anniversary of the Museum's founding is celebrated. The Japan Center for Area Studies is established. (Discontinued in FY2005)
1995	Owing to damage caused by the Hanshin-Awaji Great Earthquake, the entire collection is closed for 45 days. (Earthquake-proof reinforced construction was retrofitted between 2002 and 2003) The Center of Excellence (COE) program is established: “Pioneering Research for the Development of New Ethnological Studies Using Multimedia in the Global Era.” (Concluded at the end of FY1999)
1996	The seventh Exhibition Hall (6,439m ²) is completed. Exhibitions on Language and Southeast Asia are renovated. An audio-visual gallery, the Materiatheque, and the exhibition on South Asia are opened.
1997	The 20th anniversary of the Museum's opening to the public is celebrated.
1998	Following the enactment of the Ministerial Ordinance to revise part of the administrative rules for the Inter-University Research Institute (Ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 24 of 1998), the five research departments are reorganized into four research departments and one research facility.
1999	The Minpaku “Digital Guide and Study Area” are completed and opened to the public.
2000	A renovated exhibition on the cultures of the Korean Peninsula is opened. Partial renovation of the Museum exhibitions continued until 2003.
2004	As authorized by the National University Corporation Act (Act No. 112 of 2003), the National Institutes for the Humanities, as part of the Inter-University Research Institute, is established. The former system of 4 research departments and 1 research center is reorganized into a system with 3 research departments and 2 centers. To facilitate joint research, screening by the Joint Research Committee, whose members include representatives from the research community, is established and the scope of the call for joint research applications expanded. Editing of a book entitled A Thirty-Year History of the National Museum of Ethnology is one of the earliest commemorative events started in preparation for the 30th anniversary. (The book is published in March 2006.)
2006	The Minpaku Collections Help Desk opens.
2007	Commemorative events celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Museum are held, including a commemorative ceremony in November.
2008	A collaborative agreement is signed with the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology.
2009	After renovation, the Africa and West Asia galleries are re-opened to the public.
2010	After renovation, the Music and Language galleries are re-opened to the public. New systems are consolidated including the establishment of the Center for International Academic Exchange.
2011	After renovation, the Oceania and America galleries are re-opened to the public.
2012	After renovation, the Europe gallery and Information Zone are re-opened to the public.
2013	After renovation, the East Asia–Culture of Japan gallery is re-opened to the public. Consolidation of new systems, including the Audit Office and Umesao Archives.
2014	After renovation, the East Asia–Culture of the Korean Peninsula, Regional Cultures of China, and Culture of Japan galleries are re-opened to the public.
2015	After renovation, the South Asia and the Southeast Asia galleries are re-opened to the public.