National Institutes for the Humanities

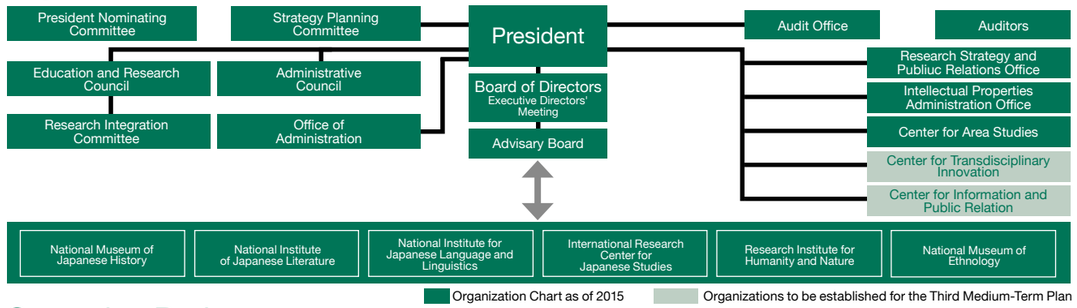
The National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU), founded in 2004, was incorporated as an umbrella organization for Japan's major research institutes in the humanities. It promotes shared use of resources among researchers and collaborative research by six institutes, each with its own research fields: the National Museum of Japanese History for history, archaeology, and folklore; the National Institute of Japanese Literature for Japanese literature and archival research; the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics for Japanese language and linguistics; the International Research Center for Japanese Studies for cultural research on Japan; the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature for global environmental studies from the human point of view; and the National Museum of Ethnology for ethnology and cultural anthropology.

NIHU encourages the six research institutes to connect and collaborate on interdisciplinary research topics. This function provided the basis for rescue of valuable cultural assets and other responses to the emergency resulting from the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Starting in 2012, as part of its involvement in joint research, NIHU initiated projects contributing to reconstruction in the wake of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami and to the study of post-disaster society and human culture.

While encouraging the sharing of databases and their open access to the public, NIHU is also collaborating with sixteen universities and four research institutes on three area studies programs; two of those programs, on the Islamic region and on contemporary China, are in their second phase, and a third, on contemporary India, is in its first phase. In addition, a project to survey and research Japan-related documents and artifacts held overseas is going forward in cooperation with four Japanese research institutions and five overseas institutions with which we have agreements. The NIHU Prize in Japanese Studies, which was established as part of our efforts to support research on Japan overseas, is now in its fifth year.

While continuing our fundamental commitment to joint use and collaborative research involving individual researchers at research institutions in Japan and overseas as well as specialized research areas, we at NIHU seek to deepen our links with universities and research institutions and further strengthen our functional capabilities. We strive to promote research that contributes to the intellectual enrichment of our society and to the advancement of human culture.

Organization Chart



Governing Body as of April 1, 2015

Executive Directors

President TACHIMOTO Narifumi

Executive Directors HIRAKAWA Minami, KONAGAYA Yuki, SATO Yo- ichiro, EBARA Masaharu

Auditors HIROWATARI Seigo, KOMAGATA Kiyonobu

Promotion of Research in the Human Sciences

The most pressing tasks in the twenty-first century are the coexistence of all peoples in the world and the survival of humankind on this planet. The human sciences continue to hold the keys for addressing these difficult challenges. NIHU promotes the development of new fields of study in the human sciences and research activities aimed at development of advanced and international research. It coordinates inter-institutional resource sharing in Japan and overseas.

Inter-Institutional Research

Bringing together the research results and resources accumulated by its six constituent institutes, NIHU plans and implements inter-institutional research that promotes the opening up of new perspectives and the further advancement of research. Under the Second Medium-Term Plan (FY2010–2015), this program focuses on two themes: Comprehensive Research on Human Cultural Resources and A Historical Synthesis of the Multilayered Relationship of Nature and Culture in Asia. Since FY2012, following the Great East Japan Earthquake the previous year, NIHU has supported the Research in the Human Sciences on Catastrophic Disasters; studies begun under this project are now in their final year project.

Inter-Institutional Exhibitions

NIHU holds exhibitions to make the results of research conducted by its institutes available to the public. Making the most of its character as a human sciences complex, NIHU plans coordinated exhibits held in collaboration with one or more of its constituent institutes. In 2014 the following exhibition was held.

"Minpaku Toy Expo: The Antique Toy Collection (Tangible Folk Cultural Property of Osaka Prefecture)," May 15–August 5, 2014, National Museum of Ethnology This exhibition featured items from the Antique Toy Collection, an Osaka Prefecture Designated Cultural Treasure donated to the National Museum of Ethnology by the prefecture in 2013. Consisting of pieces gathered since the 1970s, the collection affords a complete picture of the history of toys in Japan from the Edo period up to the present. It is also closely related to the culture of manga, which is the subject of much attention from overseas as symbolic of the subculture of Japan.

Resource Sharing

As part of its Second Medium-Term inter-Institutional collaborative research programs in the human sciences, NIHU is engaged in developing and managing research resource-sharing systems to promote sharing in academia of information resources accumulated by the six NIHU institutes and area studies centers. The program is implemented by the Committee of Resource-Sharing Projects.

The research resource-sharing system is currently made up of two systems: the "nihulNT" (NIHU Integrated Retrieval System), which cross-searches more than 100 databases of the six NIHU institutes and area studies centers 149 databases as of February 2015 and NDL (National Diet Library) Search (13 databases as of February 2015), and the time-space analysis system (GT-Map/GT-Time) for analyzing era/period information and geographic location and place-name information. Since 2010, NIHU has provided the GT-Map/GT-Time system to members of the academic community as free software.

In FY 2014, in order to achieve flexible links for research resources among the six institutes of NIHU and universities and other institutions outside of NIHU, a technical verification test using semantic Web technology was conducted, and study was begun with the aim of strengthening research resource sharing functions in preparation for the projects of the Third Medium-Term Plan. Also, in order to provide international access to the results of Japan studies and research in the human sciences in Japan, we have made a collection of international links publicly available.

International Collaborative Research on Japan-related Documents and Artifacts Overseas

In 2010, NIHU embarked on an international collaborative research project to survey and study Japan-related documents and artifacts located in other countries. The aim of the project is to clarify the significance of Japanese culture in world history and promote international research on the subject. NIHU established the Committee for Survey and Research of Japan-related Documents and Artifacts Overseas, and in collaboration with the Historiographical Institute and the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo, the Institute for Research in Humanities at Kyoto University, and the Oita Prefecture Ancient Sages Historical Archives, it is engaged in comprehensive survey and research of diverse materials held overseas. A network of international research is being created through links to institutions overseas. Under the Second Medium-Term Plan, the following three projects are underway.

"Study of the Siebold Family Collection and Other Materials Collected in Japan and Taken Overseas in the Nineteenth Century"
"Overseas Sources on modern Japanese Migrants and their Milieu: A Survey and Study"
"Survey and Research on the Preservation and Publication of the Mario Marega Documents in the Collection of the Vatican Library"

Area Studies

In order to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of areas of academic and social importance to Japan, NIHU promotes area studies by jointly establishing research centers at related universities. Its Islamic Area Studies program was begun in 2006, Contemporary Chinese Area Studies program in 2007, and Contemporary India Area Studies in 2010.

NIHU recruits young scholars for Its Center for Area Studies and assigns them to work with scholars at area studies centers in various parts of Japan. The asterisked items in the list below are hub research centers.

Public Lectures and Symposiums

NIHU holds lectures and symposiums in order to make the scholarly achievements in research as on the human sciences available widely as possible.

Publication

Human

NIHU supervises the publication of Human to provide information on the achievements in research on the human sciences at its six institutes. The theme of issue No. 6 (July 2014) is "Japan's Frightful Spirits of Mountains and Rivers (Chimimōryō)" and that of the No.7 issue (December 2014) is "The Past, Present, and Future of Kanji." (http://www.nihu.jp/sougou/jouhou/publication/human.html)

Ningen Bunka (Human Culture)

Ningen bunka publishes the proceedings of public lectures and symposiums sponsored by NIHU. Its content is published online through the current issue, volume 21 on the NIHU website (http://www.nihu.jp/sougou/jouhou/publication/ningen.html)